

STUDY ON THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS

SPIRITUAL BLESSING IN CHRIST

Read Ephesians 1:1-6

Introduction

Paul founded the church at Ephesus over a period of nearly three years (Acts 19:1-20:1), from about 52 to 55 AD. He visited with the church elders on the beach at Miletus on his way to Jerusalem (Acts 20:17-38). In Jerusalem, Paul was arrested about 57 AD and imprisoned, first in Caesarea (about 57 to 59 AD) and then under house arrest in Rome about 60 to 62 AD. (Acts 28:16-31). He probably died no later than 63 to 65 AD and probably earlier. Paul wrote the letter to the Ephesians from prison (Ephesians 3:1; 4:1; 6:20), but prison where? We can't be sure. Caesarea and Rome are possibilities.

Ephesus

Ephesus was founded by Ionian colonists about 1100 BC and over the next millennium ruled successively by the Persians, Greeks, Macedonians, and others. Rome ruled the city from 69 BC for the next 200 years. It prospered and became the provincial capital and leading city of the entire region. Estimates of its population in the first century begin at a quarter million inhabitants and go up from there.

It was famous for its temple to the goddess Artemis (Diana of Ephesus). Besides the cult of Artemis, there is evidence of various mystery religions, the practice of magic (Acts 19:19), worship of Egyptian gods Sarapis and Isis, as well as devotion to large number of other deities: Agathe Tyche, Aphrodite, Apollo, Asclepius, Athena, the Cabiri, Concord, Cybele (the Mother Goddess), Demeter, Dionysus, Eneida, Hecate, Hephaestus, Heracles, Hestia Boulaia, Kore, Nemesis, Pan, Pion (a mountain god), Pluto, Poseidon, Theos Hypsistos, Tyche Soteira, Zeus and several river deities. A Jewish synagogue existed in Ephesus (Acts 19:8). The Jewish community possessed citizenship, were exempted from military service, and granted freedom to practice their religion according to their traditions.

Purpose

Why was the Letter written? Since Paul's founding of the churches in the area around Ephesus, believers seem to have won many Gentiles to whom Paul's Letter is now directed. They were converts from a Hellenistic environment of mystery religions, magic, astrology, etc. They feared evil spirits and weren't sure about Christ's relationship to these forces. They also needed encouragement to adopt a lifestyle worthy of Christianity, free from drunkenness, sexual immorality, theft, and hatred. They also may have lacked respect for the Jewish heritage of their faith.

Paul's greeting to the Ephesians.

“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (vv1-2)

There are 3 key words used in verse 1 which are: apostle, saints, and faithful.

"Apostle" (apostolos), "messenger, delegate, envoy," denotes a person sent with a specific commission or mission, from the verb apostellō, "to send." Paul makes it clear from the start that he speaks with apostolic authority that comes directly from Jesus Christ. Moreover, he writes according to God's will. This is no casual communication, nor is it to be taken as just man's word, but as the words of Christ through Paul.

He addresses the letter to "saints." "Saint" (hagios), when used of human beings, means "consecrated or dedicated to God, holy," that is, reserved for God and his service. We saints aren't holy because we are perfect -- as our world tends to define sainthood. We are holy because we are set apart and dedicated to God, because we belong to God exclusively. *"You are not your own, you were bought at a price"* (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

The third word is "faithful." The word means "pertaining to being trustworthy, faithful, dependable" here, with regard to the Christians it means "pertaining to being trusting, cherishing faith, trust." Paul addresses the saints as faithful ones. Then he goes on to describe their location or relationship -- "in Christ Jesus." We're more used to the phrase "Jesus Christ," but Paul sometimes uses the word order "Christ Jesus" (1:1 twice, 2:20; 3:1), emphasizing Jesus' title -- "Messiah, Christ" along with his given name -- "Jesus".

Paul concludes his greeting with the words "Grace" -- the characteristic Greek greeting -- combined with "Peace" (Hebrew shalom), the characteristic Hebrew greeting. (We looked at the words "in Ephesus" in the Introduction, which don't occur in the earliest manuscripts.)

The work of God the Father (vv3-6)

In ancient Greek (the language Paul originally wrote in), Ephesians 1:3 through 1:14 form one long sentence. These verses (Ephesians 1:3-14) sets the tone for the rest of Ephesians. One way to look at this letter is as a spontaneous outpouring of praise to God.

"Blessed (eulogētos, "blessed, praised") be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing (eulogia) in the heavenly places...." (**Ephesians 1:3, ESV**)

What we have here are the blessings come full circle, beginning with God ("who has blessed us ... with every spiritual blessing") and finding their culmination in God ("blessed be the God and Father...."). God blesses us graciously, without any compulsion -- just because he wants to. And we bless back, spontaneously, without any compulsion -- because we are thankful and love God.

