

Saint Pauls Cathedral, Melbourne
Bible Study, Sunday 18th October 2020

THE EPISTLE OF EPHESIANS

A Quick Recap

The apostle Paul wrote this epistle around 61-63 A.D. from his prison dungeon in Rome. It was addressed to the believers in Ephesus and its surrounding towns.

Paul ministered in Ephesus in his second and third missionary journeys. He stayed here for three years and has a strong bond with them (Acts 18-20).

Paul's purpose of writing this letter is to address great themes that pertain to the Christian's position and spiritual blessings in Christ.

The theme "The Believer's Riches In Christ" best fits this epistle

The first three chapters is doctrinal talking about our blessings in Christ. The last three are practical chapters that teaches us how to live in Christ.

Ephesians 1:1-23

ESV

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are 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 in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸ which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹ making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

¹¹ In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, ¹² so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. ¹³ In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

¹⁵ For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, ¹⁶ I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, ¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, ¹⁸ having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might ²⁰ that 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 rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. ²² And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

NIV

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To God's holy people in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus: ² Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. ⁴ For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace ⁸ that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, ⁹ he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, ¹⁰ to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

¹¹ In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, ¹² in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. ¹³ And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

¹⁵ For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, ¹⁶ I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. ¹⁷ I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. ¹⁸ I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, ¹⁹ and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength ²⁰ he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, ²¹ far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. ²² And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Our Spiritual Possessions In Christ (1:3-14)

What is your feeling after reading this passage?

What has God blessed us with? (v.3)

What kinds of blessings does this include? (v.4-14)

{CLUE → find the words "in him" and "he"}

Why is the "doctrine of election" important?

What can we learn from this?

2. First Prayer: for enlightenment (1:15-23)

How did Paul describe the Ephesians believers? What did it result in Paul? (v.15-16)

In verse 17, What is it that Paul ask God the glorious Father to give them? Why?

In verse 18-19a, What is it that Paul ask God the glorious Father to give them? So that they may ... ? (three things)

Paul shift focus in the middle of verse 19 to talk about Christ. What do v.19b-23 teach us about Christ?"

What is one area of your life you struggle to surrender to His complete authority?

``What do you need to do to submit to Him in that area?

TEACHING POINTS'

The big idea of Ephesians 1:3-14 is one of the most spectacular reminders in the Bible of our position in Christ and His great love toward us. It is filled with rich theological doctrines, each of which has amazing practical implications. Paul actually spends most of the first three chapters in Ephesians laying out these important spiritual truths and then most of the last three chapters pointing out how they are to be applied in the daily lives of believers.

Whenever you feel discouraged or useless, you should turn to this passage and read it. After reading it you will feel the comfort and peace of the assurance of your relationship with Jesus fill you.

Below we will discuss many of these spiritual principles one by one.

v.3 – “*has poured out into our lives*”. Notice that Paul focuses on “spiritual” blessings. In many modern churches much focus is placed on physical blessings. Health and wealth are emphasized. The prosperity gospel is gaining in popularity in many places in the world. Proponents of the prosperity gospel teach that God wants His followers to be healthy and rich.

Chris Gore, a prominent teacher in Bethel Supernatural School of Ministry, said “it is always God’s will to heal” and “there is no divine purpose for being sick.” Focus is placed on physical healing rather than the gospel, sin, justification, sanctification, etc. Such teaching is dangerous because it give believers a false hope that God will always heal. When He chooses not to (for His own perfect reasons), people are disillusioned and may turn away from Him. Even if they are healed, the focus becomes miracles rather than Jesus.

The prosperity gospel is a heretical teaching that is not supported in the Bible. What the Bible does say is here. God blesses us with every spiritual blessing. Forgiveness. Peace. Redemption. Grace. Mercy. Love. Sanctification. Answered prayer. And much more. God is not stingy in what He gives to us. He wants what is best for us.

Application: When you are discouraged take some time and sit down in a quiet place to reflect on God's blessings in your life. List out those blessings one by one. Write them down on a paper. As you begin to remember God's blessings, it will encourage you and begin to change your outlook.

v.4 – *“He chose us before the foundation of the world”*. Here is one of the key passages in the Bible on the doctrine of election. This doctrine teaches us that God predestined the elect to salvation and He did it before the world began. Since He chose us before the world began, then it is not on a basis of our own merit or good deeds. It was His choice, His grace, and His power that accomplished our salvation.

It is as if each person in the world is on an escalator going down to hell. If left completely to ourselves, we will happily keep going there. But God did not leave us to ourselves. Instead He reaches down and takes some from this escalator and then puts them on an escalator going to heaven.

