

Ephesians
June 1, 2008
Introduction/Ephesians 1:1-14

I. The Importance of the Book

FF Bruce has stated that it is not unjust to call Ephesians as the “quintessence of Paulism.” He points out this letter not only summarizes Paul’s earlier letters but actually carries them to a new stage. CH Dodd called the letter the “crown of Paulism.” ST Coleridge called it the “divineness composition of man.”

Ephesians has also often been stated as being a difficult book; some quotes:

Markus Barth	“A stranger in the door”
RH Fuller	“Track dressed up in epistolary form”
EJ Goodspeed	“Waterloo of commentators”
	“Commentary of the Pauline letters”

Martin Lloyd-Jones’ commentary on Ephesians is nearly 3000 pages long.

FF Bruce tells us that Galatians and Ephesians “stand at opposite extremes of the Pauline spectrum.” Galatia was a group at churches at risk; Ephesians appear to be doing well, probably at a level with which Paul would be generally happy. In Galatians, the role of gentiles was still uncertain; twelve years later when Ephesians was written (about 61 AD), the role was mainly resolved. One emphasis that is the same in the two books was God’s salvation being all of grace, to be received through faith, and not of works.

For this class, we will assume that the letter is not addressing any particular heresies. Many have suggested that it was written to oppose Gnosticism, but there is really no basis for this argument. Others suggest that it has semblances of latent Catholicism in it, given its presentation of the unity of the church, but again there is no real reason to believe the point.

II. A Typical Beginning

Eph 1:1-2

1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus: 2 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

NIV

The words “in Ephesus” are not in all manuscripts, and the letter might have been sent as a circular letter to the churches in the vicinity of Ephesus. For this class, however, we will assume that it was written directly to the Ephesians as the opening states.

III. When Our Brother Fails/Please Don't Fall Too!

Eph 1:3-10

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 to be adopted as his sons 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** And 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 will have reached their fulfillment — to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

NIV

- Verse 3 Verses 3 to 14 are one long sentence. This section forms a blessing, in Hebrew called a *berakah*, apparently used frequently in Jewish liturgy. It is a eulogy for God and for all the blessings he gives his people. These blessings are stated in the next few verses up to and including hope (at least to verse 14 and maybe to verse 18).
- Verse 3 “Heavenly realms” appear 5 times in this short book (1:3, 1:20, 2:6, 3:10, 6:12). This is also a reference to spiritual things. “Heavenly realms” is literally “in the heavenlies” in Greek. Its use probably sets us up for spiritual warfare later in the book. The blessing is a spiritual...probably related to us having redemption by Christ’s sacrifice as 1:7 below specially states. See Col. 3:1-4.
- Verse 4 This is one of the strongest verses on the doctrine of election found in the Bible. Calvin points out the “in him” (that is “in Christ”) is a second confirmation of the God’s freedom of election, where the first is before the creation of the world. Election can certainly be seen throughout the Bible. Some OT examples:
1. God’s choice of Abraham
2. God’s choice of Isaac versus Ishmael
3. God’s choice of a remnant from the Diaspora.
What is the purpose of God’s election?
- Verse 5 “Predestined” means “marked out beforehand” (or predetermined):

Rom 8:29-30

29 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. **30** And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

NIV

Thoughts on Election

1. Comes from the heart of God, not the mind of people
2. Should be an incentive to please God, not to ignore Him
3. Should give birth to gratitude, not complacency

Thoughts on Human Responsibility

1. Must accept God (which we will if He has chosen us.)
2. Requires that we actively confess Christ as Lord
3. Focuses us on living according to God's plan

Verse 7 To redeem a slave in the OT involved paying a price, sometimes called a "ransom."

Verse 7 Why was it necessary for Christ to shed His blood on the cross for us? Could God have done it differently?

Verse 7 Some additional reference verses are Heb. 9:22, John 1:29, 1 Peter 1:18-20, and Col. 1:13-14.

Verse 8 God's grace and love has been lavished on us!

1 John 3:1

3:1 How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

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Verse 8 In the phrase "with all wisdom and understanding," the word "wisdom" is the ability to see life from God's perspective. The word "understanding" could also be translated "insight" referring to the ability to discern the right action to take in any given situation.

Verse 9 "Mystery" is one of the fun words of the NT. Per the Life Application Commentary, it had two meanings in Hellenistic Greek:

1. Referring to something secret and known to only a select few.
2. Describing what God reveals

"Mystery" is used in the following verses: 1:9, 3:3, 3:4, 4:9, 5:32, 6:19 in Ephesians.

Verse 10 "To be put into effect" is "administering" of God's good pleasure and indicates the manner in which God is working things out on earth.

How has God blessed believers?

IV. "With My Own Hand"

Eph 1:11-14

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 hope

in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. 13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having 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.

NIV

Verse 11 The wording is a bit of a mess in this verse in Greek. The NIV states it more simply. The NAS has:

Eph 1:11

11 also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will,

NASU

Acts 4:26-28 gives an example of how this works:

Acts 4:26-28

26 The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One.' 27 Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. 28 They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.

NIV

Verse 12 FF Bruce and John Calvin see the reference to the “we” as referring to Jews and “you” in the next verse to gentiles. Certainly in Chapter 2, we will see this done explicitly.

D. L. Moody: “God commands us to be filled with the Spirit; and if we aren’t filled, it’s because we’re living beneath our privileges.”

Verse 13 What exactly does Paul mean by the seal, who is then identified as the promised Holy Spirit? The next verse answers this question.

Verse 13 Some try to identify how the seal/Holy Spirit works. For example, some might suggest that it is like water baptism. Since the Holy Spirit is spiritual, it would operate in the spiritual mode, with which our spirit can communicate. However, beyond the Holy Spirit being given to us by God and the fact that the Spirit dwells within us, we do not know a lot. We probably can never fully understand the Spirit in this life or His work since we cannot fully understand spiritual things.

Verse 14 “Deposit” means that down payment is made as assurance of future payments.

Verse 14 The word for “guaranteeing” in Greek was a word borrowed from Phoenicians used in trade. Hebrew also apparently uses the same word as Phoenicians.

V. Question

For what work of God on your behalf are you most thankful? Why are you thankful? Why did God do this amazing work for us?