

PM Ephesians 1:4-5

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 22 June 2025

Preacher: Rev Ronnie Christie

[0 : 00] In order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.! And those whom he predestined, he also called.! And those whom he called, he also justified.

! And those whom he justified, he also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect?

It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died. More than that, who was raised?

Who is at the right hand of God? Who indeed is interceding for us? Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?

[1 : 07] As it is written, for your sake we are being killed all the day long. We are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered. No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

May God bless to us this reading. Ephesians chapter 1, and reading the first few verses of the chapter.

Ephesians chapter 1, reading verses 1 to 12. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.

[2 : 43] In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the beloved.

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us in all wisdom and insight, making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him, who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.

Just to there. And may God bless to us this week. Now, let us look at Ephesians chapter 1. And here we're going to look at some expressions in verses 4 and 5.

So, two thoughts we're going to explore in these verses.

[4 : 30] They're connected. He chose us that we should be holy and blameless. He predestined us for adoption as sons.

Now, you may not remember, but we have been looking at this passage in some detail. And this time, and in a fortnight's time all being well, I hope also to look at this passage, but not taking it more or less word by word, as I've been doing, but taking certain themes out of it and developing these themes and also contrasting that with the general opinion of people around us and seeking to enter into...

Sorry, I'll start again. Seeking to counteract the false ideas, the mistaken ideas that many people around us have.

And the idea that we're going to develop this evening is simply this. Okay, there's election. But what is election for? What is the practical goal in mind?

Why did God choose us looking forward to the aim of election? And the answers given here are twofold. He chose us to be holy.

[5 : 55] He chose us to be adopted as sons. Now, I mentioned Robert Burns before, and I thought that was a good idea to mention Robert Burns in Dumfries, because he's buried along the road here.

And then I reflected that most of the adults here weren't even born in Scotland, so it's maybe not the wisest thing to say. But I quoted Robert Burns before because he expresses it in a very poetic and interesting way what is a very common and mistaken idea about election.

And he says, God sends in to heaven and ten to hell all for thy glory and no for any good or ill that have done afore thee.

Which I think clearly means he sends one to heaven and ten to hell all for his glory and not for any good or evil that have done in God's presence.

And there you see there are two ideas that are worth reflecting on. He says, the goal of election is heaven. That's what God has in mind. You're up, you're down, you're down, you're up.

[7 : 06] That's the way that he looks at it. And he also implies that there are no moral considerations entering into the matter. No for any good or ill that have done afore thee.

Moral considerations in his view don't enter into the matter. And I'm not picking on Burns because he's only expressing what the common people thought in those days and the certain things that many people are saying today.

And we're going to look at that in the light of the teaching here to try and counteract this false idea and misrepresentation of the teaching of Scripture.

Okay. So that's where we're going. What are the goals of election? Holiness, adoption. No doubt at all about this. He chose us in him that we should be holy and blameless before him.

And it isn't just here that he speaks in that way. It's later on in the Romans in the passage we read those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.

[8 : 20] Now whatever it means to be conformed to the image of Christ moral considerations must enter into it there. And again he's effectively saying is Christ holy?

Then you were chosen in order that you might be holy. Is he without blame in the presence of God? Of course he is. If you were chosen to be conformed to his image then you were chosen that you too might be blameless before him.

And that to my mind is an essential way of looking at this doctrine of election. Commonly people say he does it for his just out of mere choice.

Moral considerations don't enter into it. It's not if you're good you're elected and if you're bad you're put to hell. The idea is that moral considerations don't come into it.

But you see if you look at it this way you see that moral considerations do come into it. But where do they come into it? And the answer is simply this. Moral considerations are not the root of election but they are certainly the fruit of election.

[9 : 32] Being good is not where election begins but it certainly is where election ends. And so whether you're holy or not enters into the very essence of God's purpose of election.

Moral considerations do count. Now what does this do for us? This idea that we are elected that we might be holy and without blame before him.

