

The Just Shall Live by His Faith

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Habakkuk 2:1–4

We live in a time of war and turmoil, economic difficulty and moral laxity. Some might even call it God's judgment on our society. It seems that faith in Christ has been thrown out the window. So much immorality is taking place in our society and we fear God's judgment against us. Do you struggle with the question, "How do I live by faith in our day and in our society?" Perhaps you live by faith, trusting in God for His provision. Perhaps you trust in God for His protection. Or you trust in God for salvation. These are all elements of faith—a trust in God and an assured confidence in Christ. But have you ever trusted God in the face of impending judgment? That is what the prophet Habakkuk demonstrates for us. We want to look at the prophet Habakkuk and how faith operated in his life by considering Habakkuk 2:1–4:

I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reprov'd. And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it: because it will surely come, it will not tarry. Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.

The theme for this message is “The Just Shall Live by His Faith,” with these points: 1. the context of faith; 2. the character of faith; 3. the contrast of faith.

This verse has been both controversial and comforting throughout the ages of the church. The Apostle Paul made it a center point of his theology as he explained the nature of faith and justification in his epistles to the Romans and Galatians. Martin Luther rediscovered this truth in the time of the Reformation and found it a most liberating verse that delivered him from the bondage of works religion to trust in Christ alone, by faith alone.

Recently, the doctrines of justification and faith have come under attack by some in the church. They argue for a works religion by which a person is justified or made right before God. However, the Old Testament prophet Habakkuk proves that a person is justified by faith in Christ alone, hence in God alone. He demonstrates how a justified person lives by faith. A just or righteous person does not live by his own works; he lives by faith in God. This is the lifeline of the believer. We wish to consider this justifying faith and see how it operates in the context of impending judgment by the Lord. As it operates within this context, we will begin to see the characteristics of faith as it operated in the life of Habakkuk, and then, finally, we will contrast that faith in this chapter with the lives of the wicked Judeans and the wicked Chaldeans.

The Context of Faith

The prophet Habakkuk lived in a time of social injustice. If we read Habakkuk 1:1–4, we notice the prophet questioning God and His seeming silence toward Judah. The situation there was one of persecution, violence, fighting, and lawlessness. It seemed the wicked were prospering over the righteous. It seemed that God’s faithful people were being snuffed out by the

wicked and His law was being trampled in the dust. In response to his troubles, Habakkuk begins to question God with challenging questions. “Why, God, wilt Thou not hear? Why dost Thou show me these things and not intervene? Why do the wicked increase and lord it over the righteous?”

God answers Habakkuk in 1:5: “Behold ye among the heathen, and regard, and wonder marvelously: for I will work a work in your days, which ye will not believe, though it be told you.” The Lord is going to work through the Chaldeans. They would be sent by God to bring justice. God says, “Behold My marvelous work and my marching judgment in the form of the Chaldean army.” God is going to bring in a foreign army to invade Judah and mete out His justice upon the wicked.

Perhaps you find yourself in a similar situation like Habakkuk. Our day is certainly no different. The wicked seem to prosper on every hand; violence abounds in the progression of the same-sex rights agenda and the silent holocaust of abortion. God’s law is downgraded as it was in the prophet’s day. We question God and ask Him why He allows such things. “Why, O Lord, dost Thou show us and make us party to these atrocities?” We see the effects of uninhibited spending and loaning of money. Many lose jobs and homes, and lose hope in their situation. The questions that so easily rise up are, “Where is God in all this?” We say like the prophet, “How long, Lord, shall we cry and Thou wilt not hear?” God responds to us and calls us to behold His coming judgment upon the wicked. Even if you don’t see justice meted out upon the wicked, God is holding their rightful punishment in abeyance until the final judgment. There will come a time when we will behold the marvelous work of God and His judgment upon the wicked.

This is the context in which Habakkuk is living. He responds specifically to the coming judgment by the

Chaldeans with more questions in Habakkuk 1:12–17. He pleads upon God’s character and revelation of Himself. He addresses God as the Holy One, the Just One, and the Creator of all things. It’s as if he’s saying, “God, how canst Thou do these things? How canst Thou permit the Chaldeans to come up and destroy the people of Judah? Why dost Thou permit them to persecute the nations?” Habakkuk is not trusting God for His purpose with Judah; rather he daringly questions God’s providence and justice when the people of Judah were responsible for their own sin. Habakkuk speaks much like the psalmist in Psalm 73 who considers the lot of the wicked and how they prospered without God intervening at all. But God says that He will intervene, though it was not the way that Habakkuk wanted. God’s ways are higher than our ways; His judgments are inscrutable; His ways are past finding out.

Perhaps you have come with audacious questions like the prophet. You question God’s ways in our country, in our church, or in your own life. Perhaps you do not understand why God allows injustice in the world and so you question Him as the Creator of the world. We so often would prescribe for God how He should act. We want our agenda furthered, having invested much in it, but we so often ignore God’s agenda. God’s silence does not mean that He is not interested in our situation. The opposite is true; God is working His purpose so that His agenda is furthered and His glory manifested in the world. That is the main point behind His response to Habakkuk’s first questions. He is going to do a marvelous work like Habakkuk had never seen. A massive and fearful army is going to destroy Judah and take the people captive.

How would you respond to such news? We probably would do something like Habakkuk and ask why this wicked nation be allowed to plunder the nation when they themselves deserve judgment. God uses the

Chaldeans to discipline Judah and to bring His own justice to the world. Look around us: is God not doing the same in our day? Terrorist attacks around the world and in our nations are indications that God is coming in judgment against sinful people and nations. He uses terrorists to fulfill His purpose of judgment even though they deserve God's judgment themselves for their wicked deeds. Our day is not really much different from the prophet's day. This is the context in which faith operates.

The Character of Faith

In chapter 2, we sense a different mood on the part of the prophet. It's as if his questioning is put to rest. He stops trying to promote his own agenda and we see faith beginning to operate. What is faith? The Heidelberg Catechism in Lord's Day 7, Question and Answer 21, defines faith this way:

True faith is not only a certain [sure] knowledge, whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in His Word, but also an assured confidence, which the Holy Spirit works by the gospel in my heart, that not only to others, but to me also, remission of sin, everlasting righteousness and salvation are freely given by God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ's merits.

True faith is based on Scripture and centered on Christ, trusting in Him and His merits. Someone put it this way, "True faith takes its character and quality from its object and not from itself. Faith gets a man out of himself and into Christ. Its strength therefore depends on the character of Christ. Even those of us who have weak faith have the same strong Christ as others!"¹ Faith is like an empty hand that discovers

1. Sinclair Ferguson, *Know Your Christian Life: A Theological Introduction* (Downer's Grove, Ill: IVP, 1981), 66–67.

righteousness and life in Christ. It destroys its enemies through the victory of Christ.²

We see the characteristics of this faith operating in the prophet's life, and we can use these characteristics to test how we are living by faith, if indeed we are living by faith at all. True, living faith watches expectantly for the Lord to answer. This is what we read in Habakkuk 2:1, "I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved." Though Habakkuk's questions challenge God, the tenor of his words changes in verse one. He is waiting and watching for a word from the Lord. Even though he doesn't understand exactly what is going on in the world around him, he nevertheless has learned to wait on the Lord for His word. One commentator writes, "The prophet is right in the position he takes with respect to his own role in the resolution of this perplexing issue. He will not attempt to reconcile in his own mind the apparent contradiction between the election of Israel by God as the object of His special love and the devastation of Israel at the hands of the rapacious Chaldeans as ordered by the Lord. He will not resort to the resources of human wisdom. Instead, he will watch for an answer that can come only from the Lord. Habakkuk knows that, in accordance with the nature of the prophetic office in Israel, revelation from God alone can answer his perplexity."³

Is this not what we are to do when we don't understand situations in life? Though the world around us unravels, yet our faith must look out to God and His Word. We are to watch expectantly, letting the Word of

2. Some of these thoughts are from the ordination sermon given by Dr. Gerald Bilkes on September 26, 2009.

3. O. Palmer Robertson, *Habakkuk*, New International Commentary of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1990), 165.

