

The Ephesians Series
SOVEREIGN SELECTION (Part 5)
Ephesians 1:3-14
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It's amazing how fads come and go. I was thinking about that this week, because with each new year, it seems, some new catch phrase, some popular approach to life and business seems to arrive. Currently, we are in a time period when there is a very popular expression. You've probably heard it in business. You've heard it perhaps at school in various contexts. It's the expression, "be intentional." Whatever you're doing, do it on purpose, and do it with specific goals in mind. While most of the fads that come and go, and most of the advice that we receive about life here in the world is not worth holding on to, I think this actually is. Because I think the idea of being intentional is really a reflection of the residual image of God in man. You see, God is intentional. Everything that He does has a purpose. This morning we'll discover that that's no different when it comes to the doctrine of election. God chose us with very specific purposes in mind. God had a plan, and there were distinct purposes behind that sovereign plan. Over the last four weeks we have been studying together from Ephesians chapter 1. We've studied several features of divine election.

I invite you turn again to Ephesians 1 as we continue our study here. Let me remind you of what we've already uncovered together, several features of divine election. The first feature that we saw comes from verse 4. Election is sovereign. He chose. Secondly we saw that election is individual. He chose us. Third, election is in Christ. He chose us in Him. The fourth feature that we saw of the doctrine of election is that election is unconditional. That is, it is not conditioned on anything God saw in us, or anything that we did. It is unconditional. And here Paul puts it like this, "He chose us before the foundation of the world." In Romans 9 he uses a similar expression and defines it by saying, "Before we had done anything good or evil." His choice was in eternity past, to indicate that it was not based on us at all, but simply based on His own sovereign pleasure.

Now, there's one more feature of election to unpack from this passage, and I want us to examine it today. The fifth feature of election that Paul lays out for us here in Ephesians 1 is that election is intentional. Look at verses 4 through 6 again.

He chose us. . .that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

As we have studied the doctrine of election together it raises a number of questions, and we tried

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to answer many of those questions.

But one of the obvious questions that arises out of a study of this great doctrine is the question, why me? Or to broaden it a little bit, why us? Well, from the middle of verse 4 down through verse 6, Paul tells us why. Notice that buried in the middle of verse 4 is one of those key words in the New Testament. It's translated here as "that." He chose us that. Or we could translate it "in order that." What follows that little word is the purpose, the intention, the goal, of God's choice. While there's nothing in us that made Him choose us, there were very specific purposes, very specific goals, that God had in mind in choosing us. Last week, we learned one of those goals, you remember, from 1 Corinthians chapter 1. God had the goal of choosing us, the weak and the ignoble and the base, so that none of us could boast in His presence, but rather so that our boast would be in Him and Him alone.

But here in Ephesians 1, Paul gives us three additional purposes or intentions that lie behind God's sovereign election. The first purpose that Paul mentions here in Ephesians 1, of our election, is personal holiness. Look at it again. "He chose us that [or in order that] we would be holy and blameless before Him." Now, if you're familiar with the New Testament at all, you immediately recognize that this is a central tenet of the New Testament. God chose and saved people in order to make them holy. Turn over to Ephesians 2:10. Paul puts it like this. He says, "For we are His workmanship." We're His masterpiece, "created in Christ Jesus for good works," or unto good works. And those good works, "God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." Before God saved you--in fact, before God created the world--He determined that you would walk in good works. Not in order to be saved, but as an evidence of and a reflection of the salvation that was already present in your life. In Ephesians 5:27, in using the analogy of Christ as the groom and the church as the bride, we're told that Christ wanted to present to Himself the church--that's us--in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she would be holy, and blameless. In Colossians 1:22 Paul makes the same point. He says that although we were formerly alienated from God, hostile to God, engaged in evil deeds, "He has now reconciled us in His fleshly body through death, in order [here's another purpose] to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach." In 1 Thessalonians 4:7 Paul puts it differently. He says, "For God has not called us"--you'll remember, several weeks ago we talked about what that means. In this case, we're talking not about that general call of the gospel. We're talking about the effectual call when God actually draws us to Himself at the moment of salvation. And He says here, "God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification." To be holy, to be sanctified, to be set apart. In Titus 2:14 Paul writes that Jesus "gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, [people who would be] zealous for good deeds." This is the reason God chose us. You see you, if you're in Christ, you were chosen by God in spite of who you are. But when He chose you, He had a very specific goal in mind. In the words of Ephesians 1, He wanted you to be holy and blameless.

