

“Chosen before Creation...”

- Ephesians 1:1-6 -

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Ephesians 1 - Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus: 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us

in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love 5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved.



Chapter 1

1:1

The evidence of God’s profound grace begins in Paul’s first word of his first sentence. Because the overflowing grace of God was poured out even in the stark reality of Paul’s very name... a man once known as “Saul.” When he was Saul, he persecuted the church. He hunted down and jailed believers, and was party even to their murder. The world would not have given him such forgiveness and grace. The world does not forgive or forget such atrocities.

But for God, no sin is so great to overpower the cross. God not only forgave Saul, but moreover went on to call him to the front lines to serve as a messenger of that same grace...specifically to a people that he at one time had no time for, **the gentiles**.

Once redeemed, his name was changed to “Paul.” That name means “little” and Paul wore it and all of its subsequent humility as if it was the very mantle of forgiveness that God bestowed upon him. He was never ‘Saul’ again...*that* ‘old man’ was dead, and the new man ‘Paul’ was reborn in his place.

Furthermore, as inexplicable as it might seem, **Paul was an apostle**. Peter once declared “make your calling and your election sure.” It seemed that Paul understood that concept whole-heartedly. Indeed God’s hands were all over him. Paul *was* sure.

From his earliest days he knew he had a religious mission, albeit he at first attempted to follow that call without Jesus and without the Holy Spirit. What a mess. The embodiment of ‘zeal without knowledge.’ A ‘goal’ without clear directions from above. Sadly, lots of people are still trying that route and making the same mess. They may not be literally *killing* Christians as Paul did, but spiritually there are bodies lying all over the place anyway like a religious slaughter. He may have been “on a mission” before the Damascus road but one without being “in Christ.” **Now** he was truly out there “by the will of God.”

He wrote that day not only to the believers in Ephesus, but as we have already established, he has written to us...or at least those who are ‘the faithful.’ Are you part of the faithful? Again, those crucial words leap out at us right off the bat...to those who are “in Christ Jesus.”

Paul was writing, just as sure as he was an apostle, *because God said so*. Often, when an individual expresses a desire to serve God in the fulltime ministry, we tell him that if he can do anything else in this life, he should do that instead. Because unless such is truly the case...unless you are simply compelled by God, and cannot...despite all your effort, to do anything else, you will not last...you will not make it. Because every day you will be presented with plenty of reasons to walk away. And if you can, *you will*.

On my desk there is a small piece of paper that reminds me daily of such a calling: “*There is no special honor in preaching, there is only special pain. The pulpit calls those anointed to it as the sea calls its sailors. And like the sea, it batters and bruises and does not rest. To preach, to really preach is to die naked a little at a time and to know each time you do it that you must do it again.*”

1:2

Paul, throughout all of his writings, commonly links grace and peace. Because...*and we know it gang*...without grace, *there is no peace*. Not just the existence of peace in our lives, but the embracing of such. Again, that calls for real action on our part...it calls us to actually “*walk* in our faith.”

God calls us to receive, retain, and live in his grace and his peace! Not just the *saving* grace of God, (we, and those in Ephesus, were already saved) but moreover the grace manifested *to and through* the believer *after* salvation...**grace for daily living**. (2 Cor 9:8).

1:3

Paul begins verse 3 with what is actually the longest sentence in the Bible. Clearly Paul lit into this letter with a great deal of passion and energy behind him! He takes a deep breath and goes for 11 verses before he takes another! In the English we are given periods, but not in the original.

The whole of this letter reflects a fervency in Paul that is unparalleled. He’s been passionately angry before, but he’s not angry here but rather thrilled! Paul says “hey... I am so blessed!” Yet we must remember that he is writing this from a prison cell!

This ‘long’ sentence of adoration and worship begins with the word “blessed.” Notice that the text says that we have *already* been blessed. That’s interesting, because it sure seems that a lot of Christians are still waiting around for their “ship to come in’ as far as blessings go. That’s why a lot of us seem to never get around to doing anything for God, because we are still waiting for ‘ours.’

The text says He has already blessed us, and goes on to elaborate that the gift was in the receiving of “*every spiritual blessing*” ...not a few or just some. We are reminded again of 2 Peter 1:3 where we are reminded that “...His divine power has given to us *all things* that pertain to life and godliness...”

