

CONCERNING THE WAY

November 27, 2012

LESSON 146: PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS



Ephesus was the capital city of the Roman province of Asia. The church in Ephesus is the first church mentioned in the 7 letters to the churches in Revelation, and many think that it was the mother church of the seven.

This letter of Paul's is the only one that was not written to correct some problem in the church. He had spent three years in Ephesus teaching in the church "night and day" (Acts 20:31) and visited there at least three other times, so he knew this church and its people better than any other. It has the most Christian doctrine of any of his letters, and was probably circulated among all the churches in Asia.

Paul wrote the letter while he was in prison (3:1, 4:1, 6:20), but we don't know for sure whether it was from Caesarea around 57-59 A.D. (Acts 24:22) or from Rome in 60-61 A.D. (Acts 28:30). Most likely it was from Rome, and that is the traditional belief.

Chapter 1

Ephesians 1:1-2 From: Paul, an apostle of the Messiah Jesus by God's will. To: His holy and faithful people in Ephesus who are in union with the Messiah Jesus. (2) May grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus, the Messiah, be yours!

- Paul started several of his letters this way, including Galatians, explaining that he became an apostle by God's will, not his own.
- "Holy and faithful people" – this is translated "saints" in some versions. All who have trusted in Christ for their salvation are saints or "holy people"; it literally means "those set apart for God's use".
- "in union with the Messiah Jesus" – translated "in Christ" in some translations, this is a good description of what being "in Christ" means. Physically we Christians can be located anywhere in the world, but spiritually we are always joined with Christ no matter where we are or what we are doing. We'll see this phrase used a lot in Ephesians – our new lives as believers are in Christ forever.

Ephesians 1:3-6 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus, the Messiah! He has blessed us in the Messiah with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realm, (4) just as he chose us in the Messiah before the creation of the universe to be holy and blameless in his presence. In love (5) he predestined us for adoption to himself through Jesus the Messiah, according to the pleasure of his will, (6) so that we would praise his glorious grace that he gave us in the Beloved One.

- Verses 3-14 are actually one long and amazing sentence in the original Greek, said to be the longest sentence in the Bible. This translation has broken it up to make it easier to follow.
- Who is the "He" in these verses? It is the Father, who is the one we should praise, because all of this was His idea. Notice He is "our Father" in verse 2, the Father of all believers, and the Father of our Lord Jesus in verse 3. We belong to Christ, and so we are also related to the Father.
- "Every spiritual blessing" (v. 3) is every spiritual enhancement that we need for spiritual life. Since these benefits have already been given to us (He HAS blessed us"), we don't have to ask for them but just

accept them by faith. Just like Joshua wasn't supposed to ask for land since God had already promised it to him (Joshua 1:3-4). But he was to enter into the enjoyment of that blessing.

- “In the heavenly realm” - as opposed to the earthly realm. These blessings are spiritual not material, heavenly not earthly, eternal not temporary (2 Corinthians 4:18; Colossians 3:1-4). So verse 3 tells a lot about God's blessings on believers:
- Spiritual blessings are the work of all three Persons of the Trinity. God blesses believers because of the Father's electing, the Son's dying, and the Spirit's sealing (4:30).
- Spiritual blessings begin with and are based on election (“He chose us”, v. 4). Election is God's sovereign work of choosing some to believe (see Romans 8:30; Ephesians 1:11; 1 Thessalonians 1:4; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; Titus 1:1). Salvation is God's doing, not man's (Ephesians 2:8-9). But even though it is an act of grace alone (Romans 11:5-6; 2 Timothy 1:9), based on His will (Ephesians 1:5, 9, 11), a person is responsible to believe (v. 13).
- We were chosen “in Him”, in Christ, because He is the Head and Representative of spiritual humanity (verses 10, 22; Colossians 1:18). We were chosen in eternity past, and the purpose of election is that believers will be holy and blameless in His sight for eternity. What God has begun in the past will be accomplished and completed in the future. Notice we are only considered “holy and blameless” because we are “in Christ”.
- God chose us for His own reasons (Ephesians 1:11), not because He could foresee our choice of Him. Jesus made this clear in John 15:16. But, from our human perspective, every believer has also made his own decision to receive Christ (John 1:12; 3:16; Romans 10:13; etc.).
- “Before the creation of the universe” – this is amazing, impossible for us to comprehend, but here it is. These things were all planned by God before Genesis 1:1. Here are things we know existed or were planned before creation:
 - Love between the Trinity (John 17:5, 24)
 - The Son as a lamb sacrificed (1 Peter 1:19-20)
 - Names written in the Book of Life (Revelation 13:8; 17:8)
 - Chosen ones saved by grace (2 Timothy 1:9)
 - The idea of chosen ones given eternal life (Titus 1:2)
 - The hidden wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 2:7)
- “Predestined us for adoption” (v. 5) means “marked out beforehand to become children of God”. We are given the same rights as the child who is born into the family, in this case, the same rights as Christ. And He did this because it brings Him pleasure to adopt us into His family.
- And what does He want from us in return? To give Him praise for what He has done for us through Christ (the Beloved). We should always have an attitude of thankfulness and live in a way that brings glory to Him.

