

LESSON THREE

PREDESTINATED UNTO SONSHIP

SCRIPTURE READING

[All Sections]

Eph. 1: 4-5 Even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world to be holy and without blemish before Him in love, predestinating us unto sonship through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,

[Section 1]

1 Peter 1:2 Chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father in the sanctification of the Spirit unto the obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied.

Rom. 9: 16 So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.

[Section 2]

Eph. 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ

Rev.1:12-13 And I turned to see the voice that spoke with me; and when I turned, I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment reaching to the feet, and girded about at the breasts with a golden girdle.

[Section 3]

Rom. 8:15 For you have not received a spirit of slavery bringing you into fear again, but you have received a spirit of sonship in which we cry, Abba, Father!

Gal. 4:6 And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father!

1 John 5:12 He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.

John 20:17 Jesus said to her, Do not touch Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brothers and say to them, I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.

Rev. 21:7 He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be God to him, and he will be a son to Me.

[Section 4]

Gen. 2:9 And out of the ground Jehovah God caused to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, as well as the tree of life in the middle of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Rom. 8:9 But you are not in the flesh, but in the spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Yet if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not of Him.

8:23 And not only so, but we ourselves also, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan in ourselves, eagerly awaiting sonship, the redemption of our body.

8:29	Because those whom He foreknew, He also predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the Firstborn among many brothers;
Rev. 21:7	He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be God to him, and he will be a son to Me.

OUTLINE:

- I. PREDESTINATED UNTO SONSHIP**
- II. THE SECOND ITEM OF GOD'S BLESSING**
- III. MARKING OUT A DESTINY FOR HIS CHOSEN ONES IN ETERNITY PAST**
- IV. MARKING HIS CHOSEN ONES OUT BEFOREHAND**
- V. ACCORDING TO HIS FORESIGHT**
- VI. THROUGH JESUS CHRIST**
- VII. ACCORDING TO THE GOOD PLEASURE OF HIS WILL**
- VIII. SELECTION, PREDESTINATION, AND CALLING**
- IX. GOD'S ARRANGEMENT OF OUR LIVES**
- X. UNTO SONSHIP**
 - A. By the Spirit of the Son of God**
 - B. In the Life of the Son of God**
 - C. In the Position of the Son of God**
- XI. TO HIMSELF**
- XII. TO BE CONFORMED TO THE IMAGE OF HIS SON**
- XIII. TO BE COMPLETED IN SONSHIP**
- XIV. CONSUMMATELY, TO INHERIT ALL THAT GOD IS**

QUESTIONS

SECTION 1

1. What is the goal of God's predestination? What does "sonship" imply?
2. What is the difference between selection, predestination and calling?

SECTION 2

1. How does God make us holy? What is God's goal in choosing us to be holy?
2. What is the church? How can we become the church today?

SECTION 3

1. How do we know the Spirit of God is within us? How can we live like sons of God?
2. Is it correct to say that we do not need any regulations because we have the life of the Son of God? Why?
3. Why do we need to be in the position of the Son of God?

SECTION 4

1. What it means to be a Christian? How can we be conformed to the image of the firstborn Son of God?
2. What is the completion of sonship? How does it relate to God's purpose?

In this message we come to the matter that we have been predestinated unto sonship. Ephesians 1:5 says, *“Having predestinated us unto sonship through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.”* In the grammatical construction of verses 4 and 5, the subject and the main predicate are not in verse 5, but in verse 4. Verse 4 says, *“According as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blemish before Him, in love.”* The subject is “He,” and the main predicate is “chose.” These verses can be written like this: “According as He, having predestinated us, chose us.” God’s choosing cannot be separated from His predestinating. They are two aspects of one thing. God’s choosing goes with His predestinating, and His predestinating is one with His choosing. It is very difficult to say which comes first.

II. THE SECOND ITEM OF GOD’S BLESSING

Being predestinated unto sonship is the second item of God’s blessing. As we pointed out in the previous message, the first item of God’s blessing is being chosen to be holy.