Now these two words, holy and blameless, appear together three times in the New Testament. Here in Ephesians 1, in Ephesians 5:27 that I read for you a moment ago about the church as a whole, and then in Colossians 1:22--the verse we also read together. But what exactly do these words mean--holy and blameless? Well, let's take each of them individually, and then I think we'll have a better picture for what the apostle Paul was communicating here. Take the word

holy. Holy simply means to be set apart, to be distinct, to be different. The family of words probably comes from a Hebrew word that means to cut or to separate. In its ceremonial sense, the word holy was used in the Old Testament to describe those things that were set apart from mundane everyday use for special use. They were set apart for special use. So, in the Old Testament, holy is used to describe people. Angels are holy, priests are holy, prophets are holy. It's also used of places. Mount Sinai is called holy. The land of Israel is called holy. It's even used of objects. The tabernacle is called holy, the altar holy, the sacrifices holy; even the temple is called holy. Now if you're a thinking person, that should give you pause for a moment. Because a temple, for example, doesn't have any morality. And so how can it be called holy? Well, a temple--back to our definition--a temple is holy because it's different. Because it is set apart from other buildings for a special use. Priests are holy because they are different from other men. They have been set apart by God for a special use. The animals to be sacrificed are holy because they have been set apart. They are different from other animals. God is holy because He is utterly different from us. As Leviticus says, the Lord our God is holy. There is none like Him. That is a definition of God's holiness. He is utterly different. And as Christians, you and I are to be different as well.

Turn to 1 Peter 1. Peter makes this point clearly in chapter 1 of his first letter, verse 14. He says "As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former [cravings] which were yours in your ignorance." Don't live like you used to live, "but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, YOU SHALL BE HOLY FOR I AM HOLY." We are to be set apart and different because God is set apart and different. Now Christians often misunderstand this command. And I think in our church and in our day, we can get this command wrong in two different ways. There are some Christians who hear this command to be different, to be set apart, to be different from the world, to be holy; and they rebel against it. They just don't want to be different from the world. In fact, they do everything they can to be just like their peers. They'll spend large amounts of time and money to be exactly like the people around them.

There are some Christians, or some who claim to be Christians, that if you wanted to convict them of being Christians in a court of law, you couldn't come up with enough evidence to convict them. Because they're just like everybody around them. That's one problem. But then on the other hand, there are Christians who miss this command at the other extreme. They think that when God says we're to be different, that the differences have to do with externals. Things like how we dress or what music we listen to. They really believe that those things are what God means when He tells us to be different from the world. Now understand that if you're a Christian, you ought to dress modestly. The Bible commands you to dress modestly. And if you're a Christian, you shouldn't listen to music with lyrics that glorify things that are contrary to God's commands. That's clear. But if that's all you think that being holy is, then you have missed it altogether. God wants us to be different. Different in this sense. That we reflect His values and His priorities and His thoughts and His attitudes and His actions.

Now, of course, this word holy includes the idea of moral purity. That's how we normally think of it, but there is so much more to it than that. We are to be distinct. We're to be different from the world. You want to see what the difference looks like in real life. Notice the contrast that's found in Galatians 5. Turn there with me for a moment. In Galatians 5:19 Paul draws a picture

of what the world around us looks like. Here is the culture in which we live. This is where unregenerate man lives out his days. Verse 19, "Now the deeds of the flesh are evident,"--this is how unregenerate people are and how they live--"immorality"--this Greek word comes from the word, or rather we get the word pornography from it. It's the word *porniah*. It means sexual involvement outside the boundary of marriage, of all kinds. "Impurity"--this has more to do with the mind, what goes on between the ears. "Sensuality"--this is a life given over to the indulgence of the senses "Idolatry, sorcery"--the word is *pharmakeia*, it's the Greek word from which we get the word pharmacy. It has to do with mind-altering drugs. In the ancient world they were usually taken for specific purposes, that is, to enhance your worship of pagan gods or in magic, and so that's why it's translated here as sorcery, but it has to do with the use of mind-altering drugs.