Note that these blessings are spiritual blessings in the sense that such does not mean just temporary and material, but greater and more substantial. Some blessings frankly are available to all of mankind, saved or not: the breath of life, the warmth of sunshine on our heads, smells, sights, laughter, etc. We refer to these as “common grace.” Matt 5:45 tells us that “*He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust...*” These are physical benefits bestowed upon all creation because He loves His creation.

But some blessings will never be known by those who remain outside the kingdom realm. For the believer exists in a very special place. We are still physically on “this side” of that eternal curtain of God, but having been reborn we are now given ‘access.’ We no longer are sequestered to the “outer court” away from God as man was in the Old Testament, but now we have access to Him in the inner “holy of holies” through Christ. Now we can feel His presence move in our midst. He reminds us in Colossians 1:13...with the most beautiful language: “*He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love...*”

For those that remain on the outside, they will never know what it feels like to have a marriage of “three strands.” (Ecc 4:12 “*Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.*”) We feel the hand of perfect love in ours because God ordained it. The world will never know the peace and fearlessness of stepping out the door in the morning knowing they are safe in the hands of God and nothing will touch them until He divinely orders it. They will never see and understand the universal language in the eyes of a child of God in some tribal village on the edge of nowhere on the other side of this planet. Or to be able to take their hand and baptize them in a high mountain river...an act that could cost them their life, and they shared the moment with you. They will never hear that “still small voice whispering in their ear to ‘*turn right...turn left.*’” They will never feel whole. Never be complete. Never know ‘full.’

We that are “faithful in Christ Jesus,” as verse 1 tells us, are now “spiritual beings” and thus we need a spiritual atmosphere in which to breathe and live. An astronaut on another planet that is not his own has to have his own special air to breathe in order to live and operate in that realm. We too need that “spiritual atmosphere” to live our lives here on this planet that is no longer our home. We need spiritual food, spiritual companions, spiritual exercise, spiritual strength and spiritual weapons. (“Living Abundantly” Theodore Epp)

Christ **has given us** all those spiritual blessings...*which is the very heart of the book of Ephesians*, providing us a “spiritual atmosphere” in which we live and breathe our lives as children of the Light.

These blessings occur in “heavenly places.” For us today, such references the ‘kingdom of God’ ...the realm in which we as children of God live and breathe upon this earth, while everyone else runs to and fro like caged mice on a spinning wheel.

So how exactly do we get on this “kingdom train?” How do we tap into these blessings? These blessings occur *in Christ*. Not *with Him*, or *knowing about Him* or even by *knowing Him*, etc...however great that may be. They come by our real *living out in Him*. Living “in Him” is more than church attendance or even salvation. It is living as a very real part of the body of Christ...which he tells us is the church.

All of those blessed resources that God offers are “in Christ.” They are not available outside of that realm! They don’t come through mere church attendance, or moral living, or believing that Jesus is the Son of God. They only come ‘*in Christ*’...being connected to and part of and functioning for, the living body of Christ.

Successful Christian living comes “in Christ.” Triumph over sin’s control and domination comes “in Christ.” However, *having* access or having the availability of something and actually *using* it is two different things! The “bottleneck” doesn’t occur at the receiving line of blessings, but in actually understanding and acknowledging those blessings so that I might in turn respond and use those blessing for something and someone bigger than just myself. In Joshua 1:3, God tells the people “*Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you.*” But the people still had to go out and take the land...it wasn’t coming special delivery from Amazon.

Having *access* to all these blessings and actually *appropriating* them is two vastly different things. Take two individuals who both are pursuing God. The one is living out his or her salvation in Christ...embracing the promises and blessings that come from living life in the kingdom. It is he or she that will know that special peace and joy that He wants us to have. Those who fail to embrace these blessings are doomed to stay in “baby life.” They do not mature, they do not grow up. They never enjoy the view from the top of the mountain, because they are too lazy, too fearful or too busy to climb up there.

Note also that the text does not say “gifts.” That is a different issue in which God gives ‘gifts.’ Gifts are for the purpose of our utilizing them for His glory and to bless and equip the body of Christ we are part of. In that case there are *specific* gifts for certain individuals as He divinely chooses. But ‘blessings’ are given to all people...especially those who are part of the household of the faithful...the family of saints. (vs 1)

Again, Paul was writing from prison, and yet he says Jesus Christ, has blessed him with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. Really? Heavenly places? While in prison? And yet Paul recognized that his life was firmly in the hands of God and that anywhere he was, God was there too, and that made it a “heavenly place.”