God speak to us. Habakkuk was waiting for revelation from God concerning Judah and the judgment upon their sins, and we now have that revelation written in the Word of God. We are able to read and understand by faith what God revealed to us concerning His judgment upon sin. The revelation of God in His Word is the only answer that faith will find to life's perplexing problems. It doesn't mean that you wait for God to mystically apply a certain text to your life, though He may do that at times. For us it means that by faith we take God's Word, read it, pray over it, and plead upon it before God as we face difficult problems. We face national and global economic and security problems. Are you turning to the Word and waiting expectantly for God's answer? You might face marital trouble, and so faith turns to the Word for an answer. Your child may have left the faith and embarked on a life of sin, but faith turns to the Word to sort it all out. You just received news of terminal cancer; faith turns to the Word of God for comfort and understanding of God's seemingly cross-providences. A loved one passes away suddenly and you are trying to come to grips with God's purpose in it all. Are you turning to the Word by faith? This is what it means to live by faith in every circumstance of life.

Not only does true and living faith watch for the Lord to answer, but faith also works when the Word is received and applied with the power of the Holy Spirit to our souls and lives. We read of that in Habakkuk 2:2: "And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it." This text is difficult to interpret and there are several levels of interpretation that can be used to helpfully explain it. It first of all reminds us of Moses receiving the tables of stone with the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai. Most commentators draw this connection as God reveals Himself and His

plan to Habakkuk. The Lord tells the prophet to write the vision on two tablets so that it will be visible and permanent. It was to remind succeeding generations of the portrait of a righteous man. Furthermore, this vision was to be made plain, giving a sense of proclamation. It was to be published in the public arena: “*The just shall live by his faith.*” It was to keep the person who read it in the way of righteousness as he lived by faith and looked to God and His Word. Walter Kaiser, in his commentary on Habakkuk, captures these three levels of interpretation well when he says that it refers to “(1) a permanent record of the vision that was to come, (2) a proclamation of the vision to all, and (3) a life that was marked by the obedience of faith.”⁴

Dear readers, we have this vision recorded for us, “The just shall live by his faith.” It is recorded not only in the Old Testament, but also in the New Testament in Romans 1:17, Galatians 2:20 and 3:11, and Hebrews 10:38. This shows the importance of living by faith, of living lives marked by obedience of faith. This verse speaks of our proclamation to the world. How are you living by faith? Are you demonstrating that you are living by faith in the righteousness of Christ? Or are you still attempting to establish your own righteousness by your works of the law?

True faith waits for the fulfillment of the Word of God. This is evident in verse 3 where we read God’s instructions to Habakkuk, “For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.” Although Habakkuk cannot see the fulfillment of the judgment of God yet, he is still supposed to wait for the vision. God will work in His time, according to His own plan and not to anything

4. Walter Kaiser, *The Preacher’s Commentary: Habakkuk*, vol. 23 (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1992), 166.

else. This is what faith recognizes and submits to; the fulfillment of God's Word, yet unseen, is nevertheless believed. This is confirmed in Hebrews 11:1, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." God's judgment, though as yet not clearly understood, must be submitted to. Habakkuk loses all rights to speak against God's sovereignty in judgment. The prophet acknowledges this in chapter 3:17–19 as he confesses his faith in God no matter what will happen to him or to Judah. His hope and his salvation are in the Lord. Faith waits for God to work even when it seems to our human perception that nothing is being done. God will always work and nothing will hinder it.

Does your faith operate in this way, even when it seems as if judgment is not being meted out in your situation? We live in what theologians call the "now/not-yet" tension. We have the promise of God's justice and though it might not be fulfilled in our lifetime, we can be assured that the Lord's cause will be vindicated at the final judgment and the wicked will receive their due. Is your faith resting in Christ, no matter what your life's circumstances? Consider the psalmist's words, "Until I went into the sanctuary of God, then understood I their end"—the end of the wicked (Ps. 73:17). We have the promise that we will be fully restored in true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. Sin seems so active in our lives, yet faith trusts God that He will bring to pass what He has promised.

The Contrast of Faith

We've seen the context of how the righteous live by faith, and we've seen the characteristics of faith in the midst of a message of judgment and a situation of lawlessness. Now the vision that Habakkuk sees sets before us a contrast of the just who lives by faith and the proud who lives by his works. Verse 4 states, "Behold,

his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.” The contrast is given to us in the word “but.” The contrast is ultimately between the man who is proud and rests in his strength and prowess—in this case, the Chaldeans who rested in brutal and ruthless military might and strategy—and the one who lived by faith in the promises of God and rested in God as His Savior.

This contrast can be broken down into three separate contrasts. The first is the unjust versus the just. Our text says “Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him.” Here we see a picture of the unjust and unrighteous man. His soul is lifted up against God and he trusts in himself. He does not wait for the word of the Lord as the prophet does, but he tries to do his own thing. His soul is unjust. He stands before God on his own account, in his own righteousness, and, in the following verses, we read the woes that God pronounces on people like him. This unjust man is contrasted with the just man or the righteous man, a man who is trusting in God. He does not rest in what he has accomplished, but he rests in the finished work of Christ for his righteousness before God. In the following verses, we see how this just man lives by faith, trusting in God, submitting to Him, knowing that God will achieve His purpose.

Young people and older ones, which are you? Is your life a picture of the unjust man who trusts in his own righteousness? Are you a picture of the Chaldeans who ruthlessly go about to destroy, whose hearts are lifted up at their success? Or are your life and your heart pictures of Habakkuk, who trusted in God in the most severe circumstances? Are you a righteous person, not in yourself but in Jesus Christ?

The second contrast is between that of faithfulness and faithlessness. We see that the man whose heart is unjust is faithless. His focus is internal. He is proud

because he thinks he has what it takes to live life to the fullest and doesn't need anything else. The just man, in contrast, lives by his faith, or "faithfulness," as the original Hebrew indicates. What does it mean to live by faithfulness? Does it mean that you are so faithful, or that your faith is self-produced? No, we see here that faith is a gift of God (Eph. 2:8). Faith is given as a gift through the grace of God in Christ. Christ has been faithful by dying on the cross and rising again from the dead. Christ was faithful in obedience to His Father in everything. This is the focus of the just man's faith. Is it yours? The faith of Christ is portrayed in Habakkuk. Christ had perfect faith and faithfulness. Even in the midst of judgment upon Himself for the sins of His people, He continued to trust in God. Are you prepared to live a life of faith like that, not only according to the Master's example, but living out of His faithfulness?

Beloved, where is your trust? Is it in yourself, thus exalting yourself? Or is it in Christ and His faithfulness, thus exalting Christ in the midst of life's circumstances? In the midst of judgment upon our nation, perhaps even on you personally in the way of afflictions, are you living by faith? Faith trusts God and casts all hope upon Him for salvation. Job confessed this: "Though he slay me, yet will I trust him" (Job 13:15).

The third and final contrast is between the dead and the living. This is a most solemn contrast and shows the real value of faith. The one who is proud and lifted up in himself is really spiritually dead because he has no faith. The one who has faith lives eternally. Picture it like two gardens. The one garden is planted and the plants soon spring up. There is a tap nearby, but there is no hose to bring water and fertilizer to the plants, and so they die and wither. This is the picture of a man without faith. The other garden is planted as well, but there a hose is connected to the tap and water

and fertilizer flow to the plants, nourishing them and making them strong. Storms come and flatten the first garden, but the plants in the second garden stand tall and strong in the wind because they have that garden hose that brings nutrients and life to them. That is a picture of faith. Faith is like the garden hose that brings the benefits and life that Christ offers us. If we live by faith like the prophet, we can stand tall and strong in the storms and battles of life, no matter what God does in our lives. Even if we get knocked down by a fierce storm, faith directs us to the source of our life again and we grow stronger than before because we need Christ more. If there is no faith that channels the saving benefits of Christ to our life, we will surely die. This presses home that you need to be living by faith. Without faith you will die! Do you not see the importance of this matter, that eternal life and death hang in the balances?

This is a picture of how faith works in the life of the people of God. Faith operates and gives life and hope in God in the midst of impending judgment. It is the hand that reaches out to God and says, "Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah." Faith brings life to dead hearts. It justifies us, bringing to us the righteousness of the Savior. God delights to give such faith for those who can no longer go on in their own strength and pride. Faith is the lifeline between unworthy sinners and a glorious Christ even in the midst of life-shattering change. Where is your faith placed today? Is it placed in Christ alone, or is it placed in something or someone other than Christ? The former brings spiritual life and perspective to our lives; the latter will only bring misery and death. Will you live by faith in Christ alone and be counted among the just who live by their faith?

**The Glory of God as Father:
Undue Anxiety Out of Order
for Adopted Believers**

Dr. Joel R. Beeke

Matthew 6:25–34

With God's help, I want to meditate with you on
Matthew 6:25–34:

Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink: or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek): for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and

his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

Our theme for this message is: The Glory of God as Father, with this subtitle: Undue Anxiety Out of Order for Adopted Believers.

