

Ephesians 1

For those of you who were not part of our Summer session covering Mark's Gospel, what we do is different from the life groups. This is a teaching ministry where we cover a book of the Bible – going line by line and providing, hopefully, helpful commentary to make God's Word more understandable and applicable. You're always free to ask a question while I'm teaching, but when I'm finished, we'll have a few questions to hopefully further emphasize some key points covered in the Scripture. Your questions will be welcomed then as well. I will be teaching from the New King James version. Finally, for you note takers, I write out my teachings. Vickie will send the teaching out each week to help fill in any blanks you may have missed.

The book of Ephesians is actually a letter, or an epistle, that the Apostle Paul wrote. Paul went out to spread the Gospel throughout parts of Asia and Europe and started multiple churches on three separate missionary journeys. Following his third journey, he was accused of causing unrest at the temple in Jerusalem around AD 57. Between AD 57 and 59, the authorities held him in custody in Caesarea – a town north of Jerusalem on the Mediterranean coast. However, after Paul invoked his right as a Roman citizen to appeal to Caesar, soldiers took him to Rome c. AD 60. He spent two years there under house arrest waiting for his appeal, which he would get in an audience before Cesar Nero.

During those two years, Paul wrote at least four letters that we know of. These four letters were Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon. Fittingly, these are commonly known as his “prison epistles.” I want us to keep in mind this idea that Paul was in prison as we listen to the glorious and foundational truths and doctrine of our faith. While his imprisonment was not your typical in a dungeon or behind bars incarceration, he was not free. God used this forced down time to reveal to him vital truths of not only the wonders of the Gospel, but also what living life under the Gospel can and should look like.

Paul spent more time in Ephesus than he did in most places. If you want to earn some extra credit, you can read about his time in Ephesus in Acts 19 and 20. There was no one particular church in Ephesus this letter was intended. This letter is for all the churches in Ephesus, so this is why it is called the epistle to the Ephesians. Church historians claim Paul wrote this epistle sometime between AD 60 and 62. These historians also believe this would be about five years before he would be martyred by beheading in a second trip to Rome.

The Epistle to the Ephesians is a very logical book. The most simplistic way to break it down is the first three chapters are focused on what God has done for you through your faith in Jesus. Chapters 4-6 lays out what your life should look like as a result of realizing, internalizing, and living as a result of the truths of what God has done.

¹ Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus:

For those of you who joined us over the Summer, you'll recall that the original 12 disciples of Jesus were reduced by one due to Judas Iscariot hanging himself after betraying the LORD. After Jesus' ascension, but before Pentecost that brought the Holy Spirit, Peter, as Peter often did before the Holy Spirit came upon him, took it upon himself and quoted Psalm 109:8 as the basis to replace Judas. Through the casting of lots, or a roll of the dice, they chose Matthias. The thing is, we never again here about Matthias.

To be an apostle, you had to have seen the resurrected Jesus. Saul of Tarsus, Paul's original name, was a highly trained scholar of the Old Testament. He was also a zealous persecutor against the

early church. He was believed to be present and an assenting member of the mob that had Steven stoned – the first Christian martyr.

On the road to Damascus, he was confronted by the voice and possibly face of Jesus. This was the point of Paul's conversion to becoming a believer in and follower of the LORD. Not long after this conversion, he would spend at least two years in Arabia. While we don't know exactly what he was doing there, some Bible scholars have speculated he received personal teaching from Jesus. Paul acknowledged in 1 Corinthians 15:8, "Then last of all He [the resurrected Jesus] was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time." Accordingly, I believe Paul was God's choice to be the 12th apostle. Clearly he believed this as well due to his claim it was God's will he be one.

For some reason, components of the church have chosen to isolate the title of "saint" for the super-duper faithful believers. Here in the first verse, Paul calls all believers saints. The Greek word used here is "hagios." This is interpreted as "holy ones" or "set apart ones." Keep these definitions in mind - we'll get into more why each believer can, and should, be called a saint.