The next few words have to do with conflicts. Conflicts either between individuals or conflicts between groups. "Enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions [verse 21] envying, drunkenness, carousing"--that word we could think of as partying, those who give themselves over to the indulgence of whatever they want, "and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." So Paul says, listen, this isn't a complete list, but this just gives you an idea of the kinds of things people of the world do. This is how they think, this is how they act, but I want you to be different.

Verse 22, "But the fruit of the spirit"--that is, the fruit the Spirit produces by His presence in our lives, "is love"--genuine concern for others. Selfless, sacrificing desires to meet the needs of other people, in spite of who they are or what return they make. "Joy"--a deep-seated sense of rejoicing in who God is regardless of our outward circumstances. "Peace"--that's speaking of an inner sense of calm. The wicked are never at rest, Isaiah says. They're like the churning of the sea, but the godly are at peace in their hearts. "Patience"--with other people. "Kindness"--that is tenderness with others. "Goodness"--moral virtue. "Faithfulness"--that's loyalty, trustworthiness. "Gentleness, and self-control"--that is the restraining of the appetites of the body and the mind. "Against such things there is no law." Listen, that's a contrast. That's what Paul is talking about when he says we're to be holy. Look at that list in verse 22 and 23 again. You tell me. Who expressed those qualities par excellence? Jesus Christ. Our Lord. So when we demonstrate those qualities we are like Him and we stand out like He did as different.

And don't you think for a moment that unbelievers don't notice the contrast. They absolutely do. I saw this happen. I've seen it on a number of occasions in various contexts, but I saw this happen when Sheila's mom was dying of leukemia. She was in the hospital, placed in a room for reverse isolation because she couldn't be exposed to the germs that were in the hospital. And so she was placed in this room, a private room alone for several weeks. I'm sure the hospital staff loved it, but the family got the bright idea of--she's going to be there for several weeks--let's make it home. And so I borrowed a friend's pickup and we moved her in. Literally, we moved her in. Mom's favorite lounge chair, a lap desk, a floor lamp, a stereo with a remote with her selection of favorite CDs. There were plants, and of course the most important thing to the family I married into, daily desserts. You know, it was really fascinating to me to watch over the weeks that we were there; the hospital staff was attracted to her room. Not to the room itself. They were attracted to my mother-in-law, and to my father-in-law, and to our entire extended family. The nurses, and on occasion even the doctors, would take their breaks in her room with

us. We had a great time together. It became a resort of sorts for the hospital staff. You see, the genuine love and joy that the Spirit was producing in our hearts made us different. We stood out from all the complainers down the hall. Several years later Sheila ran into one of her mom's nurses, and the nurse still remembered her mom's unusual Southern name, Minnie Catherine, and called her by that, and then she told Sheila--she said your mother was the most spiritual woman I've ever known. She stood out, different. Not because of the clothes she wore. She wore the same gown everybody else was in. But because of the qualities the Spirit produced in her life. Many of you have experienced exactly the same thing as people have observed you and your family in the midst of daily life, or perhaps in the midst of trial. And all of us are to strive to be like that. We are to strive to be different. That's what holy means. Set apart, different than everybody else, and different like this--different in resembling in our characters--Jesus Christ. And God will eventually make us different because that was His plan when he chose us.