Setting the Context

Although Matthew 5–7 is commonly referred to as the Sermon on the Mount, a more accurate title might be “Jesus’ Discourse on Discipleship.”¹ Jesus began the Sermon on the Mount by describing the relationship between God the Father and His disciples. From the start, Jesus was explicit that those who are in fellowship with God are very different from people who are not in fellowship with God (Matt. 5:3–12). Jesus said people are blessed who are poor in spirit (v. 3), who mourn (v. 4), who are meek (v. 5), who hunger and thirst after righteousness (v. 6), who are merciful (v. 7), who are pure in heart (v. 8), who are peacemakers (v. 9), and who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake (vv. 10–12). Such traits are not natural in people; rather, they are the distinguishing marks of a child of God. They are kingdom virtues. That’s one reason why Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones suggests that the Sermon on the Mount is a character sketch of a true believer, “not a code of ethics or of morals.”²

James Boice says, “Left to ourselves, our natural beatitudes would go something like this: Blessed are the rich, for they have it all and have it all now; blessed are the happy, for they are content with themselves

1. R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 153.

2. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies In The Sermon on the Mount* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 28.

and don't need others; blessed are the arrogant, for people defer to them; blessed are those who fight for the good things in life, for they will get them; blessed are the sophisticated, for they will have a good time."³

Jesus explained the heart of the law in Matthew 5:17–48. In chapter 6, he instructed the disciples how to pray and for what. However, before he reached the climax of the sermon in Matthew 6:33, which is, “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you,” Jesus dealt with genuine Christian piety (vv. 1–18) and the problem of covetousness (vv. 19–24). In our text He then offered the cure for undue anxiety, which is to trust God as our heavenly Father. This teaching strikes at the very root of covetousness by exposing our natural, inordinate care for the things of this life (vv. 25–34).

Basically, our text teaches that undue anxiety is out of order for adopted believers. Undue anxiety is a grave sin, an act of wicked unbelief that doubts God's love in Christ to us as believers. At the same time, we must understand that Jesus did not say all concern or anxiety is sin. To maintain that would be an exaggerated position.

When we compare Scripture with Scripture, we see that there are two kinds of concern or worry: a godly, circumspect, and moderate concern; and a distrustful, inordinate, and overwhelming concern. God commands us in Proverbs 6:6, 2 Corinthians 12:14, and 1 Timothy 5:8 to be concerned about properly providing for our future and that of our family. “Taking no thought” for earthly things does not negate this concern; rather, it means that we are not to be overly anxious about temporal matters. We are not to go

3. James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 1:74.

beyond due bounds in caring for our physical and temporal needs but must always subject the needs of the body to the higher and deeper needs of our soul. Temporal matters must not distract us from spiritual matters. To be tormented by anxious thoughts about future physical needs is not worthy of our Father's glory and our adoption as God's children. It reveals sinful self-centeredness and a lack of confidence in our Father. It is out of order for a child of the heavenly Father to be unduly anxious about the future.

Let me illustrate. My brother loves to shop for books. When we go into a Christian bookstore, I start with the top shelf of the first bookcase in the store and work my way methodically through the store. My brother walks through the store very rapidly, searching a bit anxiously for any valuable antiquarian work. He then rushes back to me with any special volume he finds so that I won't miss it. I have assured him many times that he should trust me; since I move through the store thoroughly, I will not bypass any special book. Then we joke about the situation. When my brother even approaches me with a book, I say, "Stop worrying. Stop going ahead of me. You are out of order!"

Likewise, we often run ahead of the Lord. We try to discover God's ways for our future, pulling works off shelves that we think will be good for us and bringing them to God. We then almost dictate to Him how He should rule our lives instead of letting Him govern our lives from moment to moment. This undue anxiety is out of order! Our heavenly Father will provide everything that we need at the right time and in the right way.

Jesus warns us against undue anxiety because of the negative way it impacts the glory of God our Father. Such anxiety is inexcusable for the following six reasons.

1. Our Father values us (vv. 25b, 26b)

Jesus says in verse 25, “*Therefore*, I say unto you...” He uses the word *therefore* three times in this section of Scripture. He uses it the first time in verse 25 in response to the argument in verse 24: “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.”

“*Therefore*,” He says, “take no thought (literally, do not worry or become unduly anxious) about your life, what you shall eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear.” Jesus is warning believers against committing the same sin mentioned in verses 19–24,⁴ of loving material possessions more than fearing God. That command is followed by various reasons not to worry about physical needs because worry is an offense to our Father in heaven who values and cares for us.

If we are believers, the first cure for undue anxiety is to believe that our heavenly Father values us. In verse 25b, Jesus asks the question “Is not the life more than meat, and the body more than raiment?” In other words, focusing one’s attention on the necessities of life is wrong. If we are obliged to trust God for life itself, why should we be anxious about food or clothing? Isn’t our life itself worth more than what we eat or put on? Moreover, if we have been called of God and regenerated by the Holy Spirit, are we not children of our Father in heaven? Doesn’t that imply that He values us enough to take care of us?

The second argument in verse 26 for our Father’s valuing us is an *a fortiori* argument; that is, it argues from the lesser to the greater. If the heavenly Father provides for the birds of the air, Jesus says, how much

4. Herman Ridderbos, *Bible Students Commentary, Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 139.

more will He provide for us, for “are ye not much better [that is, of much more value] than they?”

Our Father is glorified in valuing us who are made in His image as His children. We rob Him of that glory when we do not believe that He values us.

2. Our Father governs us (v. 27)

Which of you by being anxious can add one “cubit” to your “stature,” Jesus asks in verse 27. Many commentators suggest the King James translation is not quite accurate here, and the verse should be translated as: “Who among you is able, by being anxious, to add (even) one cubit to his lifespan?”⁵ The Greek word for stature here may mean height, but it may also refer to a length or span of time. The point of Jesus’ argument is this, “Although we try to extend our lives through numerous methods, we are not able to add even one breath to our life.” Jesus has just leveled the playing field, for the wealthy executive on Wall Street has no earthly advantage over the average Joe on Main Street. In the end, our good and gracious God governs the length of everyone’s life.

Undue anxiety about longevity, therefore, accomplishes nothing. A.W. Pink says anxiety is *needless* because the bounty of God assures supplies; it is *senseless* because of the providence of God over inferior creatures; and it is *useless* because of the impotency of man. We cannot add one cubit to our stature. That leaves us with one conclusion: Since you and I are completely dependent on our Father, why should we not fully trust Him?

Do you believe these words of Christ? Do they

5. William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 351. See also Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in The Sermon on the Mount*, 121; Daniel M. Doriani, *Matthew, Volume 1: Chapters 1–13*, 260.

encourage you? Do you truly believe that our Father counsels and directs us? The Puritan Samuel Willard says, “Believers are tender and foolish in themselves, they have not wisdom enough of their own to order and direct their way; and are therefore easily seduced and cheated by the adversary, who is subtle, and watcheth [for] all advantages against [them]: but God is always giving them his fatherly advice, warning them of their danger, showing them a way how to escape it. They have the voice of his Spirit behind them, telling them this is the way (Isa. 30:21); they have the guidance of his most wise counsel to keep them in the right way unto glory (Ps. 74:24).”

3. Our Father feeds and clothes us (vv. 26, 28–31)

Jesus uses *a fortiori* reasoning again in verses 28–31, arguing from the lesser to the greater. Here, He asks us to look at nature. We are told to “consider the flowers of the field” to see “how they grow.” They neither toil, nor spin, Jesus says. Without any care or cultivation by people, these natural beauties look more glorious than King Solomon.

Jesus is arguing here that trusting the heavenly Father is at the heart of true discipleship. At the end of verse 30, Jesus asks, “Shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?” The phrase *O ye of little faith* is Jesus’ reprimand of those who minimize God’s promises and are overly anxious about the necessities of life. The phrase *of little faith* comes from the Greek word *oligopistoi*, which Matthew uses four times: in Matthew 6:30 (our text), Matthew 8:26, Matthew 14:31, and Matthew 16:8. In each case, the disciples are rebuked for having too little faith. William Hendriksen explains, “It would seem that...those so characterized were not sufficiently *taking to heart* the comfort

they should have derived from the presence, promises, power, and love of Christ.”⁶

This rebuke is for us as well. How many times have we failed to trust the fullness of the promises of our Father in Christ and instead settled for meager scraps produced by our own efforts? Though we may offer thanks for past blessings, we too often fail to trust our Father for future graces. As John Piper says, “Faith in future grace, not gratitude, is the source of radical, risk-taking, kingdom obedience.”⁷ Only when we recognize the grandeur of almighty God as our heavenly Father in Christ will we begin to trust Him for all things, both great and small, in the present as well as in the future.