In just this first chapter, we're going to read in these 23 verses *twelve* times the prepositional phrase beginning with the preposition "***in***" followed by Christ Jesus, Jesus Christ, Christ, Him, Himself, and the Beloved. The preposition "***in***" is used to show that something is enclosed, surrounded, or taking place within a specific space, time, or condition. Let me try to simplify this. Imagine you've never gone to a tropical island. You've read about it. You've seen pictures. It looks and sounds amazing. However, should you travel and actually be on and in that tropical island, it's different, right? You are experiencing the fullness of what it's like to be a part of being and living ***in*** this paradise.

As we go through this Epistle, I will repeatedly remind you that because of your faith in Jesus, you are placed ***in*** all that Jesus is. For the purpose of trying to help you conceptualize this, God, by your faith, is putting you ***into*** the place, or tropical island, of Jesus. This is what Paul is trying to convey to us in this letter – even in the very first verse. He is going to gloriously provide the foundational earthly and heavenly blessings God has poured out on the believer who has been placed ***in*** Jesus. If you are willing to give this some sincere thought, I promise you that you will become overwhelmed by the goodness of God.

² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Verse two is a very common greeting from Paul in his letters. I could spend multiple sessions on just the word grace. In its simplest form, grace is getting blessings that we don't deserve. This is different from mercy, which is not getting the consequences of our sin that we do deserve. I've always liked the acronym of grace:

God's
Riches
At
Christ's
Expense

Prior to our coming to faith in Jesus, we cannot have the peace of God. Our sin has separated us from God, so we cannot have peace with God if we're separated from Him. We'll learn next week that it is only by God's grace – not by any good we have done or evil we have not done – that makes soul saving faith in Him available. God didn't have to choose to extend His forgiveness for humanity – for each of us, but He did. God didn't have to send His Son, Jesus, to die on a cross as a sacrifice for our sins, but He did. God didn't have to send the Holy Spirit to convict us of our sin and reveal the truth of who God is,

but He did. He did all of this by His grace, which comes from a place of a deeper love than most of us can imagine.

You must first receive the grace of God – the grace of His love and forgiveness – before you can experience the peace of God. His peace is one that passes all understanding. The peace that overwhelms you in times that, otherwise, would be non-existent in moments of pain, anxiety, and fear.

Jesus, or in Hebrew, Yashua, was His name. Fittingly, Yeshua means “salvation” or the “Lord is salvation.” “Christ” means the chosen or anointed one. “Lord” is Jesus’ title. Now...on to verse... 3! I’m telling you brothers and sisters, this letter is so full of amazing truth and revelation of God!

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,

What does the word “every” mean to you? Vickie has taught me the great and wise practice of looking up definitions of words. I looked up “every,” and one definition says, “*used to refer to each individual person or thing in a group of three or more, considered one by one without exception.*” What’s the key phrase in this definition? “Without exception.” God has blessed you and me with every spiritual blessing, *without exception*, in the heavenly places... in Christ.

Upon your confession that Jesus is the Son of God, paid the price for your sins on the cross, was resurrected and lives today, and He is your Lord and Savior, God placed you in Christ. He is the possessor of every spiritual blessing, with no exceptions, in the heavenly places. This sounds amazing, but what are these spiritual blessings in the heavenly places? God has placed in each believer – in each of us – with no exceptions, spiritual blessings such as forgiveness, adoption, redemption, the Holy Spirit, grace, peace, and so much more. We didn’t earn these blessings. We don’t deserve these blessings. We’re not worthy of these blessings. Purely on our faith alone, God freely and graciously places in us a bottomless treasure trove of His riches.

What is meant by “heavenly places?” This is the spiritual realm where God resides – above the trials, pain, and suffering of this earthly realm. A reasonable question to ask is what good are spiritual blessings in the heavenly places in light of what I’m dealing with in this life now? First and foremost, at least for me, the revelation of a heavenly place makes me realize this life is not all there is to my existence. In other words, heavenly places brings to light the truth of hope for something better beyond this life. That being said, I don’t believe these spiritual blessings in the heavenly places can only be experienced in heaven. If that were true, why would God give them to us in this life?