III. MARKING OUT A DESTINY FOR HIS CHOSEN ONES IN ETERNITY PAST

In eternity past, God predestinated us unto sonship, marking out a destiny for His chosen ones before the foundation of the world. The goal of God’s predestination is sonship. We were predestinated to be sons of God even before we were created. Hence, as God’s creatures, we need to be regenerated by Him so that we may participate in His life to be His sons. Sonship implies not only the life, but also the position of the son. God’s marked-out ones have the life to be His sons and the position to inherit Him.

IV. MARKING HIS CHOSEN ONES OUT BEFOREHAND

The Greek word translated “predestinated” can also be rendered “marked out beforehand.” Marking out beforehand is the process, whereas predestination is the purpose to determine a destiny beforehand. God firstly selected us and

then marked us out beforehand, that is, before the foundation of the world, unto a certain destiny.

V. ACCORDING TO HIS FORESIGHT

God chose and predestinated us according to His foresight (1 Pet. 1:2). This indicates that our relationship with God was initiated by God according to His foreknowledge.

VI. THROUGH JESUS CHRIST

God has predestinated us unto sonship through Jesus Christ. “Through Jesus Christ” means through the Redeemer who is the Son of God. Through Him we were redeemed to be the sons of God with the life and position of God’s sons.

VII. ACCORDING TO THE GOOD PLEASURE OF HIS WILL

God predestinated us unto sonship according to the good pleasure of His will, which is His purpose. This reveals that God has a will in which is His good pleasure. God predestinated us to be His sons according to this pleasure, according to the desire of His heart. The book of Ephesians speaks not from the standpoint of man’s sinful condition, as does the book of Romans, but from the standpoint of the good pleasure of God’s heart. Hence, it is deeper and higher.

VIII. SELECTION, PREDESTINATION, AND CALLING

God’s selection is related to His predestination and to His calling. Of the three, selection is first, followed by predestination and calling. Firstly, God selected us. Then He marked us out, that is, predestinated us. Both selection and predestination took place before we were born. Then at a certain point in our life, God came in to call us.

Ephesians 1:4 and 5 prove that God’s selection and predestination took place in eternity past: *“According as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blemish before Him, in love, having predestinated us unto sonship through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good*

pleasure of His will.” Before the universe came into existence, God selected us and predestinated us unto sonship. We need to exercise our spirit in faith to believe this word written in the Scripture. On the day appointed by God, we were born. Eventually, also at the time appointed by Him, we were saved. Even though we may have had no intention of believing in the Lord Jesus, we came to believe in Him, because we had been selected and predestinated by God. This is the selection of grace in which God's mercy is manifested. As Paul says in Romans 9:16, **“So then, it is not of the one who wills, nor of the one who runs, but of God, the One Who shows mercy.”**

IX. GOD'S ARRANGEMENT OF OUR LIVES

If we look back upon our past, we shall worship the Lord. We shall realize that our steps have been not of ourselves, but of Him. Before we were born, He selected us and predestinated us and arranged everything related to us, including the time and place of our birth. Moreover, He appointed all our days and all the places where we are to be.

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X. UNTO SONSHIP

In verse 4 we see that God has chosen us to be holy. However, to be holy is the procedure, not the goal. The goal is sonship. We have been predestinated unto sonship. In other words, God has chosen us to be holy so that we might be His sons. Thus, to be holy is the process, the procedure, whereas to be sons of God is the goal. God does not merely want a group of holy people; He desires many sons. It may seem to us that it is adequate for God to choose us to be holy. We may be fully satisfied with this. Nevertheless, God has chosen us to be holy for a purpose, and this purpose is that we might be the sons of God.

Let us take baking a cake as an example. When a sister bakes a cake, she firstly prepares the dough by mixing various ingredients together with flour. As the ingredients are mixed in with the dough, we may say that the dough is a picture of sanctification. First the dough is separated; then it is sanctified through having various ingredients added to it. After the sister mixes the dough, she shapes it into a certain form. Likewise, God first separates us, and then puts Himself, the Father,

the Son, and the Spirit, into us. Then follows the process of mixing.

