

Ephesians I

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Introduction.

- A. Of all the chapters of the book of Ephesians, Ephesians 1 is probably the most challenging for the student of the word. It doesn't contain practical advice on marriage and the family; it doesn't describe the organization and the work of the church. Instead, it deals with much more abstract and cosmic topics, nothing less than the origin of the plan of God for mankind and the way that God has brought that plan to fruition.
- B. Sadly, such a large-scale discussion of the divine purpose has proven ripe for misinterpretation and misapplication. This chapter is one of the proof texts for the false doctrine of Calvinism, and when we approach it without taking into account the context of the Bible, it's easy to see where others get off track.
- C. Let's remedy that problem this evening by beginning our study of Ephesians 1 with a verse that isn't even in Ephesians, Psalm 19:1. This passage describes the way that things should be, and the way that things generally are. It's only fitting that all of God's creation should praise its Creator. We see this ongoing glorification of God when we look up at the stars at night, or stand by the ocean at sunrise, or admire the view from a mountaintop. To the spiritually minded, all of those things proclaim the greatness of the Almighty.
- D. However, there's one part of God's creation that does not continually glorify Him. Ironically enough, it's the most impressive portion of that creation, the part that should praise Him more loudly than anything else, yet says nothing. That part is mankind. We could choose to glorify God constantly, with pure lips and lives that are dedicated to Him, but instead, we choose to sin. We mar the beauty of His creation with the ugliness of rebellion against Him. Such ugliness is precisely what does not befit the glory of God. It's a discord in the harmony of the universe. We see the story of how God solves this problem in Ephesians 1.

I. God's Solution.

- A. A natural place for us to begin our study of this story is with the first big chunk of text, Ephesians 1:1-14. As we read through this text, there are a couple of key ideas that we need to take note of if we're going to understand it. The first is the phrase, "to the praise of His glory." In different forms, it appears in vss. 6, 12, and 14. We need to zero in on this phrase because it tells us what God's motive is in His dealings with us. He wants to make sure that mankind glorifies Him just as the rest of the creation does. In a human, this would be arrogant. In God, it's just God making sure that He's getting what He deserves.
- B. Second, we see the word "predestined" pop up a couple times, in vss. 5 and 11. This is the kind of passage that makes ordinary Christians in the pews nervous, because it looks like the Bible is teaching something we don't believe in. In reality, though, we don't have to be worried. Instead, we need to look to the text itself to figure out what this word is talking about. The best textual take on this appears in Ephesians 1:11-12. Vs. 11 describes God's action—predestining us. Vs. 12 describes the result of that action, and that result is that we who hope in Christ are now, because of that predestination, able to praise His glory forever in heaven.
- C. Let's think about that one for a moment, friends. Whatever else it's saying, it does NOT fit with the classical Calvinist reading of this text. Calvinism teaches that we are entirely evil with no desire to serve God until the Holy Spirit works directly on our hearts, and that working is only for those whom God pre-chose individually. That's not what this text describes. Instead, it describes a group of people already in existence, those who hope in Christ, people who already want to serve God. Before the world began, God looked into the future, saw that the group would exist, and chose that it as a group would receive the inheritance and eternally glorify Him. That group, which we know as the church, is predestined. Whether we belong to it is up to us.
- D. Now that we've got all that unpacked, we can go through the text and see what it means. Vss. 3-5 describe three actions of God: He blessed us, He chose us, and He predestined us. Notice the connection between the first two. God chose us in the past and blesses us now. Notice also what the result of the choosing is: that we should be holy and blameless. See how this fits with the discussion of predestination that we just finished? God is still dealing with that group of people that wants to glorify Him but can't because everyone in the group has sinned. How does God deal with the problem? He chooses that group through Christ and makes it holy and blameless so that it CAN now glorify Him. That's exactly the explanation that Paul himself gives of all of this in vss. 5-6. God before the foundation of the world looks into the future, sees the group of repentant rebels, and decides that He is going to adopt them as His children. Now, the very fact that we are God's children instead of the rebels that we were glorifies the grace of God and accomplishes His purpose.
- E. In vss. 7-10, we see Paul explain at greater length the spiritual blessings he mentioned back in vs. 3. We have redemption through the blood of Jesus, which is why Jesus had to be involved in making us holy and blameless. Likewise, we also have forgiveness for our trespasses, which is according to the riches of the grace of God. Sometimes, I think that we tend to define the grace of God a little bit too narrowly, as being only the salvation offered to us through the death of Jesus. In reality, the Bible uses grace to describe any of the favor

that God shows us. In this particular instance, it appears to be a different kind of favor than salvation. Pay special attention to the connection between vs. 7. and vs. 9. In some translations, it's hard to see, but there's not actually a break in thought at the beginning of vs. 9. According to this text, the way that God lavished His grace upon us is by making known to us the mystery of His will. God's favor here is not about salvation. It's about revelation. It's about revealing to us the plan that He had kept secret from before the beginning of time so that we could take advantage of it by finding forgiveness through Christ. Once again, friends, that's just not a Calvinist thought. God tells us plainly here that we come to salvation not through the direct operation of the Holy Spirit, but through the gospel. We see the effect of God's plan for our salvation described in vs. 10, and this too is something we've seen before. Remember how we were talking about the problem of man not glorifying God like everything else in creation did? This is the solution. Through Christ, we are united with His obedient angels in heaven, and His obedient creation on earth, so that all of us praise and obey as we ought.