Now back in Ephesians 1, to further clarify what he means by this, Paul adds the word "blameless." This word was used most often in the Old Testament to describe an animal that met the standards for sacrifice. There were no obvious physical blemishes. So the word blameless came to refer not only to physical blemishes, but the absence especially of moral or ethical blemishes. It's like what we read in Ephesians 5 of the church as a bride being presented with no spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but holy and blameless. So understand what Paul is saying here. God elected us to be holy and blameless. By the way, here Paul is answering the objection that election leads to sin. Some people think if you teach people about election, it's going to lead them to loose living. God chose you so go live however you want. That isn't it at all. God chose you to be holy and blameless. One commentator says careless living is inconsistent with the scriptural doctrine of election. By the way, this also underscores that election springs solely from God's grace, because if God chose us in order to make us holy and blameless that means, when He chose us, we were unholy and worthy of blame. Now, Paul adds an interesting little qualifier right at the end of verse 4. He says, "holy and blameless before Him." In other places Paul teaches that day after day we should be growing in holiness. But here, in this passage, he has a very specific occasion in mind. He's talking about the day when we stand before God. God's goal is that on the day we stand before Him, we will be holy and blameless. It's like what Jesus' half brother Jude writes in Jude 24, "Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy." That's what Paul is saying. Paul is saying this was God's intention, that on that day when you stand before Him in His presence, you would be holy and blameless.

Now the question arises in my mind, why is this a goal of God's? Well, that's answered for us back in Romans 8. Turn back to Romans 8 for a moment. Why is holy and blameless such an important goal for God in our election? Romans 8:29 puts it like this. We've looked at this text before, so we won't work our way through it today. Let me just call a couple of things to your attention. "For those whom [God] foreknew [that is a synonym really for election--those whom God determined to have a relationship with--those whom He set His love upon] He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son." God wants us to be holy and blameless because He wants us to be like Christ. That's the purpose for which He chose us in eternity past. But why does He want us to be like Christ? Well, look at the next phrase. He "predestined us to be conformed to the image of His Son, so that [here's our little word again, here's the reason He predestined us to be like Christ, so that] Christ would become the first-born

among many brethren." Now, that's not a phrase that's common to us, but let me put it in the vernacular. Paul is saying God's design in redemption, in your salvation, was--and in my salvation, in all of the salvation of those who were His own--His goal was to create a redeemed humanity over whom Christ would reign and be pre-eminent. He would be the one in first place, the first born, the eldest son. And so, what Paul is saying here, is that God chose you to create a redeemed humanity, to make you holy and blameless, standing before God; that you would be like Jesus Christ in your moral character, and in that way, Christ would be exalted and glorified. This was one of God's great priorities in choosing you. Let me just ask you a question. To what extent does the priority "holy and blameless" show up on your radar? To what extent in your weekly decisions does the priority of becoming different in love and joy and peace and all of those expressions that we read from Galatians 5--how important are those to you? Do you strive to be like Jesus Christ on a daily basis, on a weekly basis? Is it your ambition? It ought to be, because it's why God chose you to begin with.

Well, there's a second purpose identified in Ephesians 1 that lies behind God's choice of us. Not only personal holiness, but secondly, legal adoption. Look at verse 5. "In love, He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will." Now depending on the translation you have, the words "in love" at the end of verse 4 may be attached to verse 4 or they may be attached to verse 5. They could legitimately have either done. There are good arguments for both views. After examining the evidence again this week I have to agree with the NAS translators and connect it to verse 5. "In love, He predestined us to adoption."