In eternity past, God predestinated us unto sonship, marking out a destiny for His chosen ones before the foundation of the world. The goal of God's predestination is sonship.

...To be holy is to be mingled with God. God sanctifies us by putting Himself into us and then mingling us with His nature. This is a matter of nature, of having our nature transformed with His. We were born human, natural, but God wants us to be divine. The only way this can take

place is through having the divine nature put into our being and mingled with it. In this way, God makes us holy. Thus, sanctification is a procedure to transform our nature. This, however, is not the goal. The goal is related to being formed or shaped. This is the reason that along with God's choosing us to be holy, there is the need of His predestinating us to be sons. To be holy is a matter of nature, but to be sons is a matter of being formed. God's sons are people conformed to a particular form or shape.

The golden lampstand in Revelation 1 illustrates this. In nature, the lampstand is golden, but in form it is a lampstand. In order for a golden lampstand to be produced, the material must first be pure gold. This refers to the procedure. But the goal of this procedure is the producing of the lampstand with a definite form. In like manner, to be made holy is the procedure for us to become sons of God.

...All Christians know that the genuine believers in Christ are the church. But the church is not merely a group of saved ones. The church is a collective people who have been made holy in nature to be the sons of God. This collective people must be sanctified, saturated, and mingled with God's nature. Then they will be the sons of God. Such a people is the church.

Although so many believe in the Lord Jesus, have been washed in the blood, and have been regenerated by the Spirit, they are still worldly and common, with no mark of holiness in their living. They are absolutely the same as their neighbors, friends, and relatives. Nevertheless, they talk about being the church. What a shame to God, and what a shame to the church! The church is constituted as a collective people who have been separated unto God and who are saturated with the nature of God and fully sanctified to live like sons of God. The church certainly should not be a group of worldly Christians living like the sons of sinners. It is a shame to say that such a group is the church.

If we claim to be the church, we must ask whether we are a separated and sanctified people. Are we separated unto God and saturated with God? Are we sanctified both positionally and

dispositionally with God's nature to live like the sons of God? Oh, may our eyes be opened to see what the church is! The church is not a group of Christians who are zealous, yet who are common and worldly without any separation or saturation. The church is constituted with those who have been sanctified by God to live like sons of God. Remember, the book of Ephesians is concerned with the church. In the opening word of this book, we are told that the church is a people under God's well-speaking (1:3). The first item of God's well-speaking is that we have been chosen to be holy. This is God's blessing, His well-speaking, concerning us. However, many Christians reject this blessing. God says that He has chosen us to be holy, but they say that they do not want to be different from others. Some say, "We don't want to be holy. We like to be common." God says, "You have been chosen to be different." But they say, "We don't want to be different. We want to be the same as others." This rejection of God's well-speaking is rebellion. Oh, may the Lord have mercy on us! How we need His mercy because today's situation is so pitiful! We need to see that we have been chosen to be holy so that we may live the life of the sons of God.

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A. By the Spirit of the Son of God

Now we need to consider three things concerning sonship, concerning being sons of God. The first is that God has predestinated us unto sonship by putting the Spirit of His Son into us. At the time we believed in the Lord Jesus and were regenerated, the Spirit of God came into us as the Spirit of the Son of God. This is the reason that after regeneration we can easily and sweetly call, "Abba, Father." Before we were regenerated, we could say at most, "O, God, help me." But after we were saved, we spontaneously began to cry, with tender, intimate feeling, "O, Abba, Father." Both Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:6 speak of this. Galatians 4:6 says that the Spirit of the Son cries, "Abba, Father," but Romans 8:15 says that it is we who cry out in this way. This indicates that our cry is His cry and that His cry is ours. Together, we and He cry, "Abba, Father." Without the Spirit, we cannot cry, "Abba, Father," so sweetly and intimately. But what a pleasant, sweet, and comfortable feeling we have when we say this! This is a strong proof that the Spirit of God is within us. We have the Spirit of sonship.