Why do we presume upon our Father’s bounty by seeking to gather and take comfort in earthly possessions? Should we not first be busy seeking the kingdom of God and His righteousness? Will He not provide us with all of life’s necessities? Daniel Doriani writes, “We set out on a desperate, hopeless quest when we search for fulfillment where it cannot be found.”⁸

Christ also tells us to look at the birds around us, which neither sow nor reap, nor fill barns with food for tomorrow; yet, as Christ says, “your heavenly Father feedeth them.”

Dear friends, do not let the Lord’s teaching here rush in one ear and out the other. Let it sink into the depths of your soul. As Herman Ridderbos says, “It is God’s open hand, not human effort that makes life possible.”⁹ The question each of us must ask is: “Am I living by faith, trusting in God, the Father, and Christ, His Son; or am I living as a practical atheist by fearing that if I do not take charge of my life, all may be lost?”

6. Hendriksen, 353 (*italics mine*).

7. John Piper, *Future Grace* (Sisters: Multnomah, 1995), 43.

8. Doriani, *Matthew*, 259.

9. Ridderbos, 140.

The old Princeton divine, B. B. Warfield, asks: "Is it true that He [the heavenly Father] has provided salvation for us at the tremendous cost of the death of His Son, and will not provide food for us to eat and clothes for us to wear at the cost of the directive word that speaks and it is done?"¹⁰

The words of Christ in our text expose our unbelief. Warfield goes on to say: "What a rebuke these lessons are to our practical atheism, which says, in effect, that we cannot trust God for our earthly prosperity but must bid Him wait until we make good our earthly fortunes before we can afford to turn to Him."¹¹

Do you know God as your heavenly Father? Does your heart drive you to trust Him? Can you say with the old hymn writer, "Give me a calm, a thankful heart, from every murmur free; the blessings of Thy grace impart, and let me live to Thee"¹²

In verse 31, Jesus summarizes His lesson by referring to the sin and senselessness of undue anxiety regarding food and clothing.¹³ He says that since our heavenly Father cares for creation, He will surely provide the daily necessities for His children.

Therefore, dear believer, when you are tempted to be over-anxious, take to heart these words of Scripture: "Commit thy way unto the LORD: trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass" (Ps. 37:5); "Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee" (Ps. 55:22), "for he careth for you" (1 Pet. 5:7).

10. Benjamin B. Warfield, *Faith and Life* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 45.

11. *Ibid.*, 46.

12. Anne Steele, "Father, whate'er of earthly bliss," in *Christian Hymns* (Bridgend: The Evangelical Movement of Wales, 1977), No. 570.

13. Hendriksen, 353.

4. Our Father knows and meets every need in His Son (v. 32)

Jesus' focus shifts in verse 32 from lessons in nature to people who live as though God does not exist. He says unbelievers spend their lives groping after material possessions. The preposition "for" in verse 32 is directive—"For after all these things do the Gentiles seek." Unbelievers focus all of their efforts on obtaining food, drink, and material wealth. By contrast, the children of God are assured, "Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things." Therefore, we are to live an anxiety-free life, believing that our loving heavenly Father knows all of our needs and promises to provide for them.

In other words, Jesus says, do not chase after things as the Gentiles do, for two reasons: first, because it is worldly—even heathenish—to focus on such things as food and clothing, for these are the gods of heathens. The original Greek of this text is more emphatic, saying that Gentiles "set themselves to seek" such things. They seek things with all their might. They find life in things rather than in the living, holy Father of heaven and earth.

Second, we must not chase after things because our heavenly Father—in contrast to the impotent gods of the heathen—will give food, clothing, and other such things to us, anyway. He knows what you need and will not deny it to you. Jesus says later in Matthew 7:11, "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?"

Lloyd-Jones comments on this verse, "The question I now ask myself is, Does that Christian faith of mine affect my whole detailed view of life? Is it always determining my reaction and my response to the particular things that happen? Or, we can put it like this. Is it clear and obvious to myself and to everybody else that

my whole approach to life, my essential view of life in general and in particular, is altogether different from that of the non-Christian? It should be.... If, then, we are different essentially, we must be different in our view of, and in our reaction to, everything.”¹⁴

Don Carson puts it this way: “When the Christian faces the pressure of examinations, does he sound like the pagan in the next room? When he is short of money, even for the essentials, does he complain with the same tone, the same words, the same attitude as those around him? Away with secular thinking. The follower of Jesus will be concerned to have a distinctive lifestyle, one that is characterized by values and perspectives so un-pagan that his life and conduct are, as it were, stamped all over with the words: *Made in the kingdom of God.*”¹⁵

As Christians, we differ from pagans in our views and reactions to everything because we see that in Christ our Father provides everything we need as His children, both physically and spiritually. Moreover, He will protect us from all harm. He will defend us against enemies such as Satan, the world, and our own flesh. He will right us when we are wronged. He will assist and strengthen us, carrying us through every difficulty and temptation (2 Tim. 4:17). We may thus safely entrust everything to His fatherly hands, knowing that He will never leave us nor forsake us (Heb. 13:5–6). We are under our Father’s special inspection and care (1 Pet. 5:7) during all of our earthly pilgrimage, “sealed to the day of redemption” in glory (WCF, XII), when we will be beyond all danger (Rev. 21:25).

All of this is only possible in Christ Jesus, who gave His life so that God could be our Father. As John Flavel writes:

14. Lloyd-Jones, 139–40.

15. Don Carson, *Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 92.

He spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all; how shall he not with him freely give us all things? (Rom. 8:32)... Surely if he would not spare his own Son one stroke, one tear, one groan, one sigh, one circumstance of misery, it can never be imagined that ever he should, after this, deny or withhold from his people, for whose sakes all this was suffered, any mercies, and comforts, any privilege, spiritual or temporal, which is good for them.¹⁶

This does not mean that we should sit back and let God do everything for us. We are not to lack ambition in this life. Rather, it means that we are to live in the assurance that our heavenly Father cares for us and will provide everything we need for *life and godliness* (2 Pet. 1:3). We as Christians must primarily be focused on pursuing a life of holiness. That includes studying God's Word, praying in accordance with the Word, contemplating what it means to live in and under the dominion of God, and seeking to bring all things in subjection to the rule and reign of Christ. That is our chief end.

5. Our Father commands and promises us (v. 33)

In verse 33, Jesus identifies what His disciples should seek after. Since the Father will provide His children with the things that the Gentiles (or unbelievers) seek after, the Christian should seek after the kingdom of God and His righteousness. In other words, we must be resolved to live life under our Father's direction and control, aiming for our Father's glory.¹⁷ Our paramount concern must be God and His righteousness.

We glorify our Father when He becomes number one in our life. We glorify Him when we become a new

16. *The Works of John Flavel* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, reprint 1988), 4:418.

17. France, 271.

creation and operate under “the impulse power of a new affection,” as Thomas Chalmers says. We will no longer serve two masters, for our affections will be set upon God and the things that are above.

Seeking after the kingdom of God and His righteousness is a command. We are commanded to be children of God’s kingdom everywhere: in creation, providence, and redemption; in privacy, in our families, at work and school and play. We are to be children of God’s kingdom in our eternal state through regeneration and in our present condition through sanctification. Our lives should manifest God’s own Word, for, as Psalm 103:19 says, “The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom ruleth over all.”

When we seek God’s kingdom, we also seek His righteousness. We seek His imputed righteousness in Christ, which justifies us; His imparted righteousness through Christ, which sanctifies us; and His moral righteousness, which makes the world livable by His common grace. If the Gentiles seek gods that are no gods, how much more Christians should seek their living God and Father and His righteousness? We must seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness above all else in this world.

By nature, we do not obey this command, for we are born outside of God’s kingdom. In our unregenerate state, we are under the power of Satan and are members of his kingdom of darkness. Jesus commands us to flee from Satan and his kingdom and to seek after the triune God and His kingdom.

How do we find this kingdom? We must turn to God’s Word, which Matthew 13:19 calls “the word of the kingdom.” We must pursue its truth in corporate, family, and private worship. We must exercise the spiritual disciplines that are connected to this Word and flow from it. And we must pray for true regeneration, repentance, and faith, so that we may enter into

this kingdom to possess it, in part in this life, and in full in the life to come.