God's election of believers cannot be divorced from our own responsibility. Throughout the Bible people's responsibility to respond to God's calling and place their faith in Him is emphasized. Over and over Scripture commands people to “believe” and to “repent.” All people are responsible for their own reactions to the gospel. We must respond to God's offer of salvation. We must accept God's free gift. When we do it is not due to our own goodness. Our positive response is only enabled by His working in us first.

1 John 4:19 – *We love because He first loved us.*

Throughout the Bible God's sovereignty and man's responsibility are held in tension, like two sides of one coin, a paradox. Many divisions and debates have ripped the church because of disagreements on this issue. We must remember Paul's instruction in Ephesians 4 to be “diligent to maintain the unity.” Some aspects of God's sovereignty and people's responsibility and how they work together are hard to understand. While we should study and seek to come to a deeper knowledge, this quest should not lead us to a place of division and anger toward other believers.

A person once said that the door to heaven has a sign on it. On our side of the entrance it says, “Your choice.” On the other side it says, “Elected by God.” Rather than seek to separate these two Scriptural truths, we can continue to hold them in tension and recognize the importance of both

Application: If you are saved, God has elected you. You are safe and secure in His loving arms. He will never leave you or forsake you. Since it is God's work, you should be humble. Give Him the glory and the praise. Meanwhile since He started this work in your life, you must depend on Him and not your own strength to finish it.

Philippians 1:6 – *Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*

v.5 – “*Adopted as His children*”. – Adoption. It is one of the most exciting teachings in the Bible. Our holy, eternal, all-powerful, all-loving God has chosen to adopt us as His sons and daughters. We were His enemies. We were poor, sinful, and wretched. He not only loves us. He not only accepts us. He then adopts us, giving us all the rights and blessings due to children.

Because of this we have a personal relationship with the creator of the universe. Since He is our Father, we can come to Him at any time with any request.

I myself have four children. If a stranger came up to me and asked for something, I may or may not help depending on the situation. But if one of my children ask, then I will help because I am their father. Their cries are not always pleasant. As a baby or a toddler, they may scream in the night. The words they use are not always eloquent. The way that they ask is not always correct. But since we have a relationship, I will respond.

We have that same kind of relationship with our heavenly father. Because of this we know He hears us. More than this, we know that He will never abandon us. He will protect us. He will teach us. He will remain faithful and loving to us no matter what we do.

In verse 5 it tells us that He did this “according to the purpose of His will.” Once again, we see the principle of sovereign election. He chose us.

Application: When was the last time you thanked Him for adopting you? What should an adopted child do? What should you do to show your appreciation?

v.7 “*In Him we have redemption through His blood.*” – Redemption means that He paid the price for our sins. He freed us from our slavery to sin.

I heard a story of a girl who was being taken to a slave market to be sold. A kind gentleman felt compassion for her. So he bought her and handed her certificate of freedom and sent her away free. But she started following him saying again and again, “my redeemer.” She wanted to spend her life serving such a gracious redeemer who paid the price for her freedom.

Jesus is our redeemer. He offered His own life as a sacrifice. He paid for our freedom with His own blood. Redemption through Jesus was God’s plan of salvation from the beginning.

Application: What will you do with your redeemed life? Will you be like the freed slave girl who followed her redeemer?

v.7 – “*According to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us.*” – God is not stingy. His forgiveness is not stingy. He does not sprinkle blessings on us, a little here and a little there. He doesn’t count them out carefully. His blessings are lavished on us.

Note how He gives to us. It is “according to” His riches. How rich is He? How big is God’s bank account? How vast is His estate? Of course it is infinite. He never runs out of blessings. They are like the oil of the widow women in the time of Elisha. She kept pouring and pouring out of the one jar.

When I was a kid I used to look forward to Christmas because I would receive a lot of gifts. It was so exciting to open them up. The night before I could hardly sleep. As I have grown the source of my excitement has changed. I find that I am excited by giving gifts to my children. I love to find them special gifts which they will enjoy. It is a delight to see their childlike joy at the special things my wife and I have prepared for them. At this age there is

little I need or want. God has been good to us. But it fills my heart with happiness to see my little ones enjoying the blessings we are sharing with them. And yet if they fight and argue over those gifts, it saddens us to see them being selfish with the things which they should generously share and enjoy together.

Somehow I think that God is like this. It is a delight to Him to share His good things with us. But when we misuse these things or selfishly hold on to them instead of sharing, it also saddens Him. His resources are unlimited. He wants to give us even more. But He also wants us to use these things for Him. As we prove ourselves to be good stewards then it will give our Redeemer great joy.

James 1:17 – *Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father.*

v.9 “*Making known to us the mystery of His will.*” – God’s plan of salvation is progressive. Certainly there were many hints of it in the Old Testament, but it was not always completely clear. He reveals His plan for people step by step.