Well I think from one point of view there's two points of view of course. From one point of view this can be something enormously comforting. Here is a person who has come to know Christ they believe that they're walking in God's way and they're struggling desperately and they're having a real difficulty over temptations and they've got sins that they seem to go back to constantly and they're told here you're elected for holiness and putting their trust in the promise of God looking to the fulfillment of what he has said in his word they say one day I'll certainly reach the goal because that is why God elected me.

One day the struggle will be over. One day the temptations will be gone. No more will be the shame of having failed once again.

One day all the flaws in my character all the habits should have marred my happiness and spoiled my testimony one day will be gone thank God because he elected me for that goal in mind.

[11:13] And so they can say he has begun a good work in me I've come to know him I'm trusting in him how did that happen except by the grace of God and they can say the one who has begun a good work in me will go on to perfect it.

One day I will be presented before the presence of his glory blameless and with great joy because this is the goal of election the believer can trust in that promise and say however depressed I am at my performance at the moment I'm pursuing this goal and one day it will be mine.

And in that way I believe that there is something really comforting in this idea that we are chosen to holiness. One day we will reach that goal despite all our failures.

But this teaching should encourage fresh endeavour as well. If God has chosen us for holiness then surely surely he is leading us now along the path of holiness.

And that consideration means that we cannot be presumptuous. Now Calvinists are meant to say once saved always saved and that's meant to be something that gives them real assurance.

[12:42] I'm not denying that for a moment. But I believe that is true. But I'm not convinced that it's the whole truth or necessarily the proper balance truth.

It is much more accurate and much more helpful and much safer and I believe much more biblical to define that doctrine in a slightly different way.

People say the seed that has been sown in our hearts is God's seed. God's seed cannot wither and die. True.

But we could also say if it's God's seed it cannot fail to grow. So it's not a matter of once saved always saved.

It's a matter of once saved always growing. Or people might say we've got the life of God and the soul of man. It's God's life implanted by the Holy Spirit in us.

[13:43] It cannot die out. It cannot die out because it is God's life implanted within us. But then you see if it's God's life planted within us it cannot fail to develop.

And once again you've got this idea that there must be progress if the work of God is genuine. And because the aim is holiness there must be progress along the path of holiness.

And we cannot simply take comfort from this teaching without facing the challenge of this teaching. Is this a picture of our life? Are we actually growing in holiness?

Because that is what we would expect to happen if indeed we have been elected to enjoy holiness or to bring us to holiness.

And that is a question of course that can be deeply disturbing for us. When we assess our lives we find it very difficult to see where we are and we might say we are as far from this goal as ever.

[14:50] I want to use a very down to earth illustration. Some of you know that we are hoping to move from Glasgow to Edinburgh and this involves an awful lot of work more so than we realised of doing odd things in the house that never get done and getting a few tradesmen in to do this and that and the other and a lot of painting and other things around the house.

And for a time folks would say how are you getting on and we would say we are as far from moving as we ever were and that's the way it seemed to us when we considered what all we had still to do. All the decluttering and downsizing as well as sorting things out in the house. And what we discovered is that the more you did the more you realised you had to do. So you remove the stained sealant around the bath and you make something nice and decent and it looks very nice compared to what it was anyway.

And then your ears yeah well that's alright but the grouting is very dirty now so you'll have to clean the grouting as well. And you've put in this ceiling around the bath and the woodwork is not just all it should be so you've got to do a wee bit of painting on the woodwork and if you do the bit of woodwork you'll have to paint the bathroom door as well.

That sort of thing you're discovering. The more you do the more you realise you have to do. And that's why we said for a long time we're as far from moving as we ever were because we were just looking at all that needed to be done.

[16:23] But there was another way we could have looked at it and that was to see what we had actually achieved in that time. And we could say well we've had the painter in and the central heating man in and we've got a roof arranged to come and sort the roof and painted the garden shed and the garden wall and that sort of thing.

And when you looked at it that way you realised you actually had made some progress. Now I'm going into detail about that because I hope you appreciate that sort of situation. Because you see what I'm saying is that's what we do in regard to the spiritual life.

We look at the way that still lies ahead of us and we say we're as far as ever from reaching that goal.