He gives us every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places to be a testimony to the truth of who He is and His character. By being in Christ, we are in the place of God’s holiness, love, goodness, mercy, grace, and endless other components of His Being. Just as Jesus won the victory of good over evil – of life over death – at the cross, these spiritual blessings we’re given to allow us to be victorious and overcomers in this life. Can they eliminate our struggles and suffering? Possibly, but maybe not always. What they absolutely can do, if we’re willing to believe, is lift us up above the pain and allow us to experience the greater power of hope in Christ. Forgiveness reconnects us to God and its power allows us to let go of things that have been dragging us down. Adoption and redemption opens up the door to being loved and valued unlike anything we’ve experienced.

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,

Verses 4 and 5 bring up, at least for me, both a wonderful and potentially challenging topic – being chosen and predestined for adoption. The idea of being chosen by God, in of itself, is glorious. It's kind of a mystery for me. A famous theologian, D.L. Moody, echoes my thoughts about being chosen by God, "*I'm so glad God chose me before I was born, because I don't think He would have chosen me after I've lived.*" But verse 4 is very clear – He chose each of us – before the foundation of the world. God is eternal – He has no beginning and no end. He also sees all of eternity at the same time. He chose every believer before He created the heavens and earth. Not only were we chosen, but also that, as His chosen ones, we should be holy and without blame before Him...in love.

It's the idea of being chosen and predestined to adoption that creates a potential stumbling block. There was another theologian, John Calvin, that believed that God eternal-decreed and pre-determined the fate of every person before birth. Some people (the "elect") are chosen for salvation, while others are chosen for damnation (the "reprobate"). Personally, I think this is blasphemous. This completely invalidates, in my mind, John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." I read this verse as an open invitation to *every* human being to be saved. I don't believe that God would send His only begotten Son to the cross for only some of His creation. If that were true, then you would have to change John 3:16 to, "For God so loved only those He chose that He gave His only begotten Son." You wouldn't need "whoever believes in Him" because it wouldn't matter – they were fated to believe.

How I found peace with the idea of being chosen and predestined was from Romans 8:29a, "For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son." Hang in there with me on this. Because God is eternal and can see all of eternity at all times, He knows whether or not each of us is going to choose to believe in Him. Because of this foreknowledge, He could then predestine us to be conformed to the image of His Son. In other words, every single human has the ability to choose whether or not to believe in God – to believe in Jesus. I believe God gave us this ability to choose to magnify or enhance the potential of a loving relationship with Him. I believe with all my heart God wants everyone to repent and believe. I'll try to wrap this topic up by saying I believe God offers everyone to be chosen, but only those who choose to believe are the chosen ones and are, therefore, predestined to be His adopted children.

Not only are we predestined to be adopted, but also this is done according to the good pleasure of His will. Did you hear that? You are chosen and predestined to adoption by God through Jesus for the good pleasure of His will. God delights in you. You are His good pleasure. Do you believe that? Personally, I struggle with this most of the time. I completely relate to Paul's statement in Romans 7:15, "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do." (NIV) But that is a works-based mentality. God loves us not because we're worthy, but because He created us in love. From His grace, He looks past our unworthiness and remembers our original creation. He loves us enough to sacrifice His Son, so we can be redeemed and go through the process of returning to our original design. From His will, which is a place of love and grace, each of you are His good pleasure.

⁶to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.

Again, not because we earned, deserved, or were entitled to all these blessings, but only by His grace He made us accepted in the Beloved. The word accepted can also be interpreted "embraced." Beloved means Jesus, so here, again, His grace puts us in the place of being accepted, or embraced, *in* Jesus. Have you ever felt unaccepted? I have – even to this very day. I know much of this is my own insecurity, but regardless of the why, it is how I feel. While feelings should never be dismissed, they can often override a truth. Verse 6 could not be clearer regarding the truth that if you believe in Jesus, then you are accepted and embraced into the being of Jesus.