1:4

Verse 4 reminds us that our participation in this realm was not happenstance or chance. For God literally chose us before He began to separate out the oceans from the land in the book of Genesis. That “selection” was not made randomly or without purpose. He chose us, and equipped us, to “be holy and without blame.”

When we are born again, our eyes are opened...we are rescued from the fog of this world that allows us generally only to see ourselves and maybe a few feet from us. Prior to salvation we have no clear vision and path for which to walk. We cannot see through the void. We don’t know where we came from or where we are going. Salvation brings us into the light, and now...seeing clearly for the first time in our lives, we choose to either walk on with new clarity, or sit down out of fear.

He has done His part...he has already bestowed all spiritual blessings. It is up to us now to grab hold of them and move forward.

We are often willing to embrace God’s sovereign election and position, but we must note that verse 4 speaks of our character as well as our divine standing in Him. God may choose us, but scripture is quite clear as to our mandatory response to Him. He does not love some and hate others. He loves all men, ...*that does not change*, but how we respond to that love accords our grasp of the promises and blessings he has for us, and the joy and success of our lives “in Him.”

He did not “choose” us to live as we please. He “chose” us to live holy and blameless! This is both an immediate positional state of being, an “eyes wide open” realm of reality, as well as a maturing and evolving into the “likeness” of Christ. I am positionally “finished” in the eyes of God...I know where I am going and shall not be denied. However, we know that we are affectively “still in motion”...still traveling down that road of maturity.

1:5-6

Uh oh...there’s that dangerous word: “predestined.” Few doctrinal issues have caused as much division within the larger body of Christ. Did God “choose” those of us that are His children today? Yes He did. But it’s not hard to pick the winning horse, when He saw the race from start to finish before we ever got to the track! But we must be careful not to take the next presumptuous “next step” which say’s if He chooses some to be His

children that He therefore chooses some to be lost. For the Bible tells us clearly that “*God our Savior... desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*” (1 Tim 2:3-4)

There are ways and plans of God that defy full human explanation. The only thing we know for sure in such situations is that when we force an extrapolated outcome, we inevitably end up with an extreme and unbiblical doctrine. An example would be the “oneness” doctrine of the apostolic church. In an overt need to humanly understand how God can be one deity in three persons, some folks were compelled to push the envelope ...saying that if Jesus is God, ...that when he was here on earth, heaven must have been empty. But then one must ask the obvious question: who was Jesus praying to in the garden, or calling out to on the cross?

Similar problems occur when one takes the principle of predestination and takes the next leap of presumption ...one not taught in scripture, and say that if God chose some to be His, He therefore must have chosen others to be lost. It is what is known in theology as “double-predestination.” This “mistake” causes all sorts of theological misdirection and leads to even greater errors in the living out of our faith.

How is that we can both be “chosen” and yet still clearly have free-will? Wiersbe has an interesting take on this subject as it pertains to this verse: "You do not get into God's family by adoption. You get into His family by regeneration, the new birth (John 3:1-18;1 Peter 1:22-25). Adoption is the act of God by which He gives His 'born ones' an adult standing in the family. Why does He do this? So that we might immediately begin to claim our inheritance and enjoy our spiritual wealth!"

So in today's text, and we will deal just with that, we are “adopted” by the choice of God. God ‘took us in as His own’ for His *own good pleasure*. Romans 9 tells us that God prepared us for His glory...and what was the point of such an act? That we would step back and praise Him for the “glory of His grace.” For no matter what the ends and outs of predestination are, it is and was *His grace* that made us acceptable. It was and *is* all Him!

Paul's point here is not to teach the finer points of predestination theology, but rather to continue in His same line of thinking, that...*we are adopted*...brought into the family. In such, we might have access to all the privileges as well as the responsibilities that come with being ‘family’. Most commentaries see the last two words of verse 4 as connected to the beginning of verse 5. So we would read it rather... “*in love, having predestined us...*”

Because it is only a son who has access to the inheritance, God predestined us to have access to all of the blessings of the kingdom. Not just the ones that are waiting in heaven, but the ones that are ours *now*...