In response to our obedience to the command to seek after God and His righteousness, Jesus promises, “all these things shall be added unto you.” In the original Greek, this phrase referred to a custom in which goods were sold by measure. The seller would add a little extra to the required amount to ensure a good weight and to foster good will. So the Lord here promises to those who seek after His kingdom and righteousness that He will throw in for good measure all the temporal things they need in this life.

Christ strengthens our faith through such generosity and good will. How precious such promises are to us as God’s adopted children! As the Puritan Thomas Watson writes, “If we are adopted, then we have an interest in all the promises: the promises are children’s bread.” Or, as William Spurstowe says, God’s promises are like a bag of coins that He pours out at the feet of His adopted children, saying, “Take what you will.”

Are you living to the glory of God by resting in His goodness? Are you looking for the Father’s care through His Son, Jesus Christ? All the promises of God to His children are yea and amen in Christ Jesus (2 Cor. 1:20).

6. Our Father cares for us every day (v. 34)

Our Father knows exactly how much affliction to send our way. In saying “sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof” (v. 34), Jesus tells us that God will give us the right amount of trials each day for our own good and the right amount of grace to cope with them.

Jesus is implying two things here. First, He is very practical in saying that since each day has a sufficient number of trials, we should not worry about what may happen the next day. We should seek to live to God’s glory today, and God will give us fresh grace to handle

the troubles of tomorrow. We must trust our Father to help us through today, for He will care for us in all the tomorrows that stretch before us. He will care for us every day.

Second, Jesus is implying that we need each day's troubles to keep us close to Him, for our Father uses such troubles to correct and chasten us for our sanctification. Hebrews 12 tells us that our Father chastens "every son whom he receiveth" (Heb. 12:6). The Father uses all of our troubles to disciple us and for our welfare (Rom. 8:28; 2 Cor. 12:7). John Owen says all our sufferings are "for our education and instruction in his family." Samuel Willard says: "All our afflictions are helps toward heaven" and contribute to the "increase of their eternal glory: every reproach and injury doth but add weight to their crown." We foolishly think that God chastens us to destroy us, for 1 Corinthians 11:32 teaches us that the Lord chastens us so that we will not be condemned with the world. God's chastenings are badges of our adoption as God's children and of His fatherly love (Heb. 12:3–11). Once we understand that, we may be comforted by the afflictions our Father gives us. The Heidelberg Catechism summarizes all of this beautifully in Q. 26:

The eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (who of nothing made heaven and earth, with all that is in them; who likewise upholds and governs the same by his eternal counsel and providence) is for the sake of Christ his Son, my God and my Father; on whom I rely so entirely, that I have no doubt, but he will provide me with all things necessary for soul and body and further, that he will make whatever evils he sends upon me, in this valley of tears turn out to my advantage; for he is able

to do it, being Almighty God, and willing, being a faithful Father.¹⁸

What if we cannot feel the powerful love of our Father when we suffer daily afflictions? What if such troubles make us question the Father's love to us and our adoption by Him? Thomas Shepard responds, "Is thy son not thy child, because while it is young it knows not the father that begot it, or because thou art sometimes departed from it, and hast it not always in thine own arms?"

How precious the love of the heavenly Father is toward His children! Jeremiah Burroughs writes, "God, who is the infinite glorious first-being, embraces them with an entire fatherly love. All the love that ever was in any parents towards children is but as one drop of the infinite ocean of fatherly love that there is in God unto his people."

In verse 34, Jesus says worldly minded people mainly consist of two groups. The first group enslaves itself to material possessions, seeking to amass as much as life will allow. The second group never seems to have enough and is constantly fretting over its neediness. The problem is the same for both groups; instead of trusting God as their father through Jesus Christ, these people measure themselves by what they have or do not have.

For both groups, tomorrow's cares are knocking at their doors today. Jesus commands His disciples not to be stuck in such worry. That does not suggest that tomorrow may be free of trouble. Rather, we are to limit ourselves to handling the troubles that come our way each day. Jesus says that we are to live every moment of every day with our eyes on the Father. For His own glory's sake, we are to trust Him.

Let me offer an example. My Dad was really happy

18. www.reformed.org/documents/heidelberg.

on family vacation. During that time he was willing to give us his undivided attention. He was also generous in spending his hard-earned money. Just as Dad found satisfaction in supplying his family's temporal and financial needs while on vacation, I want to care for the needs of my family rather than seeing them worry about them. I want to show them my generosity. I feel honored when my family comes to me and asks for things, then is thankful when I supply them.

Likewise our Father in heaven is delighted when we come to Him with our every need. We honor Him when we come to Him boldly, cast our cares upon Him, appeal to His generosity, and are grateful when He shows His goodness to us.

If you have never known God as Father through Jesus Christ, you do have much to be anxious about. For if God is not your Father, then Satan is your father, and if that does not change, you will spend eternity in hell with him.

The gospel offer still comes to you. Fly to the throne of grace and plead for forgiveness from God through the blood of His Son, Jesus Christ. Ask for grace to experience what Paul writes in Romans 8:14–15: “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. 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.”

If God has performed a work of grace in your life but you struggle with trusting Him for today and tomorrow, think of what Jesus said in John 17:9, “I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine.” Later, He asks the Father to sanctify His disciples and those who come to the faith through them (vv. 17–20). Those who come to faith are believers in all ages.

If you have an intimate relationship with Christ, take comfort, for the Father's only begotten Son has

pleaded your case in the heavenly court, and the Father will withhold nothing from you. Entrust all of your cares to Him who values you, governs you, feeds and clothes you, knows your every need, commands and promises you, and cares for you every day and through all eternity.

You may now ask, "How should I respond to my Father so that I truly glorify Him?" In closing, let me offer six practical ways to do this:

1. *Trust your Father for every need.* Behave as a child of your heavenly Father by living above slavish fear and the anxieties of this world. Do not be dejected when you lack much of this world's comforts and toys. You will lack no needful thing, and every trial will work for good.

2. *Show childlike reverence, love, and zeal for your Father in everything.* Reflect often on your Father's great glory and majesty. Stand in awe of Him; render Him praise and thanksgiving in all things.

3. *Submit to your Father in every providence.* When He visits you with the rod, do not resist or murmur. Do not immediately respond by saying, "I am so afflicted that God cannot possibly be my Father." Rather, say with gratitude, "My Father is dealing with me again."

4. *Obey and imitate your Father.* Strive to be like Him. Be holy as He is holy; be loving as He is loving. Imitate your Father (Eph. 5:1) to show that you bear the family likeness.

5. *Engage in your Father's work.* Like a true son, do your Father's will and engage in His work. Discipline yourself and channel your energy into profitable use for God's church and kingdom. Turn your anxiety into ministry for your Father's cause. Like Christ, our Elder

Brother, we must be about our Father's business, remembering that the night is coming when no man can work (John 9:4).

6. *Rejoice in your Father's presence.* Delight in communing with Him in private, family, and corporate worship. Above all, long for heaven, where your adoption will be made perfect. As a child of God, wait eagerly for your full inheritance when the triune God will be your all in all.

All glory be to our Father who never fails us by not caring for us. *Soli Deo gloria* to Him who never makes one mistake in His paternal care on our behalf. Amen.

The Glory of the Son's Purchase: The Privilege and Right of Adoption

Dr. Joel R. Beeke and Maarten Kuivenhoven

Ephesians 1:3–6

The Christians of Ephesus to whom Paul wrote lived in a religiously pluralistic environment. The people could choose from a smorgasbord of gods, religions, and occult practices. The worship of Artemis, or Diana, the goddess of fertility and child-bearing, was a major enterprise in Ephesus. The powers of darkness had a firm grip on this city.

Today, millions of people are also falling prey to eclecticism. They are melding various gods to form their own kind of religion. Acts of witchcraft and occultism abound. Many American cities and towns are gripped by the powers of darkness and secularism.

How should Christians function in such a world? When wickedness is pressing in on every side and discouraging us, how do we keep our focus on Jesus Christ? Scripture teaches us to look beyond the circumstances of this life. In Ephesians 1, Paul advises us to focus on the Father's plan of salvation in Jesus Christ and the wonderful blessings we have in Him through His redemptive and adoptive work. To keep this focus, let us specifically look at Ephesians 1:3–6:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual

blessings in heavenly places in Christ: according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.

Under the theme “The Glory of the Son’s Purchase: The Privilege and Right of Adoption,” we will consider the following aspects of adoption: its author, anchor, ambition, advantage, and acclamation.