⁷ In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace

What next mountain-top experience do we receive when we're in Jesus? Redemption through His blood which brings the forgiveness of sins for the rest of our earthly existence. Redemption is an important word to understand to help you take in what Jesus did. The concept is buying back what was once yours. Before Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden, humanity was God's creation and His possession. Adam's choice to obey Satan's temptation as opposed to God's commandment placed him and every other human being after him, other than Jesus, under new ownership – Satan. From a place of seemingly endless love, God wanted us back, and the price would be His Son's blood shed through His scourging and crucifixion.

Again, with God being holy, our sin had to be dealt with for us to be reconciled to Him. The price of our redemption – God buying us back didn't cost us anything, but it cost Him everything. Also again, He did this not because we deserved it, but solely according to the riches of His grace.

⁸ which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, ⁹ having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself,

How many times have you asked, or maybe wondered, "What is God's will?" This is a big question, and to help us work through the answers, I believe He has a will for each of us as individuals, and I believe He connects the wills for each of us into a greater collective, or corporate will for the entirety of His creation. Understanding what may seem like a mystery of knowing exactly what God's collective or corporate will is might help us figure out, or reverse engineer, His will for our lives. Verse 10 provides us the answer to God's overarching will for His creation.

¹⁰ that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him.

Jon Courson explains this, "In due time – in His time, God's will is everything in heaven and earth will be gathered together in Christ, around Christ, and for Christ." At the very least, this unveiling of God's overarching will seems fair given what Jesus went through to make it possible. Again, look at the preposition "*in*." It's used in this verse twice – all things which are in heaven and in earth will be placed into the Being of Jesus. When I look around at this crazy, sin-drenched world, I can't help but to ask when will this happen? We'll get a taste of it during the Millennium when Jesus will return again and rule and reign from Jerusalem.

¹¹ In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, ¹² that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

Yet another blessing of being placed in Jesus is we receive an inheritance as a result of our trust in Christ. What is an inheritance? I looked this up, and I like one of the definitions, "*to come into possession of or receive especially as a right or divine portion.*" The inheritance we receive is all that Jesus has and is. Let's take a quick inventory of what we've received so far in Him:

- Every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places*
- Predestined and chosen to be adopted according to His good pleasure
- Accepted
- Redeemed and forgiven

Just try to take this list in, and it's not even close to being complete. More importantly, we didn't have to do *one* thing to receive all of this other than believe.

¹³ In Him you also *trusted*, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.

The list of what we receive *in* Jesus continues – we receive the word of truth, which is the Gospel that unveils the lone key to our salvation. As I've gotten older, the need for truth has become more essential to me. I don't like being confused, and I don't like being lied to. Even if it's bad news, I can handle the truth because it does not change. Truth provides a foundation that I can stand on and know it's not going to move. For me, one of the real fruits of knowing the truth is it helps me more readily recognize the lies.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the truth – I'm certain of it. The love, mercy, and grace behind it overwhelms me as it is so foreign to how the rest of the world thinks or acts. The Gospel opens the door to a whole new world that includes that list I provided earlier and much, much more. The reason for my confidence in the truth of the Gospel is as the key blessing of belief is I have been given, as each of you have, the promised Holy Spirit. This co-equal member of the triune Godhead has many responsibilities. The one that Paul is pointing out is He is the guaranty of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession. The Holy Spirit is, for lack of better words, a down payment towards each believer's redemption. He is the vehicle that helps fulfill Philippians 1:6, "He who has begun a good work in you will complete *it* until the day of Jesus Christ." Each of us is that purchased possession. The purchase price? Jesus' shed blood on a cross. If any of you ever feel you don't have value, meditate on this truth alone, and I'm certain God will replace the lie that you're not valued.

¹⁵ Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, ¹⁶ do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers:

Beginning in verse 15, Paul outlines the first of two prayers he provides in this epistle. I hear the voice of a shepherd in this prayer. He's in prison, but he's not thinking of himself. He's thinking of his flock. He's heard through messengers of their faith and love for each other. This good news leads him to want to give thanks to God through prayer. This is convicting as the majority of my prayers are for those who are suffering and hurting. This prayer is a good reminder for each of us to praise God for the blessings in our lives and pray for them.

¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, ¹⁸ the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and what *is* the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power

Paul lays out a beautiful laundry list of requests from God to the Ephesians. May we each ask of God the same thing for ourselves and for those He has brought into our lives. Let's look at this list of requests:

- The spirit of wisdom and the revelation in the knowledge of Him.
- The eyes of our understanding be enlightened.
- We may know the hope of His calling.
- The riches of the glory of the inheritance of His saints

- The exceeding greatness of His power.

I could spend a lot of time on each of these, but in the interest of getting through the rest of this chapter and not putting you into a deeper sleep, I'm just going to zero in on the knowing the hope of His calling. If you get a phone call, then you must assume someone is attempting to reach out to you – that person is calling you. Jesus is on the phone to every believer – calling each of us to inform us we have hope as a result of our faith. The long-term hope is that we will spend eternity with Him fully healed, free of pain, and void of sin and Satan's hassling.

The hope of our calling isn't just an eternal hope. God gives us gifts and abilities to give us a hope of our God-designed purpose in His kingdom – in this life – in Him. He called you to be His adopted child, and you, thankfully, took that call. But He doesn't stop calling. He's called you to put to use the gifts He's given you for the purpose of glorifying Him and helping others. This is such a blessing – knowing you have a purpose – knowing that your Lord and Savior has specifically given you a hope in this life and the next of His calling.

²⁰ which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated *Him* at His right hand in the heavenly *places*, ²¹ far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.

Looking at this list, Paul tells us that all of this became possible in Christ when the Father raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places. This is the fullness of the victory. Jesus defeated death in His resurrection for those who believe. That alone is glorious. However, the fullness of His victory is what becomes available to those who believe – what Paul prays for in this list.

Notice the location of the throne of God – it is *far* above Satan and his evil forces. Genesis 3 reminds us that Satan is a created being. The Creator is always greater than the created. Satan is no match for God. He could flick him into the abyss like we flick a gnat off our arm. I just wish He would do that now! Just remember that one day, each of you will arrive in that far above place – His throne of grace – and hear Him say, “Well done, my good and faithful servant. Enter the joy of My kingdom.”

²² And He put all *things* under His feet, and gave Him *to be* head over all *things* to the church, ²³ which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

Verse 22 reminds us that all things are under Jesus' reign, and He is to be the head of all things to the church. What does “all” mean? It's the same concept of what we talked about with “every.” It means the entirety with no exceptions. There is nothing that doesn't fall under the reign and rule of Jesus. Our last verse reminds us that not only is Jesus the head over all things to the church, but also the church is His body. We are the fullness of Him, and He fills us with Him.

I don't know about you, but I was truly overwhelmed by what God has provided just in this first chapter. Moreover, He provides all of this solely from a place of love and grace. We did nothing to earn or deserve any of this. We simply chose to believe in Jesus. After learning all of this, there is a line that Paul used three times in this chapter that I believe is a great way to respond to all of what God has provided us in Christ, “to the praise of His glory.”

How do we possibly respond to this galactic outpouring of love, goodness, power, and grace? At the very least, we should respond with thanksgiving and praise of His glory. When you really try to take in all that God has done, words of thanksgiving and praise are a good start, but they're nowhere near enough. Our words of praise and thanksgiving should translate into action. James told us that faith

without works is dead. Well...words of praise and thanksgiving don't mean nearly as much if they're not backed up with a life that is led resembling that praise and thanksgiving. When we get to chapters 4-6, Paul will provide us details on what that life should look like. For now, the best way to prove your gratitude and praise for God is to love Him with all your strength, heart, soul, and mind, and love those He has brought into your life.

Questions:

- What does God's grace mean to you?
- Describe your experience of one of the spiritual blessings in the heavenly places. Examples: forgiveness, adoption, redemption, the Holy Spirit, grace, peace
- Which from the list of inheritance Paul provides means the most to you and why?
 - Every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places*
 - Predestined and chosen to be adopted according to His good pleasure
 - Accepted
 - Redeemed and forgiven