That's what we say when we look at what needs to be done. Because just as in clearing up the house so it is in clearing up our lives. We clean a bit and realise that's dirty too and we've cleaned that bit up as well.

The more we do the more we realise what needs still to be done. And we say we've made no progress simply because our standards have been raised and we've got a higher degree of certainty about what it means to be holy.

[17 : 44] And we've realised that more things are sinful than we thought at the beginning. And it's not necessarily that we haven't made progress, it's just that our standards have been raised and we think there's an awful long way to go.

Just as much as there ever was. But if you look at it the other way around and say where have we come from, am I still what I was? And I think most of us would be able to say I'm not what I was.

There has been progress. I'm not the person I was when I was first converted. There has been this done and that done and I see things differently now in certain areas of life that I never realised for years and years were wrong and now I see them to be wrong.

I have made progress peace. And it seems to me we've got to get this happy balance. Are we in the way of holiness? Are we progressing towards this goal?

Because the doctrine of election, if we're going to hold to it, implies that we have got to be in this path or else we're not God's people. Well, we need to have a happy balance about it.

[18 : 54] By all means, let's acknowledge that there's an awful long way to go. But if we can say, yes, but I have come an awful long way, if we can say that as well, that that seems to me to be the happy position to be in.

And that means, you see, that as I say, this teaching is comforting, wonderful. We're going to attain holiness someday. But it's also challenging.

Are we advancing along the path of holiness the way we ought to be doing? And it's when we keep these two things in proper balance that I think we've got the biblical teaching just right.

And this therefore should be a source of comfort that enables us when we're struggling to say, yes, but the victory's there. One day I'll reach the goal because that's what God assigned to me.

On the other hand, we haven't keep presumptuous, but we have to say, yes, but I must keep persevering. That it seems to me is the practical outworking of this idea that we are called, that we are appointed to holiness.

[20 : 09] Moral considerations do come into it. Okay, the other thing here is adoption. I've heard it said that adoption was not an unusual custom in the Roman Empire of Paul's time.

In order to have a suitable heir, an emperor might adopt somebody as his son in order that that person might inherit the empire.

So he takes somebody from outside his family circle and he legally adopts him as his son simply in order that the inheritance might be his. I don't know how accurate that is, but I've heard it in good authority.

Now if that's the case, and people living in the Roman Empire knew that, what a remarkable expression of God's grace this is, that it says here he predestined us to be adopted as his sons. Just as the emperor takes in somebody from out with his family and gives them all the privileges, one that belongs to the family, so God the father took some from out with his family and gives them all the privileges of belonging to the family of God.

[21 : 32] Now I'm talking here of privileges and I think that's right. We can't think of the fatherhood of God in terms of care and the Bible does allow us to speak in that way.

God is a loving heavenly father because he acts like a responsible father to his children. he cares for us, he guides us, he's with us, he sustains us, he promotes us and helps us on in life and so on.

That is a biblical picture of God as our father. But that's not what is in mind here. It's a different aspect to sonship that is in mind here and I do think that it's very much in terms of privilege and status that we have to think about these things.

And I say that because of the way that Paul speaks of this doctrine elsewhere and particularly in the Romans where he speaks of us as being heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.

What does it mean for Christ to be an heir of God? And of course we can't say, at least I can't say, I wouldn't begin to say anything in detail about this.

[22 : 43] It's a wonderful picture not to be taken literally. An heir is somebody that takes over the estate when somebody dies. That's not in mind. Somebody dying is not in mind. Taking over the estate is in mind.

It speaks of privilege. It speaks of authority. That's what Christ has as the heir of God. And we are joint heirs along with Christ. So that's why we say here, adoption here talks about privilege and status and authority and that sort of area.

Just like the boy that's adopted into the emperor's family in order that he might inherit the empire. So we are adopted into God's family so that we might enjoy the same status as our Lord himself enjoys.

Which is a mighty big thing to say, but it's something that Paul quite distinctly says. We are seated with Christ in heavenly places. Just as he occupies the place of honour and authority at the father's right hand, that is the status that we ourselves enjoy because we are the adopted children of God. And that's the goal that was in mind when he chose us. He didn't say that person's for heaven, that person's for heaven. That was not what he said. He said that person is an outcast and stranger but I'm going to make him or her a son or daughter in my family.