Ephesians 1:3–14 is a long sentence that praises Trinitarian redemption and the privileges of believers. One of the most important of those privileges is adoption—a privilege that is wonderfully grounded in the electing purposes of God the Father and inextricably tied to the redemptive work of Christ. Paul stresses adoption in these ways because it includes so many of God’s purposes in salvation. Adoption encompasses so many aspects of the true believer’s walk that it actually functions as a dominant metaphor for our salvation.¹ So, let us focus on adoption, particularly as it is laid out for us in these opening verses of Paul’s hymn of praise for the Trinitarian plan of salvation.

Adoption’s Author: God the Father

“Great is Diana of the Ephesians!” was the cry of Ephesus’s citizens when the economic wealth that the

1. Jay T. Collier, “The Prayers of Joint-Heirs,” <http://www.togetherforadoption.org/wp-content/media/prayers-of-joint-heirs-by-jay-t-collier.pdf>. Accessed October 20, 2009. Calvin also equates election with adoption. In his commentary on this verse he writes, “He [Paul] rises to the first cause, to the fountain, — the eternal election of God, by which, ere we are born, (Rom. ix. 11.) we are adopted as sons.” *Commentary on Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 196.

worship of the goddess Diana provided was threatened by the gospel. Luke tells us in Acts 19 that the gospel threatened to undo what Satan and his silversmiths had crafted for Diana worship. In verse 27 Demetrius the silversmith complained about the impact that the gospel was making on Diana worship: "Not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth." It is no wonder that Diana's worshipers hated the gospel and those who preached it.

In Ephesians 1:3, Paul countered the cry of Diana worshipers with his own cry of doxology: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!" The Ephesians worshiped Diana and regarded her as the author of life, but Paul presented the correct perspective of the children of God. We no longer worship the gods of this world; we worship the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. If we are living in union with Christ, then He is also our God and our Father. That is the first privilege and right that Paul mentions in this passage: God the Father is the author of our adoption. Through the Father's Son, we are made sons and daughters of God.

The worship of Diana was of great significance in Ephesus. Historically and religiously, the relationship between Ephesus and Diana was "forged in terms of a divinely directed covenant relationship."² The Ephesians were obligated to serve Diana. The economy, entertainment, and worship of the city centered on this goddess. Christians who lived in the region must have felt great pressure to worship both God and Diana. Paul did not rebuke the believers but encouraged them

2. Clinton E. Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 303.

by reminding them of the blessings they had in Christ. He directed them back to the gospel, to their redemption, and to their adoption as sons and daughters of the Most High God. He reminded them of the wonderful covenant that God had made with them. The covenant with Diana and with the gods and goddesses of this world was a covenant of death, but the covenant of God was a covenant of life and of grace.

Paul referred to the covenant relationship of Christ with His Father by saying, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." God the Father, who is the author of our adoption, has ratified that adoption in this covenant. It is within this covenant relationship that our adoption was ratified. As Son of God, Christ claimed and enjoyed God as His Father. As the Son of man, Christ was subject to God to fulfill His redemptive mission. This covenantal relationship between God the Father and God the Son was forged in eternity to redeem us from sin and break our covenant of death with sin and the world so that we could enter a new covenant of grace and be adopted by God as our Father.³

As Paul considered the great gospel privileges and blessings of this covenant, he could not help but praise God for His grace. First, he praised God for His *electing grace in Christ*. Verse 4 says that God has blessed us "according as he [the Father] hath chosen us in him [Jesus Christ] before the foundation of the world." God's electing grace is the foundation of the gospel. Without election there would be no gospel, no redemption, and no adoption. Out of this covenantal relationship between the Father and the Son flows the electing grace of God the Father towards His children. God has chosen us in Christ and is worthy to be

3. See also Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *God's Ultimate Purpose: An Exposition of Ephesians 1* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 53–56.

praised for His electing grace. Without it, we would not be His children.

Second, Paul praises God the Father because of His *redeeming grace in Christ*. In verse 7, Paul says that we have redemption through Christ's blood "according to the riches of his grace." We who are in Christ enjoy redemption from sin and idol worship. Many people cannot tear themselves away from their narcissistic mirrors of self-idolatry. They have become gods unto themselves. But Paul reminds us here that we do not belong to ourselves. We were bought with a price. Although we live in a culture of idol worship and self-absorption, we have been freed from self to worship the true God because of His redeeming grace in Christ.

Election is the bedrock of redemption, Paul says. God the Father provided the way of suffering and the cross so that Christ might bear our punishment and guilt of sin. In the dark, unknown recesses of eternity, God planned our redemption, and in the fullness of time He brought it to pass. As Galatians 4:4–5 says, "But when the fullness 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." We have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ. God the Father is worthy of worship because He planned and executed this redemption through Christ, which has resulted in our adoption by the Father.

Third, Paul praises God the Father for His *adopting grace in Christ*. In verses 5 and 6, he praises God for "having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved." God not only elected and redeemed us, He has also adopted us as His children. Redemption and adoption are inseparable because, as Walter Elwell and Barry

Beitzel write, “in the Bible, adoption and the blessing of sonship are viewed almost exclusively as benefits of redemption, so that only the ‘saved’ are God’s children. The ungodly are called children of the devil.”⁴ Election and redemption affect our adoption as children of the most High God. Before we were redeemed, we were children of the devil, but God has now made us partakers of His covenant of grace, not only giving us right standing with Him, but also including us in the warm bonds of His Trinitarian love. The Father elected us, the Son redeemed us, and the Spirit indwells us. No wonder, then, that Paul exalts God, first to encourage the Ephesian Christians, and, second, to encourage us as we face a world as bleak and filled with idolatry as Ephesus was. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!”

God is worthy of our praise because Jesus Christ is our Elder Brother, and in Him we have God as our God and Father. The Spirit of adoption dwells in our hearts so that we can run to God and cry, “Abba, Father.” We need not turn to weak and beggarly elements but to the high privilege we have as the children of God. So Thomas Watson says, “We have enough in us to move God to correct us, but nothing to move him to adopt us, therefore exalt free grace, begin the work of angels here; bless him with your praises who hath blessed you in making you his sons and daughters.”⁵

It is a great privilege to hear our children call us “father,” for it conveys dependence, admiration, and love. But the greatest thing of all is to come to our Father in heaven as His children, crying out to Him, “Abba, Father.” When we are hemmed in by evil, as-

4. Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Map on Lining Papers. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 31. Logos edition.

5. Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2000), 240.

saulted by false teachers, or suffering because of our faith, we should cry out with Paul, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!" Like a child who boasts, "My dad is stronger than your dad," we as believers ought to cry out to the world, "Our God is stronger than your gods. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!" People around us might know God minimally as Creator and as Judge, but we who have been elected, redeemed, and adopted know God personally as our Father!

We ought, then, to ask ourselves this very important question: Does a eulogy of praise reign in our life since God is the fountain of our salvation and our adoption?

Adoption's Anchor: Our Election

Paul next praises God the Father for *choosing* us in Christ. Verse 4 says, "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world." Our adoption is anchored in the electing purposes of the Father. God has not loosely arranged our adoption. He has taken great care in adopting us by taking upon Himself the covenant oath and obligation of His people.

Some people think that election is a difficult doctrine to accept, particularly when thinking of sinners who are eternally lost. But Paul finds great comfort in the doctrine, saying our election in Christ is the foundation of our salvation and adoption. Thomas Watson writes, "When men adopt, they have only some deed sealed, and the thing is effected; but when God adopts, it puts him to a far greater expense; it sets his wisdom to work to find out a way to adopt us."⁶ Watson goes on to describe what happens in God's electing grace, "Our adoption was purchased at a dear rate; for when God was about to make us sons and heirs, he could not seal

6. *Ibid.*, 235.

the deed but by the blood of his own Son. Here is the wonder of God's love in adopting us, that he should be at all this expense to accomplish it."⁷ For Watson, the three elements of election, redemption, and adoption are essential to the Christian life, for they are all rooted in Christ.

How does God choose us? Paul has three important things to say here. First, God chooses us "in Christ" (v. 4a). When children play soccer, they choose their best friends or the most skilled for their teammates. God, though, does not work this way. He does not choose us on the basis of any ability in us to believe or to be friends with Him. Rather, we are so vile and wretched that there is nothing in us that should move God to choose us. Every reason that God chooses us is found in Himself. As verse 5 says, He chooses us "according to the good pleasure of his will." God has reasons for choosing us that we will never know. What we can know is that God has chosen us in Christ, reconciled us to Himself in Christ, and adopted us in Christ. Our election is realized in a living faith union with Christ. Outside of Christ there is no comforting election. Because God has elected us, He has sent His Son to purchase us and to unite us to Himself by faith.