Ephesians 1:7-10 In union with him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our offenses, according to the riches of God's grace (8) that he lavished on us, along with all wisdom and understanding, (9) when he made known to us the secret of his will. This was according to his plan that he set forth in the Messiah (10) to usher in the fullness of the times and to bring together in the Messiah all things in heaven and on earth.

- “Redemption” means to “purchase in the market”, to free by paying a ransom price. Christ bought us and freed us from slavery through the blood He shed on Calvary.
- “All wisdom and understanding” – one of the gifts God gives us is the ability to understand some of God’s purposes for the world. Obviously none of us can know the entire mind of God, but He has revealed much to us through His Word. He is pleased to reveal His will and help us understand it.
- “The fullness of the times” – this is translated “dispensation” or “administration” in some translations. This dispensation is the millennial kingdom when “the times” in God’s purposes will be completed (fulfilled), and everything spiritual and material will be under Christ and His rule (see 1 Corinthians 15:27; Colossians 1:20).

Ephesians 1:11-12 In the Messiah we were also chosen when we were predestined according to the purpose of the one who does everything that he wills to do, (12) so that we who had already fixed our hope on the Messiah might live for his praise and glory.

- Verses 3-10 have been speaking to Gentiles. If you read this carefully you can see that Paul is speaking of the Jews here, saying that the Jewish believers also experience God’s blessings, and they were called first (“we who had already fixed our hope...”).
- Notice that God predestines people according to His purposes, not by anything we have done.

Ephesians 1:13-14 You, too, have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed in the Messiah, you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, (14) who is the guarantee of our inheritance until God redeems his own possession for his praise and glory.

- “You, too” – speaking of Gentile believers again.
- You can see here that we are sealed by the Holy Spirit at the moment we believe in Christ.
- The word “seal” means security (Matthew 27:66; Ephesians 4:30), authentication and approval (John 6:27), certification of genuineness (John 3:33), and identification of ownership (2 Corinthians 1:22; Revelation 7:2; 9:4). The sealing is done in Christ, and the Holy Spirit is the one Who does the sealing.
- “The guarantee of our inheritance” – the Holy Spirit is our down payment that guarantees more to come.
- “Until God redeems His own possession” – we are His possession, this redemption is when we are finally set completely free from the presence of sin, which will happen at the coming of Christ.

Ephesians 1:15-16 Therefore, because I have heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, (16) I never stop giving thanks for you as I mention you in my prayers.

- Now Paul starts another long sentence – verses 15-23 are all one sentence in the original Greek.
- He starts by praising the believers in Ephesus because he has heard about their faith in Jesus and their love for other Christians.

Ephesians 1:17-20 I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus, the Messiah, the most glorious Father, would give you a wise spirit, along with revelation that comes through knowing the Messiah fully. (18) Then, with the eyes of your hearts enlightened, you will know the confidence that is produced by God having called you, the rich glory that is his inheritance among the saints, (19) and the unlimited greatness of his power for us who

believe, according to the working of his mighty strength, (20) which he brought about in the Messiah when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realm.

- Because of the Ephesians faith and love, Paul prays that the Father would give them a “wise spirit” and “revelation” that comes to all believers when we come to know Christ fully.
- This knowing is not just an intellectual knowledge of God or objective facts about Him, but knowing Him personally and intimately. It includes an intimate awareness of God’s character and will. Philosophy says, “Know yourself,” where Christianity says, “Know God through Jesus Christ.”
- When we come to know God in this way, the “eyes of our hearts” are enlightened, and we have confidence in the fact that God has chosen us, that we are His inheritance and that God’s power in and through us is unlimited, as proven through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This knowledge should give us the confidence that we “can do all things through Christ”.
- “Seated him at his right hand” – this represents a place of honor and sovereign power, and this is where Christ currently sits (also Psalm 110:1).

Ephesians 1:21-23 He is far above every ruler, authority, power, dominion, and every name that can be named, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. (22) God has put everything under the Messiah's feet and has made him the head of everything for the good of the church, (23) which is his body, the fullness of the one who fills everything in every way.