What is the mystery? Paul further clarifies by saying “set forth in Christ.” It is the plan of salvation by God’s Son dying on the cross. Even Jesus’ own disciples had a very hard time accepting that this was going to happen, much less all the other Jews who were expecting a political savior.

Now we know and understand God’s plan of redemption. He sent His perfect Son as a sacrifice to pay for our sins and then raised Jesus from the dead to prove that His plan worked! He did this in the “fullness of time.” At just the right time.

Salvation is offered to all people everywhere in order to “unite all things in him.” Later in this book, we will see that salvation came to the Gentiles. All peoples can be united through Christ as every person who believes in Him will be part of His one big family.

v. 11 – “*In Him we have obtained an inheritance.*” – Here is yet another of the amazing spiritual blessings we have in Christ. Many people go through their entire lives trying to build up their bank accounts. Years of overtime and stress are endured for the sake of increasing the size of one’s nest egg. And yet no one can take this with them. What they have earned is left to their children, who may or may not use it wisely.

But when a person comes to Christ, he is the rightful heir of a heavenly inheritance. It is as if this inheritance is in a trust account. Not all is received immediately. When a minor receives an inheritance it is often kept in trust and he receives a yearly stipend until he is of age and mature enough to manage it well. For believers this is the case as well. We have already received the inheritance and at the same time not yet. We have received the Holy Spirit and eternal life and the power to have victory over sin and adoption as sons and daughters to the king. At the same time, our inheritance is not yet fully realized. One day in the future we will receive the “keys” to our heavenly home and our bodies will be upgraded to version 2.0, perfect and sinless.

Application: Every person who receives an inheritance should be good stewards of the assets he needs to manage. We too, must be good stewards of the gifts and resources the Lord has entrusted to us. What is one resource God has blessed you with? How can you use this for Him as a good steward?

v.11 – *“Having been predestined”* Romans 8:29-30 – For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

As seen in the first verses of this chapter, God predestined believers to adoption. In this chapter in Ephesians we see this whole process. Predestination to adoption through redemption because of His grace. Then receiving an inheritance sealed by the Holy Spirit. We see this process above in Romans 8. From the very begin of the process to the end it is God taking the initiative.

Jesus told the disciples in John 15:16, “You did not choose me, but I chose you.”

God chose us first. People often ask, “what practical value does the doctrine of predestination hold?” The answer is “a lot.”

Firstly, it is a comforting doctrine. Since God did not choose us because of our own good deeds, we know He will also not abandon us when we do wrong.

I have often heard parents in the overseas country where I serve tell their children things like, “You are naughty. I don’t want you anymore. If you keep doing this [wrong thing], I will leave you here.” It is an oft used parenting method to threaten abandonment. How must kids feel who hear that all the time. Even if they don’t believe it on the surface, there has to be a part of them that wonders if their parents really do want them and if maybe one day they might be abandoned.

For believers, we need never fear God forsaking us. He made the decision to adopt us before He even created the world. He isn’t going to change His mind.

Secondly, it is a God exalting doctrine. The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. Our reason for existence is to bring glory to God. The doctrine of election brings God glory because it highlights His sovereignty, His power, and His grace.

v.12 – *“That we might be to the praise of His glory”* – Why did God do this for us? Yes, He loves us. Yes, He wants to bless us. But here we see the ultimate motivation. It is for His glory.

Our mission in life is to declare God’s holiness and glory.

Someone once asked me, “Is God prideful? If we ask people to praise us or if we tell people how great we are, then that is pride. But God does this all the time? How can a perfect God seek His own glory.”

This is a good question. Sooner or later, most Christians will ask it. I answered with an illustration.

Let’s say that I am an author. I spend thousands of hours to write a book. It’s a very good book. But just before I get it published someone steals my manuscripts. They then publish the book in their own name as if it is theirs. After that they get the credit and the profit from the book that I wrote. As the rightful author, what should I do? Am I justified in taking up the case, going to the bookstores or to the court and showing proof that I wrote the book? I believe I am. It is my work, my creation. It is right and just that I receive the credit. Is that

pride? No, that is justice. On the other hand, the person who is trying to steal the credit is sinning. He is trying to take what is rightfully mine and that is not just.

The same is true for a painting. If you painted a beautiful picture, you would not like it if someone erased your signature and added their own.

This can help us to understand why God seeks praise and glory for all the things He has done. He is the Creator. He is the redeemer. He is the King. He deserves the glory for what He has done. If someone else tries to take glory for themselves, it is unjust and robbing God.

When we try to get glory for ourselves for our successes or achievements we are taking it away from its rightful owner, God.

Isaiah 42:8 – *I am the Lord; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols.*

Application: Have you had any recent successes or achievements? How you can give God glory for these?