*... you have
received a spirit
of sonship in
which we cry,
Abba, Father!
~Romans 8:15~*

...Living like a son of God, however, is not a matter of outward regulations. It is altogether a matter of the Spirit of the Son of God within us. If you call, "Abba,

Father," you will know what to do... when we go to our Father and call, "Abba, Father," we shall know what kind of life we should live, because we have the Spirit of the Son of God within us.

B. In the Life of the Son of God

We have been predestinated unto sonship, not only by the Spirit of the Son of God, but also in the life of the Son of God. This is very subjective. We actually have the life of the Son of God. As 1 John 5:12 says, "**He that hath the Son hath life.**" Therefore, we are not God's sons-in-law; we are God's sons in life. At times, we may be able to reject the Spirit of the Son of God, but we cannot reject the life of the Son of God because it has become our very being. We have two beings: the first is the natural being that was born of our parents, and the second is the spiritual being that is born of God. In this second being we have the life of the Son of God. According to our second being, we have not only the Spirit moving and working within us, but also the life that has become our self, not the natural self, but the spiritual self. Sometimes we not only rebel against the Spirit, but also against ourselves, against our being.

...In every son of God there is both the Spirit of the Son of God and the life of the Son of God. Because of this, there is no need for regulations. For example, there is no need to post a regulation in your home saying that your children should not eat anything bitter, but eat only things that are sweet. If a child takes something bitter into his mouth, he will spontaneously spit it out, even if he does not know the meaning of the word bitter. Because the life within every child rejects bitter things, there is no need to have regulations about bitterness. In addition to having the Spirit of the Son of God, we have the life of the Son of God. If we taste something that is bitter to the Son's life, we cannot pretend to be happy with it. Although we may pretend to be happy, we are not happy in the depths of our being, for we know that we are acting against the life of the Son of God. If we call, "Abba, Father," and live according to the life of the Son of God, we shall have joy in the depths of our being. In fact, our whole being will be filled with joy.

C. In the Position of the Son of God

Not only do we have the Spirit of the Son of God and the life of the Son of God, but we are also in the position of the Son of God (John 20:17). Actually, sonship is more specifically related to position than it is to life. You may be a son born of your father, but for certain legal reasons, you may not have the position of a son. If you do not have the position of a son, you do not have the sonship. Thus, sonship is a legal matter. For example, a certain person may not actually have been born the son of a rich man. But if, legally speaking, he has the position of being that man's son, he will be entitled to his inheritance. The inheritance belongs to him, not according to life, but according to position. Some genuine sons, however, may have the life of the father, but have lost the position of sonship. This illustrates the fact that the life of the son of God is related only to life but that the position of the son of God is a matter of legality. Hallelujah, we have the Spirit of the Son of God, the life of the Son of God, and also the position of the Son of God.

All this is for our inheritance. Because we are God's sons with the sonship, we shall inherit all that God is and all that He has. We have the legal position to inherit all the riches of the Father. In the church life we enjoy the Father day by day. Today this may simply be a matter of life, but in the future it will also be a matter of position. Revelation 21:7 says, ***"He who overcomes shall inherit these things, and I will be God to him, and he shall be a son to Me."*** In this verse being a son and inheriting all these things is not merely a matter of life, but also a matter of position. Although we are sons of God in life today, the universe cannot yet see that we are sons of God in position. But when the New Jerusalem comes, the universe will know that we are the sons of God in position as well as in life. Everyone will be able to see that we are the sons of God in position. All the angels will say, "Look at those people—they are the sons of God. They are enjoying God and inheriting all that God is in the New Jerusalem."

The church today is a miniature of the New Jerusalem. Here in the church we are sons of God both in life and in position. There is no need for us to tell one another that we are sons of God, for we all recognize one another as God's sons. Because we have the Spirit, the life, and the position, we understand one another and recognize one another. We confess that we all are sons of God. Although we have the Spirit, the life,

and the position to be the sons of God, we are not yet holy as far as our disposition is concerned. Hence, in the church life God is constantly mixing us so that we might be sanctified by being mingled with His nature.