Second, God chose us from "before the foundation of the world" (v. 4a), Paul says. While we were yet unknown, God already knew us. He knew that there was no good thing in us, yet He chose us. Before we existed, God was already at work, electing us and laying the foundation of our redemption and our adoption. Can you think of any more powerful comfort than to know that there was never a time that God did not intimately know us? We live in a world of shallow friendships, but God delights in deep and profound relationships with His people—relationships that are rooted in eternity!

7. Ibid.

When you talk to people about their friends and ask, "How long have you known them," they may respond, "For a long time." But God says to us, "I've known you forever. There was not a moment that you were out of my sight or out of my mind. I have been in relationship with you from eternity as your electing Father, redeeming Son, and sanctifying Holy Spirit."

Third, God has "predestinated us unto the adoption of children," Paul says (v. 5a). These words destroy any notion we might have of election being a cold, calculating choice made by an arbitrary God. Instead, it is a great wonder that God chooses any one of us rebellious children to be His children. Our adoption is certified because we have been chosen by God. The word here for adoption means "to formally and legally declare that someone who is not one's own child is henceforth to be treated and cared for as one's own child, including complete rights of inheritance."⁸ We who were once alienated from God have now been predestined to be adopted as His children.

In *Sermons on Ephesians*, John Calvin explains the assurance of this adoption when he says, "When he [Paul] says that God has predestinated us by adoption, it is to show that if we be God's children it is not through nature but through his pure grace.... For we have no such status by birth or inheritance, neither does it come of flesh and blood."⁹ We are assured that by the grace of God in Jesus Christ we are adopted into the family of God. Therefore, "they whom he calls to salvation ought not to seek the cause of it anywhere else than in this gratuitous adoption."¹⁰ Calvin goes on to say:

8. Johannes E. Louw and Eugene Nida, eds, *Greek-English Lexicon of the NT Based on Semantic Domains*, 2nd ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1988-89), 35.53, BibleWorks 7.0.

9. John Calvin, *John Calvin's Sermons on Ephesians*, trans. Arthur Golding (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1973), 39.

10. *Ibid.*, 43.

Whosoever then believes is thereby assured that God has worked in him, and faith is, as it were, the duplicate copy that God gives us of the original of our adoption.... It follows then that if we have faith, we are also adopted. For why does God give us faith? Even because he elected us before the creation of the world. This therefore is an infallible order, that insofar as the faithful receive God's grace and embrace his mercy, holding Jesus Christ as their Head, to obtain salvation in this way, they know assuredly that God has adopted them.¹¹

Election is like a rearview mirror in which you see the steps God took in electing you. When you look back at the Holy Spirit calling you from darkness to light, it confirms that God has chosen you. When you look back at how you were justified by faith in the righteousness of Jesus Christ, it confirms your election. As we, by God's grace, grow in holiness and purity before God, we are assured that we are the elect of God. As 1 John repeatedly tells us, when we possess Christ in His Word, desire Him for His own sake, know Him in our souls, yearn for Him in our walk of life, and love those who love Him, we know that we are God's elect and have passed from death to life. Ultimately, then, Christ assures us of election. As Calvin writes, "Christ, then, is the mirror wherein we must, and without self-deception may, contemplate our own election."¹²

In Christ, election is our friend, not our enemy. Election produces humility, not pride; encouragement, not depression; confidence, not fear; assurance, not presumption. Election fills us with joy and praise because it glorifies God and His grace from beginning to end. It moves us to confess with Charles Spurgeon, "I believe

11. *Ibid.*, 47.

12. Cf. Fred Klooster, *Calvin's Doctrine of Predestination* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1961), 29ff.

the doctrine of election, because I am quite sure that if God had not chosen me I would never have chosen Him; and I am sure He chose me before I was born, or else He never would have chosen me afterward.”¹³ Or as Sinclair Ferguson says, “Until we have come to the place where we can sing about election with a full heart, we have not grasped the spirit of the New Testament teaching.”¹⁴

Adoption's Ambition: Our Holiness

Holiness is the grand ambition of election. Verse 4 says that we were chosen from eternity “that we should be holy and without blame [or blemish] before him [God] in love.” When God pursued us in His love, we were ugly and deformed by sin. Realizing that makes the doctrine of election and adoption even more precious because few people would choose terribly deformed orphans to redeem and make them part of their family. But the infinitely perfect and holy God does just that with terribly deformed sinners! God has chosen not only to redeem us but also to restore us in the image of His Son. He has chosen us to be holy and blameless before Him in love.

Many translators stumble over this phrase *in love*. Some keep the phrase with verse 4, explaining that the pathway to holiness is through love.¹⁵ Others put it with verse 5, explaining that God has predestined us to the adoption of sons *in love*.¹⁶ This phrase can go

13. C. H. Spurgeon *Autobiography, Vol. 1: The Early Years, 1834–1859* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1962), 166.

14. Quoted in John Blanchard, *The Complete Gathered Gold* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2006), 163.

15. John Piper, “God Predestined Us Unto Sonship Through Jesus Christ,” http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByDate/1992/792_God_Predestined_Us_Unto_Sonship_Through_Jesus_Christ/ accessed October 15, 2009.

16. Most newer translations read this phrase with verse 5. The AV reads it with verse 4. Most commentators argue theologically for

either way. If we unite it with verse 4, it confirms that we are elect if we are fulfilling the purpose for which God has predestined us. The apostle John speaks of that in 1 John 3:10–16, where he says the basic mark of God’s children is that they love one another. Their love reflects that of their heavenly Father, who has loved them from all eternity. This truth is confirmed in Galatians 5:22–23, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.” The first fruit of the Spirit is love, and out of this Spirit-worked love flow all other fruits. We are predestined to produce those fruits of the Spirit, and as we demonstrate those fruits with God’s help, we can be assured of our election and salvation.

We have also been predestined to holiness, Paul says in verse 4. Holiness is not just a state or a duty but chiefly a privilege to which we have been called by God. Holiness is what distinguished Israel from the nations surrounding her, for she was to be set apart. God told the Israelites, “And ye shall be holy unto me: for I the LORD am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine” (Lev. 20:26). Holiness was God’s design for Israel, and it is His design for us today. We have been chosen to mirror the image of God. We have been predestined to be made holy and blameless like our God. What a great and solemn purpose we have been predestined to! Are you living out this privilege? When God elects us and adopts us into His family, we are chosen to the privilege of holiness exercised in love.

Paul here refutes the greatest objection Arminians

the phrase to go with verse 5, but the argument can be made just as strongly in both cases. Both readings are consistent with how Paul uses the phrase elsewhere. See A.T. Lincoln, *Ephesians: Word Biblical Commentary* (Waco, TX: Word, 1990), 17. Lincoln treats both positions but argues for the AV reading based on grammar and syntax.

have to the doctrine of election. "If election is true, people can live as they please, without striving after holiness," Arminians say. But Paul says just the opposite. The very purpose of election is to make us holy (cf. 1 Pet. 1:2). God's election does not destroy moral effort; rather, as Spurgeon notes, "God's choice makes chosen men choice men."¹⁷

You may ask how you can be predestinated to holiness and blamelessness when you struggle with sin in yourself. Paul says in Romans 7 that he had the same internal struggle between the old man, his flesh, and the new man. All believers deal with that struggle. Yet, our struggle does not negate our being predestinated to holiness because this holiness does not depend on us. Notice how Christ-centered Paul is here. He brings everything back to Christ, who controls the entire Christian life. We have been chosen in Christ, which means that our holiness and blamelessness rest in Him and His righteousness. He has bought us with His precious blood, and He will see our sanctification through to the end. His Spirit of adoption dwells in us as children of God; and by grace, the Spirit intercedes for us and sanctifies us unto holiness.

We live with tension—a "now, not yet" tension—as the children of God with regard to this holiness. As adopted children of God we enjoy holiness in this life, but we also battle ferociously with sin. We experience a measure of progressive holiness in our hearts and lives when we gain the victory over sin through faith in Christ and His obedience, but we also anticipate the day when we will be completely holy, without spot and blemish before God. That will be a great day because God's eternal blessing will then be pronounced on us for the sake of Christ's work in us. We live with ten-

17. Quoted in John Blanchard, *The Complete Gathered Gold*, 164.

sion now because we do not know what we will one day be like. So, Scripture tells us that our mortality shall put on immortality and our corruption, incorruptibility (1 Cor. 15:53ff.). When we finally behold Christ face to face, our adoption will be perfected forever. God's work in us will be consummated.