[24 : 10] That person is not related to me in any meaningful way, certainly not morally but I'm going to take that person and I'm going to make that person holy and in the process involved in that I'm also going to adopt them into my family circle to give them all the privileges of the children of God.

So that's what is being taught here. That's one of the goals of election. Now the example of the Roman Empire, the Roman Emperor choosing someone to be adopted as his son fails to give an accurate picture of things here in at least two ways.

Firstly, surely the Emperor adopts somebody, chooses somebody whom he thinks has the gifts and abilities to do the job. The reason why he has to do this is either because he's not got a son or because he's got a son that is no good.

So he goes to somebody that he thinks will be good and he takes him into the family in order that he might inherit the king, the empire. So he does it on the basis of merit and ability and attainments. That's not the way it's done here. It's done on the basis of grace. So he adopts us as his children even although we have no attainments that might equip us for that task. He chooses us for this purpose even although there is no natural abilities in ourselves that would compel God to choose us in that way.

[25 : 40] It's purely, purely a matter of grace. In that way it's different from the picture that we're using of the Roman empire adopting a son, somebody as a son.

And another way in which it's different is this and this we're going to develop more. I would think that adoption in that way of looking at it in the Roman empire was very much a legal act.

There may not have been any great personal feeling involved in it. It was a status that a young man was given for a more or less business purpose, a pragmatic thing without really any emotional or personal ties involved in it.

He had the status of sonship but little more of what sonship involves than simply the status of sonship. But in this case it's very, very different.

in a sense it's a legal act but it's done with all the love and affection that could possibly be imagined in regard to a father and son relationship.

[26 : 47] In this case there was warmth. He predestined us to this position in love. It was the outpouring of God's grace and warm affection that is a part of this picture of adoption.

It's not simply a legal act but a general reception of an outsider into a family relationship. And that is mind bogglingly big. Now I heard a true story years ago now but I've kept it in mind because I thought that will make a good sermon illustration.

It's a purely secular story and it's true. And I'm giving it its spiritual application as you'll see. But I heard this woman should move to a new area.

She didn't know many people but she knew one lady who invited her to some sort of reception in her house. And she went along not very keenly but because she didn't think she'd know very many

people.

And right enough when she got there she didn't know anybody. So she takes her coffee and her piece of cake or whatever and it's a nice summer day. She goes out to the garden where some people are sitting around and there's chairs there to sit on.

[28 : 01] So she sits down and she looks around just seeing what's going on. And she sees two boys running in and out of the house and around and she reckons they must belong to the family.

But she's a wee bit uncertain about what's going on because they look about the same age but they don't seem to be twins. And eventually she calls one of the boys over and says to him, is that boy your brother?

And the boy says, yes, he's my brother. So the woman says, are you twins? And the boy says, no, he's four months younger than me. And while she's starting to get her head around this, the boy adds, one of us is adopted but I can't remember which one.

And that to me is wonderful in the natural realm. And that's what we've got at the spiritual realm. Here's these two boys in this family.

They were treated so absolutely alike that nobody could remember, or these boys couldn't remember, which one was adopted and which wasn't.

[29 : 13] So one had become the son of the family in the normal way, through a warm, loving, marital relationship. The other had become a son through signing a document in a lawyer's office.

How different? And yet, they were treated as one. And that, to my mind, is a good illustration of what we're talking about here. This is fantastic, that we're joint heirs along with Christ.

The basis of our sonship is completely different. He's the eternal son of God. He was in the bosom of the father from the earliest times. He has commended himself to the father's loved by coming amongst us and acted for us.

The natural warmth of that relationship is indescribable. And here are we, we are adopted into his family. In a sense, as I say, it's a legal provision.

And yet, and yet, we are joint heirs along with Christ. The basis of sonship is entirely different, but the results of sonship are entirely the same.