- Paul explains what being at the right hand of the Father means. Jesus Christ is not just a man, but fully God, and is over everything.
- “Ruler, authority, power, dominion” – every earthly power, of course, but this also means every spiritual power including angelic beings - fallen and unfallen.
- “for the good of the church, which is His body” – this is an important theme in this book, that somehow we who belong to Christ, both Jews and Gentiles, are part of the body of Christ. This means we can contribute to and be a part of the “fullness” of the King who, because of His work of creating, saving and reconciling all things (Colossians 1:16-20), already “fills all things” (Ephesians 4:10; see also Ephesians 3:19; 4:13; Colossians 2:9-10). This is going on in our lives right now, but we will see it more fully in the Kingdom.

Chapter 2

In chapter 1 Paul talked about God’s eternal plan in choosing those who are predestined to sonship and the fact that all believers on earth and in heaven will be brought together under Christ the Head of the church. Chapter 2 explains how this eternal plan is being carried out by showing how God makes sinners saints and then places them into the church, Christ’s body.

Ephesians 2:1-2 You used to be dead because of your offenses and sins, (2) that you once practiced as you lived according to the ways of this present world and according to the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now active in those who are disobedient.

- Yet another long run-on sentence by Paul – this one goes from verses 1-7.
- Before we trusted in Christ for our salvation, before He transformed us, we were spiritually dead. Death means you can’t communicate with the living. A person who is dead spiritually has no

communication with God; he is separated from God. It is sin that has killed people (Romans 5:12; 7:10; Colossians 2:13) and they stay in that spiritually dead state until they are regenerated by faith in Christ. If that never happens in their life, that spiritual deadness becomes the “second death” and results in eternal separation from God.

- People who are spiritually dead live by the ways of this world and of Satan, the current ruler of the world (1 John 5:19). “This present world” (kosmos) is the satanically controlled system that hates and opposes all that is godly (see John 15:18, 23).
- “Prince of the power of the air” is Satan, the ruler of a vast multitude of fallen angels of varying ranks and powers, all opposing God and His people (Ephesians 6:12). Adam was ruler of this world until his rebellion against God turned control over to Satan. That will continue until Christ comes back and defeats all of His enemies, including Satan.
- “those who are disobedient” – those who are consciously and actively rebellious against God.

Ephesians 2:3-7 Indeed, all of us once behaved like them in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of our flesh and senses. By nature we were destined for wrath, just like everyone else. (4) But God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love for us (5) even when we were dead because of our offenses, made us alive together with the Messiah (by grace you have been saved), (6) raised us up with him, and seated us with him in the heavenly realm in the Messiah Jesus, (7) so that in the coming ages he might display the limitless riches of his grace that comes to us through his kindness in the Messiah Jesus.

- So all of us were disobedient at one time, and we enjoyed it. It was fun! We only lived to “fulfill the desires of our flesh and senses”, in other words, we just lived to gratify ourselves, to get what we wanted when we wanted it. We were headed for the wrath of God just like everyone else.
- But we didn’t stay in that condemned state – because of the great love of God He has done three things:
 - Made us alive with Christ
 - Raised us up with Christ
 - Seated us with Him in Heaven
- God made us alive - we went from being “dead people walking” to making us alive because of our faith in Christ, we were resurrected like Christ and made a new person spiritually, someone that will spend eternity with God. Spiritually, since we are in Christ now, we are already seated with Him at the right hand of the Father in Heaven. That’s how sure our position is. We are not just earth bound bodies of flesh anymore; our citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20). What is now a spiritual truth will become physical reality when Christ returns to transform our earthly bodies into heavenly ones. We will forever be the ultimate expression of God’s love and kindness.

Ephesians 2:8-10 For by such grace you have been saved through faith. This does not come from you; it is the gift of God (9) and not the result of actions, to put a stop to all boasting. (10) For we are God's masterpiece, created in the Messiah Jesus to perform good actions that God prepared long ago to be our way of life.

- Salvation is a gift of God, given to us when we express faith in Christ, not because of anything we have done, but because of the grace of God (Romans 3:20, 28; 4:1-5; 11:6; Galatians 2:16; 2 Timothy 1:9;

Titus 3:5). So we have no reason to boast about how good we are or what great things we have done, it is all from God.

- The Greek word for “masterpiece” here is “*poema*”, which is where we get our English word “poem” So if you are in Christ, your life is a great poem written by the creator of the universe!
- Believers are God’s masterpiece, or “workmanship” in some versions, because they have been created (a work only God can do) in Christ Jesus. The purpose of this creation is that believers will do good works. We don’t become God’s masterpiece by doing good actions, but it is supposed to result in good actions (also Titus 2:14; 3:8).