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XI. TO HIMSELF

Sonship brings us to God, that is, into God Himself that we may be one with Him in life and in nature.

Before we were saved, we were in the state of the sinful flesh, the flesh of sin (Rom. 8:3). One day we heard the gospel, and this wonderful Spirit of Christ came into us as the Spirit of life to regenerate us. Now this Spirit is working, moving, and regulating within us (Rom. 8:2) for the purpose of sonship, that is, to make sinners the divine sons of God. This Spirit of the divine sonship moves, works, saturates, permeates, and transforms us until eventually we will be thoroughly transformed into the image of Christ. This will bring us into a state of holiness. This is the fulfillment of the divine sonship.

When the Spirit of Christ came into us, the work of sonship began, but it was not yet accomplished. From that time on, the Spirit of Christ as the Spirit of life works within us as the Spirit of the divine sonship to accomplish the sonship. Then when we are permeated, saturated, and thoroughly transformed, we will be wholly sanctified, that is, wholly brought into a state of holiness as the accomplishment of the divine sonship.

XII. TO BE CONFORMED TO THE IMAGE OF HIS SON

As the Father brings us to full sonship, we are being conformed to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:29).

Perhaps you have been a Christian for many years. What is your general idea of what it means to be a Christian? Is it your idea that the meaning of being a Christian is to be a person who keeps the law and does good in order to please God? Or is a Christian a person who needs to be conformed to the image of Christ? According to typical Christian thought, a "good Christian" is actually a Christian who keeps the law. In other words, if you are trying to be a "good Christian," in

actuality you are not trying to be a man of Christ but a good man of Moses. If this is your case, in regard to your living you are a Christian in name only, for in reality you are trying to be something else.

How then can we be conformed to the image of the firstborn Son of God? The way is very simple. The Spirit of the Son of God is now in us (Rom. 8:9). We need to stop trying to keep the law and stop trying to do good. Be simple. Simply keep yourself in contact with the Spirit who indwells you. Simplify the whole situation by realizing that the Spirit of the Son of God dwells, works, and acts within you all the time. Simplify the situation by no longer trying to do good and trying to be a good Christian. Simplify yourself to just one item: knowing the indwelling Spirit of Christ and keeping in contact with Him moment by moment. To take this way is to take the tree of life (cf. Gen. 2:9). The tree of the knowledge of good and evil is complicated, for with it there are many things, including good, evil, death, and knowledge. The tree of life, however, is simple, for with it there is only one thing—life. The tree of life is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself as the Spirit.

XIII. TO BE COMPLETED IN SONSHIP

Eventually, we shall be completed in sonship. The completion of sonship, the full sonship, is the redemption of our body (Rom. 8:23). This means that our body will be transfigured, that is, it will also be “sonized.” Our spirit has been “sonized,” our soul is in the process of being “sonized,” and when the Lord comes, our body also will be “sonized.” That will be the completion of sonship.

We have been predestinated to be conformed to the image of God’s firstborn Son so that He may be the Firstborn among many brothers. This is God’s purpose—to produce many brothers of His firstborn Son for His expression. When Christ was the only begotten Son, He was unique. But God desired to have many sons who will be the many brothers of His Son. In this way the only begotten Son of God becomes the Firstborn among many brothers. He is the firstborn Son, and we, according to God’s predestination, are the many sons who are being conformed to the image of the Firstborn. God’s purpose in this is that we express Him in a corporate way. Hence,

for the fulfillment of God’s purpose, He predestinated us to be conformed to the image of His Son.

*Because those whom He foreknew,
He also predestinated to be
conformed to the image of His
Son, that He might be the
Firstborn among many brothers;
~Romans 8:29~*

*And not only so, but we ourselves
also, who have the firstfruits of the
Spirit, even we ourselves groan in
ourselves, eagerly awaiting
sonship, the redemption of our
body ~Romans 8:23~*

XIV. CONSUMMATELY, TO INHERIT ALL THAT GOD IS

Consummately, the meaning of sonship is that we shall inherit all that God is for eternity (Rev. 21:7).