Adoption's Advantage: Spiritual Blessings

If we have been adopted by God, the Father blesses us with all spiritual blessings in Christ. Union with Christ makes us partakers of a vast spiritual treasury in heavenly places. From the moment of our union with Christ by faith, we were given those blessings to enjoy. In verse 3, Paul tells us that God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing *in Christ*. The verb is in the past tense, showing that these blessings are not only in the future, but have already been given. Outside of Christ there are no blessings, only misery, shame, guilt, and a future of everlasting punishment. These blessings include what Paul is speaking about here and so much more! While they are heavenly blessings, we enjoy them here on earth as the children of God. We enjoy them in Christ, for He is the source of all these blessings. They come to us in Christ our Elder Brother. Hugh Martin summarizes these blessings in this way:

How rich and glorious, then, is Christ, considered as the treasure-house of all spiritual blessings. In him we find laid up for us election, adoption, acceptance, redemption, inheritance, the Spirit's unction, seal and earnest. He is the Elect, the Son, the Beloved, the Redeemer, the Heir, the Anointed and Sealed of the Spirit.... We are elect in Christ the Elect One, sons in Christ the Son, accepted in the Beloved, redeemed in the Redeemer, heirs in the Elder Brother, anointed and sealed in Christ.¹⁸

18. Hugh Martin, *Christ for Us* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of

When we are in Christ, no blessing is withheld from us.

Apart from union with Christ in His death and resurrection, we would not enjoy any of these blessings. Christ's redemptive work alone has made us fit to receive them, because prior to the Spirit's regenerating work we were not worthy of them. The reality of our unworthiness is what the prodigal son realized when he said, "I am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants." Nevertheless, the father accepted him as his son, saying, "For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found" (Luke 15:24). His response to his son is how God deals with us in Christ. Not only does He view us from eternity as His sons in Christ, but He also assures us of this fact when He brings us to our senses and applies the redemption of Christ to our hearts. When God speaks this assuring word, we essentially hear Him say, "This my *son*, this my *daughter*, was dead, and is alive again." Because of Christ, we are not servants but children of God. Out of God's sheer grace to us in Christ, we receive the right not only to be His sons and daughters but also to enjoy the vast treasury of privileges that it provides.

Unfortunately, we often live as though we had no privileges and blessings as the sons and daughters of God. Sinclair Ferguson illustrates how we ought to be living according to the blessings we have received in Christ:

When I was a boy in Scotland, I occasionally read puzzling notices in the local newspaper, such as: "Will Angus MacDonald please contact McKay, Campbell, and Ross (Solicitors) at 10 Bannockburn Street, where he will learn something

Truth, 1974), 216, 219. Quoted in Richard D. Phillips, *Chosen in Christ: The Glory of Grace in Ephesians 1* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2004), 39.

to his advantage?” Angus, whoever he was, was a beneficiary of someone’s will, and he did not yet know it. Angus had suddenly become a rich man. But what if Angus did not see and respond to this notice? His poverty would continue. If Angus did not pursue his claim to his inheritance, he would not taste its riches. Do not make that mistake! If you are a Christian, then you are rich in Christ; enjoy and share your riches.¹⁹

Do you claim your privileges in Christ? Are you enjoying what was given to you by the Father through the Son’s redemption?

Adoption’s Acclamation: Amazing Grace

Finally, let us look at adoption’s acclamation. Paul highlights this acclamation in verse 6, “To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.” These words tell us that adoption is not first and foremost for our benefit, although great benefits accrue to us. The significance of our adoption is to acclaim the grace of God.

As parents, we pour our lives into our children. We influence them each day with our thoughts, our teaching, and our examples of character and godliness. The same is true of a child of God. We have been chosen to be adopted as God’s children to reflect the image of the Father in righteousness and holiness. We have been chosen to acclaim the grace of God who has impacted our lives for good. It is by the grace of God that we are what we are. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:10, “But by the grace of God I am what I am.” He attributes his apostleship, his character, and his adoption to the grace of God. The glory of the Son’s purchase is that we have been adopted to magnify the grace of God. We

19. Sinclair Ferguson, *In Christ Alone: Living the Gospel-Centered Life* (Lake Mary, FL: Reformation Trust, 2007), 123.

have been included in the family of God because of His grace. We have been blessed in the Beloved because of the grace of the Father.

The grace of God puts our adoption in perspective. We were once orphaned through sin, walking in the smoking wreckage that we had made of our lives. Why would God want to adopt sinners like us? Paul gives the answer, "To the praise of the glory of His grace." This is the glorious acclamation of our adoption: to magnify the grace of God in our lives.

Grace changes us completely. We were once fatherless orphans alienated from God, but now we are the sons of God. We were once full of the filth and smut of this world, but now we have been washed clean in the blood of Christ. We did not seek after God before, but now our hearts pant after Him, longing for communion with the One who loved us from before the foundation of the world. Before grace, we tried to renovate ourselves. We tried to gloss over the glaring sins of our lives. But now we wholly submit to God's indictment of us as sinners, and we rest in the finished work of Jesus Christ. Before grace, we were powerless to do anything to reverse our condition, but now God has given us the power to become the children of God. In doing so, He has entirely changed our prospects (John 1:12). Before grace, we attempted to reduce feelings of guilt and shame because of our sin, but now through the redemptive work of Christ, God has done away with all that pollution. Before grace, we worshiped ourselves and other gods, but now we worship the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Grace has turned us from cursing God to worshiping Him. By grace we live as the children of God.

Paul goes on to say that God has "made us *accepted* in the Beloved." As Spurgeon has pointed out, we are accepted as believers in Christ's person, Christ's heart, Christ's book, Christ's loins, and Christ hands. For

Christ's sake, we are accepted in our persons, in our prayers, in our participation in God's kingdom through using our gifts, and in our praises. What wonderful content is contained in this short phrase, "accepted in the Beloved"!

Literally, this phrase could also read, "Wherein he has *blessed* us in the Beloved." Again Paul links adopting grace to the Beloved Son, echoing the Father's approbation of Christ our Elder Brother in Matthew 3:17: "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." Christ is the ultimate object of the Father's affections and good pleasure. Through Him and in Him we are adopted, which is the essence of grace. The Beloved Son has blessed us richly, redeeming us from destruction and transforming us into His image. He has sent His Spirit of adoption into our hearts to enable us to cry, "Abba, Father." This magnifies His grace and causes us to praise it. The apostle thus makes a full circle of praise. He opens in verse 3 by blessing the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He ends this circle of praise in verse 6, "To the praise of the glory of his grace." The entire spectrum of God's redemptive work commands our amazement, our acclamation, and our praise.

We owe everything to God's amazing grace. From election to glorification, grace reigns and triumphs. John 1:16 says we receive "grace for grace," which literally means "grace facing or laminated to grace." Grace follows grace in our lives as waves follow one another to the shore. Grace is the divine principle by which God saves us; it is the divine provision in the person and work of Christ; it is the divine prerogative manifesting itself in election and adoption; and it is the divine power that enables us to freely embrace Christ so that we might live, suffer, and even die for His sake and be preserved in our Elder Brother for eternity.

Are you praising the glory of God's grace? When visiting an elderly friend in a nursing home some time

ago, I noticed that she had nothing on her walls except a small index card, upon which she had typed:

God's
Riches
At
Christ's
Expense

“That means everything to me because I live only by grace,” she said.

Is that true of us as well? Do we consider it a wonder to be the sons and daughters of God (1 John 3:1)? Oh, what a privilege it is to be children of God through the great redemption price paid by Jesus Christ! Truly, the glory of the Son's purchase of us culminates in the privilege and right of adoption for all eternity! How blessed we are to be on our way to heaven where we, together with millions of other elected and adopted brothers and sisters, will share in a concert of praise to our Redeemer and in communication with each other! In that eternal family, heaven will teem with wonderful relationships, first with Christ and the triune God, but also with our spiritually adopted siblings and the holy angels.

Are you living with the consciousness of your inestimable privilege of being a son or daughter of God? Is that realization compelling you to worship and live to God alone for His great plan of salvation?

Or, do you lack all the blessings of adoption because you are still children of the devil? You need not live that way any longer. The Father in heaven is willing to adopt you into His glorious family. He has no pleasure in your death but calls you to repent and believe the gospel. Will you hear His voice and enter into the riches of His adopted family, or will you persist in following your self-destructive path into the homelessness of hell? There you will have no faithful Father,

no faithful Elder Brother, and no faithful brothers and sisters to love you.

Flee, then, today, to the Redeemer. Allow yourself no rest until you know the privilege and right of God's adopted children through the glory of the Son.