Ephesians 2:11-13 So then, remember that at one time you gentiles by birth were called "the uncircumcised" by those who called themselves "the circumcised." They underwent physical circumcision done by human hands. (12) At that time you were without the Messiah, excluded from citizenship in Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise. You had no hope and were in the world without God. (13) But now, in union with the Messiah Jesus, you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of the Messiah.

- Jews in those days called all Gentiles “the uncircumcised”, to mean that they had no standing or favor with God. This physical difference affected every part of their lives. There was huge social and spiritual boundary between Jews and Gentiles.
- This physical difference meant that Gentiles did not have the following five privileges:
 - They were without a Messiah, someone to redeem them
 - They could never be a citizen of Israel, the chosen nation of God.
 - They were foreigners, and so could never participate in any of the blessings of the covenants that God had made with Israel. They had no hope of future glory and blessing like Israel did. Israel’s “covenants” include the Abrahamic (Genesis 12:1-3; 15:18-21; 17:1-8), the Palestinian (Deuteronomy 28-30), the Davidic (2 Samuel 7:16; Psalms 89:1-4), and the New (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:24-30). These covenants—all pointing to “the promise” of the Messiah and of blessings through Him—promised Israel a perpetual existence, a land, a King, and spiritual blessings.
 - They had no hope, because they could not expect any of these previous things.
 - Finally, they were without God, who is the only true God. The Greek word here means atheist.
- But now, you who were once far away (those of us who are Gentiles) have been brought near to God because of the sacrificial death of Christ.

Ephesians 2:14-16 For it is he who is our peace. Through his mortality he made both groups one by tearing down the wall of hostility that divided them. (15) He rendered the Law inoperative, along with its commandments and regulations, thus creating in himself one new humanity from the two, thereby making peace, (16) and reconciling both groups to God in one body through the cross, on which he eliminated the hostility.

- Christ is the peace between Jewish and Gentile believers. He destroyed the hostility between the two groups. A believing Gentile should never have any hostility towards a Jewish believer, and vice-versa.

- Through His death Christ made the Law “inoperable”. The Jews whole world revolved around obeying God’s law, and Gentiles didn’t care about them at all, that’s why there was such a barrier between them. But Christ’s death ended the Law (Romans 10:4), bringing peace between the groups, because now we all come to God through the cross, not by obeying the Law.

Ephesians 2:17-18 He came and proclaimed peace for you who were far away and for you who were near. (18) For through him, both of us have access to the Father by one Spirit.

- How did Christ “proclaim peace to the Gentiles (you who were far away)? He preached almost entirely to the Jews (you who were near) in His ministry on earth.
- We again see the work of all three persons of the Trinity here. Believers now have access to the Father through the Holy Spirit because of Christ’s death on the cross (also Romans 5:2 and Ephesians 3:12).

Ephesians 2:19-20 That is why you are no longer strangers and foreigners but fellow citizens with the saints and members of God’s household, (20) having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, the Messiah Jesus himself being the cornerstone.

- Because of Christ, we have become fellow citizens and members of God’s house, all the way back to Adam.
- It’s important to remember that this does not mean that the church replaces Israel; you can see Paul is not saying that. God has made an entirely new people group who share in Israel’s promised blessings but do not replace them.
- This church has been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, which confirms that the things that they said were inspired by God. And Christ is the “Rock” on which the church is built (Matthew 16:18). You can see this idea expressed in Psalm 118:22; Isaiah 28:16; Matthew 7:24-25; 1 Peter 2:3-8; and Revelation 21:14-21.
- In ancient building practices “the chief cornerstone” was carefully placed. It was critical because the entire building was lined up with it. The church’s foundation, that is, the apostles and prophets, needed to be correctly aligned with Christ. All other believers are built on that foundation, measuring their lives with Christ.

Ephesians 2:21-22 In union with him the whole building is joined together and rises into a holy sanctuary for the Lord. (22) You, too, are being built in him, along with the others, into a place for God’s Spirit to dwell.

- So we are each a stone of this great building that is like a great temple to God. The sense of the Greek is that each piece is carefully fitted to each other, not just thrown together. The church is a living and growing organism.
- In the Old Testament God’s glory was in the temple, which represented His presence with the people. In this Age God inhabits His new temple which is not built from wood and stone but of living believers. The Holy Spirit indwells each individual believer (see John 14:17; Romans 5:5; 8:9, 11; 1 Corinthians 2:12; Galatians 3:2; 4:6; 1 John 3:24; 4:13), who is a “temple” (1 Corinthians 6:19). But the temple in verses 21-22 refers to the Holy Spirit’s shared “dwelling” (see 1 Corinthians 3:16; 2 Corinthians 6:16),

