

Living UP TO OUR Heavenly Calling

A study in the book of Ephesians

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Ephesians 1:1 - 14

Introduction

This letter is more like Romans than any of the others. Paul explains some of the great themes and doctrines of Christianity. Many scholars consider it second only to Romans in giving us great doctrine.

Paul wrote this great majestic letter about the greatness and glory of God from a prison cell! **What would you be likely to write from a prison cell—especially if you were there on false charges?**

First, let's review Paul's history with the people of Ephesus.

Acts 19:1 – 10:

While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples ²and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."

³ So Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?"

"John's baptism," they replied.

⁴ Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus." ⁵ On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶ When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. ⁷ There were about twelve men in all.

⁸ Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God. ⁹ But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. ¹⁰ This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.

What was Ephesus like at this time?

Acts 19:23 – 34

About that time there arose a great disturbance about the Way. ²⁴ A silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought in a lot of business for the craftsmen there. ²⁵ He called them together, along with the workers in related trades, and said: "You know, my friends, that we receive a good income from this business. ²⁶ And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that gods made by human hands are no gods at all. ²⁷ There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited; and the goddess herself, who is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty."

²⁸ When they heard this, they were furious and began shouting: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" ²⁹ Soon the whole city was in an uproar. The people seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia, and all of them rushed into the theater together. ³⁰ Paul wanted to appear before the crowd, but the disciples would not let him. ³¹ Even some of the officials of the province, friends of Paul, sent him a message begging him not to venture into the theater.

³² The assembly was in confusion: Some were shouting one thing, some another. Most of the people did not even know why they were there. ³³ The Jews in the crowd pushed Alexander to the front, and

they shouted instructions to him. He motioned for silence in order to make a defense before the people. ³⁴ But when they realized he was a Jew, they all shouted in unison for about two hours: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

Paul had lived and worked in Ephesus for three years – a very long time for him. So, everyone living anywhere near there had heard the Gospel. But note that not everyone received it.

Ephesians 1:1-2 – Paul's Greeting to the Ephesians

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

Ephesians 1:3 – 14

This passage, which was one long sentence in the original, sets the tone for the rest of Ephesians. We'll look at it in three segments:

1:3 – 6 (ESV)

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 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.

What does it mean to bless God the Father? Do you bless God? When you do, what does that mean to you?

What are these spiritual blessings?

"A new heart is better than a new coat. To feed on Christ is better than to have the best earthly food. To be an heir of God is better than being the heir of the greatest person. To have God for our portion is blessed, infinitely more blessed than to own broad acres of land. God has blessed us with spiritual blessings. These are the rarest, the richest, the most enduring of all blessings, they are priceless in value." (C.H. Spurgeon)

Do you thank God for your spiritual blessings even more than your physical or material blessings?

Believers are chosen by God, and they are chosen before they have done anything or have been anything to God. Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. (1 Corinthians 1:26)

How would you describe yourself before you were "called" by God?

We are chosen not only for salvation, but we are also chosen to be holy and blameless.

"The road to holiness is a journey of long obedience."

1:7 – 10 (ESV)

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.

What is redemption?

How have the riches of God's grace has been lavished upon you?

When Paul talks about the mystery of God's will being made know to us, he's not talking about some mystical thing, but simply that what has not been known before has now been revealed to us—the mystery of God's will.

1:11 – 14 (ESV)

¹¹In 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, ¹²so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. ¹³In 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, ¹⁴who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

“In Christ” is a central to Paul’s theology. Paul uses it or its synonym 33 times in Ephesians. What do we have as a result of being “in Christ”?

- **We have been transformed!**

2 Corinthians 5:17: *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!*

- **We have a dynamic and marvelous unity—with Christ and with each other!**

Galatians 3:28: *There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

What are other blessings we find in these 14 verses because we are “in Christ”?

1. **We are blessed with a sure inheritance.**

First, what is this inheritance that we have obtained? It is eternity with Jesus. Our identity as “in Christ” affects everything.

2. **We have been predestined.**

Predestined simply means you were predetermined in advance by God, and since that is true, how blessed are you? How confident should you be that you are loved by God? What could possibly ever separate you from God?

3. **We have been sealed with the Holy Spirit.**

The Holy Spirit is the mark of salvation. And we have been sealed with the Holy Spirit. Can anyone break that seal?

The Holy Spirit is a “seal” of our inheritance and a guarantee of our inheritance. Both are symbolic of a promise, or a validation, made by someone in authority.

The goal of the Holy Spirit's work in a believer's life is God's glory.

Take-Away

- Read Ephesians 1 every day.
- Feast on the truth that you are “in Christ.”
- Memorize verse 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.*