Notice two things about these blessings:

1. They are "spiritual" blessings. These aren't mere physical or natural blessings, but blessings of our spirit by God's Spirit. The blessing of knowledge, the blessing of love, the blessing of mercy, the blessing of salvation -- the list goes on and on. He gives us every spiritual blessing. God is generous, not tight-fisted, in giving out his spiritual blessings.
2. They are offered in the heavenly realm, not the earthly realm.

In Christ

Ephesians introduces us to a phrase that we see throughout Paul's letters, but especially here -- "in Christ." In the first 14 verses of Ephesians, the phrase (or its equivalent) occurs 11 times:

- "The faithful in Christ Jesus" (verse 1)
- "Every spiritual blessing in Christ" (verse 3)
- "Chose us in him" (verse 4)
- "Freely given us in the One he loves" (verse 6)
- "In him we have redemption" (verse 7)
- "Which he purposed in Christ" (verse 9)
- "To gather up all things in him" (verse 10, NRSV)
- "In him we were also chosen" (verse 11)

- "The first to hope in Christ" (verse 12)
- "Included in Christ" (verse 13a)
- "Marked in him with a seal" (verse 13b)

Elsewhere in Ephesians it is found at 1:20; 2:6-7, 10, 13; 3:6, 11, 21; and 4:32.15. We should be particularly intrigued by the local idea of incorporation into Christ, which I believe applies to most of the verses in our passage, especially in verse 11 where it talks about all creation being summed up in Christ as head. Likewise, in chapter 2 there are a remarkable number of compound verbs carrying the idea "together with," such as ""made alive with Christ" (Ephesians 2:5), "raised ... with Christ" (Ephesians 2:6a), "seated with him" (Ephesians 2:6b), etc. We are all "in Christ," part of him and He part of us. The primary idea of Ephesians is not Christ as the means by whom all these things come (though, of course, he is the means). Rather the primary idea is how we are joined with him in a spiritual sense. Our whole life is "in Christ."

Predestination and Election (vv4-5)

Now, let's jump off the pier into deep water -- predestination. This whole passage 1:3-14 is full of words that describe God purposing, planning, willing, and choosing from before the world's beginning. None of us can pretend to really fathom predestination, much less understand it. So instead of trying to wrap your logical mind around predestination or rejecting it out of hand, just let these words of God's willing in this passage wash over you like a spring shower, reminding you that your God is greater than you and me and has planned much for us that is beyond our understanding! Look at this string of words. We include the Greek words in parenthesis, but don't let that put you off.

- 1:1 -- Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will (thelēma) of God."
- 1:4 -- "For he chose (eklegomai) us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight."
- 1:5 -- "In love he predestined (proorizō) us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure (eudokia) and will (thelēma)...."
- 1:9 -- "And he made known to us the mystery of his will (thelēma) according to his good pleasure (eudokia), which he purposed (protithēmi) in Christ...."
- 1:11 -- In him we were also chosen (klēroō), having been predestined (proorizō) according to the plan (prothesis) of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose (boulē) of his will (thelēma)"

The gist is that God has a plan that He is bringing to fruition and you and I are part of it. When Paul says, "He chose us in him before the creation of the world," He is speaking of choosing the Church...

"Chose" has the idea of "to pick out, choose," here, especially, "select someone/something for oneself," to make a choice in accordance with significant preference. The next word, "predestined" focuses on the time of the choosing, "decide upon beforehand, predetermine." Another important word in our passage is "will," used three times in verses 1, 5 and 11. The noun thelēma, "will" means "what one wishes to happen, what is willed."

It's pretty clear by his vocabulary that Paul is emphasizing that the Gentile Church is not some accident of history, but part of God's carefully conceived and executed plan, begun before the ages, before the world was created, which comes to focus in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Chosen for Holiness (v4)

What we have been chosen for is:

1. To be holy and blameless in his sight,

2. To be adopted as sons.

"Holy" (the same word as "saints" in verse 1) means that we are consecrated to God, separated to him as his possession. God has claimed us, and we belong to him. **"Blameless"** means "without blemish" and was used of animals that were brought to the temple for sacrifice. These sacrificial animals given to God must be perfect -- not lame or diseased. Notice the sphere of this holiness and blamelessness -- **"in his sight."**

Any understanding of God's sovereign choosing that diminishes our personal responsibility for personal holiness and sanctification falls far short of the whole counsel of God.

Chosen to Be Adopted (vv5-6)

Now Paul introduces another concept that has been in the mind of God from before the beginning -- adoption.

"Having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved." (vv5-6)

In Paul's day, one could move from the lowest class to the highest by means of adoption. A beloved slave could be freed (manumitted) and then adopted by a Roman citizen. Upon adoption, the slave became a son, an heir, and a citizen. An adopted son now had the same rights and privileges as a naturally born son. While parents cannot choose what their biological children look like however, in adoption, a child is chosen with knowledge and option of choice. We are blessed by being adopted into God's family because God, knowing fully who we are (including our weaknesses, foibles, and sins) wanted us and so adopted us.

Key Verses:

"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, 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" (Ephesians 1:3-4)