Now before we look at our adoption, let me step back a moment and remind you of where we are. I don't want you to get lost in the forest for the trees, and not be able to see the whole picture. Ephesians 1:3-14 is one long complicated Greek sentence. It's divided or marked into sections by the recurring refrain "to the praise of His glory." And we've studied this in the past, but I'm just reminding you now. That means that verses 4 through 6 stand together as one unit. And verses 4 through 6 describe God the Father's primary role in your salvation. And in the Greek text the main idea, the core idea, of verses 4 to 6 is found at the beginning of verse 4, "He chose." That means everything relates back to that verb. That means everything in verses 4 through 6 goes back to election. Now, with that in mind, let me translate verse 5 for you literally, as it stands in the Greek text. Go back and pick up the main verb of verse 4, He chose us in love, having predestined us to adoption through Jesus Christ to Him according to the good pleasure of His will. Let me simplify it. He chose us, having predestined us to adoption. Now, the Greek word "predestine," or predestinated, another form of it, is one of those words, that when you say it, you better duck or pucker; because you're either going to be hit or you're going to be kissed. It's just one of those emotionally volatile words. But the word itself is not a very difficult word to understand. It literally means, "to decide before." It means our destiny was decided before. You see the word destiny in predestined? And pre--meaning before. To decide one's destiny before. Before we came to Christ, before we were born, before even the foundation of the world, our destiny was determined. All of those whom God chose, verse 4, were also predestined, verse 5. Their destiny was determined before. And what was their pre-determined destiny? Look at verse 5, predestined to adoption as sons. Here is another great reason for God's choice. Not only personal holiness, but also legal adoption. God chose us to adopt.

Now scripture teaches us that Christ, of course, is God's unique Son, His one and only Son, His *monogenes*, His only begotten Son, His Son by nature. But one of the purposes that God had in choosing us was to make us sons and daughters, not by nature--we could never be that--but by adoption. Now this is a New Testament concept. There are a few passages that picture Israel's relationship to God as sons, but the Jewish culture had no adoption like Paul is talking about here. In fact, there are only four adoptions recorded in the Old Testament, and all of those happened outside of Israel. So Paul here borrows this image from the Roman culture. You remember that Paul was a Roman citizen. He was born into Roman citizenship. He understood Roman culture, and so did the people to whom he ministered and wrote. And so he uses an illustration borrowed from their culture. Now to fully understand the illustration he uses, we have to sort of go back in time and understand a little bit about Roman law and culture. So let me give you just a brief lesson in Roman law and culture concerning this issue. In Rome, in the Roman Empire, the father had absolute power over everyone in the family. He could even take the life of a family member and it not necessarily be considered murder. He also had full ownership of everything. He could sell anything that the family owned without question. And those rights were passed down to sons. So adoption was sometimes practiced in order to continue that role of power, to continue the family line, and to maintain the property ownership within the family.

Under Roman law the process of adoption involved two steps. The first step in adopting was to release the son from his natural father. The procedure for this was a bit strange in our way of thinking. The way this was accomplished, the way that a son was released from his natural father, is that the natural father would sell the son as a slave to the adoptive father. And he wouldn't just do this one time. He would do it three separate times. The first two times, the father who wanted to adopt the boy would release him, and he would automatically come under the authority of his natural father again. But the third time that it happened, the third time that the adoptive father bought him as a slave from the natural father, the son was permanently free, was considered permanently free of his natural father. That's the first step. That brings us to the second step.

Once the boy was free from his natural father, then the adopter was in a position to legally become the father of that person, with the same absolute control of the natural father. And he retained that control until either he died, the boy died, or he freed him from that obligation. And the adopted son would become a son in every sense that a natural son would be. There was absolutely no difference in Roman law between a son born into a family, and one who was adopted. I think the most graphic illustration of that comes to us by way of a man named Octavius. Octavius was adopted. He was adopted by Julius Caesar. At Julius Caesar's death, Octavius, an adopted son, became the next Emperor of the Roman Empire, and was fully acknowledged and recognized to be the qualified one to follow Julius Caesar, even though he was adopted. We know him in history as Caesar Augustus. So Paul uses this cultural custom to describe for us a great spiritual reality.

Christian, just think about this for a moment. God, the creator of the universe, the sovereign Lord, the almighty eternal One, has legally adopted you. Now I don't know about you, but when I hear that, I am very tempted to think that that statement ought to be followed by some legalese. You know, the kind like you hear after car commercials, or pharmaceutical commercials. Yes,

God adopted us, but the adopted father makes no guarantees explicit or implied, and said adoption may be rescinded at the discretion of the adoptive parent for reasons including but not limited to. . . you get the idea. Let me tell you that there are no caveats. There is no fine print. When God saved you, He did something between you and Him that He thought could best be described as adoption. Let that sink deep down into your souls.