- F. We've already looked at vss. 11-12, which describe how the church is predestined to an eternal inheritance in heaven, so let's move on to vss. 13-14, which tell us how all of this interacts with the Ephesians. Notice once again how the Ephesians' pattern of salvation doesn't fit Calvinism. It didn't start with the direct operation of the Holy Spirit. Instead, it began when they heard the gospel. Then, the Ephesians believed the gospel, still, according to the text, without the Holy Spirit directly doing anything. According to Calvinism, this should have been impossible. Then, finally, at the end of vs. 13, we see the Holy Spirit appear, but in reality, this still isn't necessarily talking about direct operation. We get some insight about what's going on in this sealing process from 2 Timothy 2:19. The seal says, "The Lord knows who are His." How does Jesus know such a thing? Easy! He refers to the standard. He looks at the requirements for being a child of God, as revealed by the Holy Spirit through the word of God. Then, He compares our lives to those requirements. If we've done everything we should, we get the divine stamp of approval. We are sealed by the Holy Spirit. It's hard to see on the surface, but this verse is actually talking about the same thing as the witness of the Holy Spirit in 1 John 5. Nor is that all that Paul says the Holy Spirit does here. The Holy Spirit also acts as the guarantee or down payment of our inheritance in heaven. Friends, this is like when we buy a house, and, when we make an offer, we put down earnest money so that the seller knows we're serious. In the same way, the revelation of the Holy Spirit about the certainty of the promises of God is how we know that God is serious. The point of it all is that even though we were rebels, through Jesus we have the opportunity to glorify God forever.

II. Paul's Application.

- A. Now, I know that that is a whole massive lot of doctrine. Some of you are doctrine junkies and eat all that stuff up; others of you are sitting patiently waiting for a take-home message. Thankfully, that's exactly where Paul heads next. He gives us our take-home in Ephesians 1:15-23. Actually, in this text there are three take-homes, and the first shows up in vss. 15-16. Paul hears about the continued faith and love of the Ephesians, and he's thankful for it. Why? Because they're Christians, and Paul has just got through describing all the reasons why it's cool to be a Christian. If we're Christians, we get all the neat stuff described in vss. 3-14.
- B. Sometimes, I think we forget about this. We're too used to people being Christians, and we're too used to people being non-Christians. If that kind of apathy shows up in our lives, we need to pay more attention to Ephesians 1. If someone is a faithful brother, that's wonderful, and we need to do everything we can to keep him that way. If someone is not a child of God, that's terrible, because he's missing out on so much, and we need to do everything we can to help him change. That was Paul's attitude, and it should be ours.
- C. The second take-home shows up in vss. 17-19. This is where Paul prays that the Ephesians will take the first part of the chapter and apply it to themselves. He wants them to understand how amazing the hope that they have in Christ is, how spectacular their inheritance in heaven is, and how much God will do to get them there.
- D. This, friends, is something that we need to get ourselves on a daily basis. Paul's point is that being a Christian is so important and so precious that it overshadows literally everything else in our lives. As Christians, we can go through mishap, trial, and disaster, and still come out of it with our heads held high, because we know what we've got, we know where we're headed, and we know that nobody can take any of that away from us. We can lose our jobs, our health, or our lives, but as long as we have Jesus, nothing else matters.
- E. Paul's third take-home is that we need to understand God's power and God's work in our lives in terms of what God has already done for Christ. This is the point of vss. 19-23. When Paul starts out with his description of Jesus, Jesus is dead. He has nothing. God, though, is so powerful that He is able to take this dead man, raise Him from the dead, seat Him at His own right hand, give Him authority over everything, and establish Him as head of the church. When God started, Jesus had nothing. When God finished, Jesus had everything.
- F. And this, friends, is the same God who loves us, who counts us as His children, and who will move heaven and earth to help us too. Sometimes, we feel like our situation is hopeless. Sometimes, we feel like we can't go on. When that happens, we need to consider not ourselves and our abilities, but God and His abilities. As long as we put our hope and trust in Him, He will work in our lives just as powerfully as he worked in Christ's life. The path we walk may be dark sometimes, but through God, we are guaranteed to see a happy ending.

Conclusion. If you want the assurance that only a child of God can know, become one this evening.