[30 : 24] Joint heirs with Christ. And that's what makes this such a wonderful thing to reflect on. And this, you see, is what gets me about Robert Burns and folks that speak like him.

How cold there is, how cold the way of describing election is in the poetry of Robert Burns in the passage we've quoted. into heaven and ten to hell.

Cold, legal, indifferent, impersonal. That's the way he described it. And that's the way many people see it, wrongly. Because what we've got here is the most indescribable act of warmth, love, and affection that we could possibly imagine.

The whole tone of what Burns says is completely different from the whole tone of what scripture says when we're talking about election. There's nothing cold and legal about this.

There's nothing impersonal in God choosing one or not choosing one. There's warm love poured out on his people, adopted into the family of God.

[31 : 39] And that's the way we have to see things. Now how we experience this is another matter. I fear that we can't say very much about this.

I can say of course in good biblical authority that we do not realise this privilege to the fullness at the present time. Because again Paul speaks about the time coming when the sons of God will be revealed.

So it's not known who the sons of God are. They themselves may not realise it to the full degree that they will in the future. there's a certain hastiness about this at the moment.

But nonetheless the basic idea is there. We have a wonderful God that has called us to a new relationship, that has appointed us to a new relationship.

A relationship of faith to him, yes, of obedience to him, yes. A relationship that requires us to seek holiness, yes, but a relationship that implies the most intimate thing that we can possibly imagine, that we are sons and daughters of God and that we are joint heirs along with Christ.

[32 : 55] No wonder the Apostle John says how great is the love the Father has lavished in us, that we should be called the children of God. And that is what we are.

There are many times when we don't feel like this. But what we've got to try and do is keep this remarkable privilege before us and recognise the infinite nature of God's grace and the wonderful goal that he has in mind and recognise that this talks of a privilege that is unimaginable even in the

natural world.

That's the two goals that we've got here of election. Elected to holiness, elected to adoption. Now, to sum up, I like to think of election as what I would call a syndrome.

A syndrome is probably a medical term more so than anything else. but it involves a number of little symptoms that run together, that are all brought together and once all these or most of these things are there, then you've got whatever disease it is.

Syndrome implies various ingredients that have got to go into something before it is the real thing. Okay. And election is to be conceived in those terms.

[34 : 28] election isn't just who's going to heaven and who's not. It's much bigger than that. It's much grander than that. It's much more glorious than that.

It's a syndrome where we've got to put different elements together. Or, if you like, it's one of these, think of one of these stained glass windows in a beautiful cathedral where they've got eight or ten or twelve different colours of glass, all of them in their place, and the beauty of it when they're all there, well, if you like that sort of beauty, it's wonderful.

Now, what would happen if only one colour was there? And the whole thing makes no sense at all. No beauty there. Something very ugly. If all the colours were taken out except one, and that colour comes there, there, and there, and all the rest is blank.

Meaningless. No beauty in there at all. No glory. And that's what Robert Burns and people like him today are doing when they think about election in the terms that he has described.

It's one colour they've put into the thing, and the picture is ugly, incomplete, no glory attached. But when you put the different elements into it, varied elements into it, it's then when you get the complete picture that it looks really glorious and wonderful.

[35 : 58] And that's what we've got in these two that we've got this evening. These are not two separate things. They're part of the syndrome. They go together. After all, if we are adopted as his sons, we must be appointed to holiness, because his son is holy.

So what I want us to do is to recognise that when people describe election in the sort of way that we've mentioned, and when they deride it and make improbable descriptions of it, what they're doing basically is leaving out all the colours but one, making it seem plain and ugly and frankly stupid.

And what we need to do is put all the colours back in, and then we'll see it in all the glory that is portrayed in scripture. And that's what we've begun to do.

These two things must be found there in a proper description of election. The fact that we're elected to holiness, the fact that we're elected to be adopted as his sons.

I hope this will help us to understand and appreciate and defend the doctrine of election better. I hope that it will enrich our lives as we think about these wonderful things.

[37 : 19] Something comforting, something challenging, something wonderful beyond comprehension. May God bless to us his word. We're going to sing in conclusion Psalm 101 verses 1-6.

Thanks.