Now some of you have a head start on this concept because perhaps you were adopted by human parents. Or perhaps, and I know this is true of some in our church, you have adopted children of your own. If you've experienced either of those, then you understand this in a way the rest of us don't. But here's the bottom line. If you are a Christian, then God truly thinks of you as His adopted child. This means that we have a new Father. In John 8:44, Jesus said we used to have a father--it was the devil. And the works of our father we did. But now we have a new Father. And with our Father, with this new Father, comes all the privileges that come with that Father. He has compassion on us. Psalm 103:13, "Just as a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him." He takes care of us. Matthew 6:32, "Your heavenly Father knows what you need." He gives good things to us. Matthew 7:11, "If you, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven, give what is good to those who ask Him?" And He truly, genuinely loves you. First John 3:1 says, "See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us that we should be called [what?] the children of God." He loves you. He loves you with an unfailing love, with a perfect love, a love that can never change. It means that when we find ourselves in trouble we can call out to Him. Turn to Romans 8. In Romans 8 Paul talks a lot about this adoption that we have. He says in verse 14, "For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God." If you have the Spirit, then you are sons of God. And you've not received a spirit of slavery that leads to fear again. You're not a slave any more. You don't have to fear like a slave fears. You have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by which we cry out Abba Father, that term of endearment and, yet, respect. Dear Father, is probably a good translation of it. It's got both elements. The element of affection and joy and relationship, and yet still the element of respect, that our word daddy doesn't really always have. But it's got that idea in it. And by the way, the crying out here, this is not like a little child welcoming his dad home. The cry here, the Greek word translated cry, is the cry when you're in trouble, when things are bad, when life is difficult, when you find yourself in the middle of troubles. What do we do as children to our earthly fathers? Dad, help! Abba, Father! Help!

Notice that we also have a share in our Father's estate. Look down at verse 17. If [we're] children, "heirs also, heirs of God, and fellow heirs with Christ." Do you understand that you are an heir of everything God owns? And there's nothing excluded from that. Notice it says we are fellow-heirs with Christ. That brings up an interesting point. Jesus Christ is now, in the mind of God, our older brother. We're part of the same family. Amazing reality. And while we already enjoy the benefits of our adoption, it's not yet fully complete. Look down at verse 23. We "groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons [that is], the redemption of our body." Our adoption will not be fully complete until we're perfectly made like our older brother, and fully glorified. So, at the moment of salvation, one of the purposes for which God chose us in eternity past was fulfilled. He legally adopted us as His own children.

Now, look back at Ephesians 1 because Paul gives us a couple of other insights into our adoption here. Notice the first insight, verse 4, it's in love. It was motivated, our adoption was, by the love of God. Just a moment ago, I quoted for you 1 John 3 where it says, "See how great a love the Father has shown us that we should be called children of God." It was God's love that motivated Him to adoption. Another insight comes in verse 5. Our adoption is through Jesus Christ. As we've already talked about in previous weeks, Christ is the source of every spiritual blessing we enjoy, including our adoption. It comes both because of our connection to Him as our representative, we are in Christ; and it also comes because of His work--His life and His death for us on the cross. Adoption would not be possible without Jesus Christ. Notice He says our adoption is to Himself. With our new heavenly Father, our adoption was not just some cold legal process that bought Him some advantage. It's personal. It's to Himself. Psalm 65:4 says, "How blessed is the one whom You choose to bring near to You." That's the idea. Or in Revelation 21:7, after all that's been described of what's coming God says, "He who overcomes," that's every Christian in terms of Revelation, "he who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son." It's personal. And notice the last insight that Paul gives us about our adoption, at the end of verse 5. Our adoption is "according to the kind intention of His will." Notice in your NAS the marginal reading. You'll see a little footnote there. Literally it is "according to the good pleasure of His will." That's a better translation. Good pleasure simply means what seemed good to God, what pleased God. God chose us according to what seemed good to Him. The great commentator William Hendrickson puts it this way, "What God did in our adoption was a result, not of sheer determination, but of supreme delight." God chose to adopt you not because He had to, but because He took a delight in it. He delighted to adopt you.