V. 13 – “Sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.” A seal was used by ancient kings to show their authority. It was also used to issue decrees. We remember also that when Jesus was buried in the tomb, Rome put their seal on it to show that it was off limits, under their safekeeping. Any person who tampered with this tomb would be dealt with by the Roman Empire.

Here we see that God seals us in much the same way. Firstly, He is the authority. Sitting on His throne in heaven (Isaiah 6), He has divine authority over our salvation. And He has chosen to use this authority to decree our salvation, even from before the beginning of the world. As proof of His intentions to safeguard our salvation, He gives us the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit seals our salvation, announcing that we are off limits to Satan and his demons. No tampering allowed! Those who have been predestined and adopted as God’s children are not then left to their own devices. We are under His protection. It is a great place to be!

A child in the playground may live in fear of bullies. But when his older brother is walking beside him, he will have confidence and know he is safe.

The Holy Spirit is our strongman, protecting our house from spiritual attacks.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 – *Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.*

v. 15 – Paul heard of the Ephesians’ testimony – The testimony of the Ephesians’ faith spread out. One area where they were strong was in love, love toward all the saints. We see in these verses that since Paul left the Ephesians were growing. Their testimony also encouraged others.

Application: Not all the churches had a good testimony. The Corinthian church, for example, had many problems. Sometimes one of the top reasons given for not coming to Christ is that Christians are hypocrites. Sometimes it is a general claim and sometimes people pull out specific examples. But this should not be.

What is your testimony? What would the people say about you? What would your family say? What would your classmates say? What would your co-workers say? Let us strive to live in such a way that our good deeds glorify God and attract people to Him rather than repel them.

V.15-16 - Paul continually thanked God and prayed for the Ephesians – Paul had a heart for discipleship. The people he ministered to were not numbers on a stat sheet. They had names and faces. He cared for them deeply and wanted to see them grow and be fruitful. When Paul left a place, he didn't forget about the people he had shared with. Neither did he leave them to their own devices. Though he knew that they were in God's hands, he did not just move on and "let God do his work." Instead he followed up, which is why we have his epistles in the New Testament, a record of Paul's discipleship efforts in connecting to and supporting those he shared with.

While the Ephesians were not perfect, Paul was very thankful for the good things he had heard about them. Throughout his epistles, Paul is very positive toward those he is discipling. Each of them had their fair share of sins, but he did not focus on these. Instead he focused on their strengths. And he was thankful to God for the work He had done in their hearts.

Whenever he thought of them (which was often), he immediately turned to God to first thank Him and then pray for them. A leader who constantly complains about those he serves needs to re-examine his own heart. From Paul we also can learn how to have a lifestyle of prayer. Part of making prayer natural is to do it often. Sure, we can have set times and places. But we should also pray spontaneously for people.

Application: When you think of a friend from way back, say a prayer for them. When you think of a person you haven't seen at church for a while, pray for them. When you think of your Bible study or Sunday School students, don't complain. Instead thank God for the positive things you see in their lives and say a prayer for them.

v.17-19 – Paul prays deep and meaningful prayers for them – Note the type of prayers Paul prays for the Ephesians. They are rich and powerful. He prays predominantly for their spiritual knowledge and growth. What exactly does he pray for?

- Wisdom (17)
- Enlightened eyes (18)
- To know the hope of their calling (18)
- To know the riches of the inheritance (18)
- To better understand God's power (19)

We don't see prayers for career, exams, health, business, or long lives. It doesn't mean that he never prayed for these things. But these things were secondary to spiritual growth and we see that reflected in the main content of his prayers.

Application: What is the main content of your prayers? What do you pray for yourself and others? Don't stop praying for daily needs and problems which you face. But do focus more on the most important things, which are spiritual growth and character. Pray for your kid's sickness and school. But also pray for them to become patient, to grow in discernment, to

be sensitive to sin, and to love God’s Word. Pray for your job. But also pray against temptation and ask God to turn your weaknesses into strengths.

Every believer should strive to know God and His truth more – Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians was centered on their growth in “wisdom,” “knowledge,” and “enlightenment.” Home to many false teachings, the world seeks to distract, deceive, and mislead. Trivialities vie for our time and attention. Media and pop culture seek to control how we think.

But truth is not relative. It doesn’t change with the times. Unlike science books, which constantly update to offer corrections on failed evolutionary theories, the Bible does not change. It is God’s absolute truth, containing everything we need to live a godly life in this world. Being able to read God’s divine revelation to us is a profound blessing. And we should not let it go to waste. Believers should diligently strive to study and obey the Bible, putting its life transforming principles into action.

ⁱ <https://studyandobey.com/inductive-bible-study/ephesians-studies/ephesians/>