This week, I read one account of an adoption that moved my own heart. A man named Gerald, a father named Gerald wrote this. "My wife and I waited 15 years for a child that never came by the natural way. However, we were approached one day with the lead of a newborn--not yet born. I remember standing in front of the judge with the child on the day that our adoption finally came. The judge pointed his finger and asked of me, "Is anyone coercing you to adopt this little boy?" After we had assured him that we were doing so only out of love for our son, the judge made this somber statement. "From today on, he is your son. He may disappoint you, even grieve you, but he is your son. Everything you own one day will be his, and he will bear your name." Then the judge looked to the clerk, and gave this simple command. Order a change in this child's birth certificate, and make it reflect that these are the parents of this child. In the same way you and I have been adopted by God, not because He was coerced from the outside or within, but because of His love and delight. What an incredible privilege. Adopted by God Himself.

Believer, how do you respond to such an amazing truth as that? How do you respond to adoption? Well, Paul tells us. Turn over to Ephesians 5. When he gets to the application of the great doctrines he's teaching, in Ephesians 5:1 he says this, "therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children." Start copying your new Father. Start copying His attitudes and His thoughts and His behaviors. And those are outlined in the verses that follow. Walk in love. Don't have anything to do with immorality or impurity or greed. Don't let any filthy or silly talk or course jesting come out of your mouth, but rather giving of thanks, and on it goes. This whole section about the practical application of our election has to do with imitating God. Like a child tries to

walk in the footsteps of his father, walk in the footsteps of your new Father. That's how you respond to such adopting love. Try to imitate God.

Perhaps you are here this morning, and you aren't sure if you belong to God. You may be thinking, boy, that really sounds attractive. I would truly love to have God as my Father. To know that He thinks of me as His adopted child. But how exactly does one get God to adopt you? How does one become a son or a daughter of God? Well, the apostle John tells us. Turn back to John 1. He tells us exactly how it happens. Verse 9, he says that Jesus came into the world, and verse 10, he says the world was made by Him but the world didn't recognize Him. He came to His own things, that is, the world He made, and His own people didn't receive Him. But, verse 12, as many as received Him-- that is Jesus Christ--to them, God gave the right to become children of God. We sometimes talk about receiving Christ. It's borrowed from this verse. Well, what does that mean? Well, the second half of the verse defines it. Even to those who believe in His name. It means to understand the claims Jesus Christ has made. He claimed to be God in human flesh, to have come to live a perfect life, and to die as a substitute for those who would believe in Him. It means that you come to understand those claims, to acknowledge those claims to be true; and then to put your trust wholly and completely in Him, to give up everything else, to turn away from everything you know to be sin, and cling to Christ and Him alone. To those who received Him, He gave the right to become children of God. You can become a child of God today if you're willing to turn from your sin and embrace Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Even that, though, will all be God's grace. Verse 13. Those who do so "were born not of blood, nor of the will of flesh nor of the will of man, but [because] of God." God's working. So all you can do is like all of us around you have done, and that's throw yourself on the mercy of God. And those who are contrite at heart He receives. Amazing reality. God chose us, and He chose us for the purpose of personal holiness, of legal adoption; and the next time that we have together, we'll examine the third great purpose of election, God's glory.

Let's pray together. Father, and we delight to be able to call you Father, and to know that that's more than just a label. That's reality, that you think of us as your adopted children. How can we begin to properly thank You and adore You and praise You for Your grace toward us; that You chose us in eternity past because of nothing is us, in fact in spite of who we were. And Lord, You chose us that we would be holy and blameless, that we would be like Your Son, that we would be different from the people around us; so that we would radiate and reflect His glory. And Father, we thank You that You chose us unto adoption, that You made us Your own children. Father, help us to understand these truths. Drive them deep within our hearts. Help us to get our arms around the length and breadth and depth of Your love for us, so that we could grow up in that love into Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen