

“Ephesians”

Fall Series 1

Lesson 2

“Ephesians 1:1-23”

Objective: To understand the message that Paul meant to convey to his audience and then to come to understand what that message means for us today as those living in the 21st century. We will seek to ascertain what this message means and to determine how we are intended to live our lives as those who are disciples of Christ in our modern context in light of the message it contains.

Materials: We will begin by examining carefully the Greek text of Ephesians, examine other early translations such as the Syriac Peshitta, and any other sources along with the historical setting of the first century Roman world that can help us to understand the original meaning. We will then examine early interpretations and understandings and examine commentaries and modern interpretations to enlighten our understanding for our contextual situation.

Procedures

- 1.** We will begin by translating the text from Greek into English
- 2.** We will examine the contextual setting and seek to understand as much as we possibly can about the historical, cultural and social settings in order to understand the message.
- 3.** From here we will seek to find out how to best apply the calling that Paul has for the early disciples to our modern contextual framework in order to do our very best to live as disciples of Christ in our modern era.
- 4.** We will seek to understand the attitudes that we are called to have as disciples and to reflect not only the actions that are the calling of a disciple, but also to learn how to form our attitudes to reflect our calling as followers of Jesus Christ.

Translation

Ephesians ^{1:1} Paul, an ambassador of Christ Jesus, because of the desire of God, to the holy ones who are [in Ephesus] and the faithful in Christ Jesus. ² Favor 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, the one who blessed us in every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies, in Christ, ⁴ just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of world to be holy and blameless before Him in love. ⁵ After predestining us unto adoption through Jesus Christ unto Him, according to His good will and desire, ⁶ unto His praise, glory and favor, which He bestowed freely on us in the beloved One. ⁷ In whom we have redemption through His blood, the remission of the trespasses, according to the riches of His favor, ⁸ which He lavishly poured on us, in all skill and wisdom ⁹ making known to us the mystery of His desire, according to His good pleasure, which He set forth in Him ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to bring together all things in the Messiah, the things in heaven and the things upon the

earth in Him. ¹¹ In whom we have been chosen, having been destined according His purpose in all things, all things being accomplished according to His counsel and desire, ¹² so that we who were for the praise of His glory, the ones having trusted first in the Messiah. ¹³ In whom also you having heard the word of truth, the good news of your salvation, in whom also believing you were sealed with the Spirit of promise, the Holy One, ¹⁴ which is the down payment of our inheritance unto the redemption of His possession, unto the praise of His glory.

¹⁵ Because of this I also having heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love of all the holy ones ¹⁶ I do not stop giving thanks for you remembering you in my prayers. ¹⁷ In order that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, might give to you a spirit of skill and revelation in knowledge of Him, ¹⁸ enlightening the eyes of [your] heart, so that you might know what is the hope of His calling, who are the riches of the glory of the inheritance in the holy ones, ¹⁹ and what is the overwhelming greatness of His power for us, the ones believing according to the working of His great

power. ²⁰ Which He accomplished in the Messiah; He raised Him from death and is sitting at His right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name being named, not only in this age but in the one coming. ²² And He has subjected all things under His feet and He made Him the head over all the assembly, ²³ which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

Lesson

As we approach this first chapter we need to be reminded of a few things from our introduction. One of those things is that Paul was very familiar with the community of believers at Ephesus as he had spent a lot of time there. Secondly, it is important to remember that Ephesians is made up of two parts: In chapters 1-3 the divine calling of those who are disciples of Jesus Christ is outlined and described, while in chapters 4-6 those disciples are challenged to live into that divine calling, to live in a manner that is worthy of the calling which they have received.¹ In the early verses of chapter one, we find that Paul is setting the stage as he begins explaining to the believers their place in the cosmos. He wants his audience to understand what has been done for them by God. This understanding will then set up the context for the purpose for the lives and the actions of those “in Christ.” Paul will then challenge his audience to alter their thinking and their actions to pursue the purpose that has been destined for God’s redeemed people.

¹ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary series, Vol. 42 (Dallas TX: Words Books, Publisher, 1990), p. xxxvi.

The followers of Christ need to be reminded that being a disciple of Christ means that as long as they have breath in their bodies they are in a state of continually learning what it means to be like Jesus. They are called to travel as far as they can down the path of discipleship during their lifetime, although they will never arrive at the final destination during this lifetime. They are to continually to strive to be more and more like Jesus throughout their life. They do this through the strength, faith, and courage that God grants them in their lifetime. It is important for them to always remember that the things that they accomplish, the steps that they make on this journey, are not to be seen as their accomplishments apart from the hand of God. They can have no hope, and they have no chance, apart from the “favor,” or “grace” of God that will be highlighted in such powerful terms in Ephesians chapter two.

As Paul begins this letter he gives his name as an indication of letting them know who he is along with his designation as an ambassador for Christ. He wants his audience to know who is writing these things to them and then he goes onto describe his role as a servant of Jesus Christ. He does not speak without

authority nor merely in his own wisdom. He speaks with the authority that has been granted to him by Jesus. Most versions use the word “apostle” to translate the word here, but this is in fact not actually a *translation* of the Greek word here (ἀπόστολος - *apostolos*), it is instead a transliteration. Not translating a word allows scholars and churchmen to define the meaning for their audience and sometimes rather than clarifying the meaning this type of thing has clouded the meaning of terms that are transferred into English using this methodology.

This word, ἀπόστολος - *apostolos*, was a word that was used in normal everyday life in the ancient world to describe an envoy, or an ambassador. It became imbued with the more specialized meaning over time as the church used it in a specialized manner. The meaning that that we so often understand is that evolved meaning and would not have been what the original audience will have understood. For that audience this word held the meaning of an official “envoy” or “ambassador” for Jesus Christ and His kingdom. When Jesus called men to be “apostles” he was not calling them to be some kind of a church officer, He was calling them to represent Him as His ambassadors or representatives in

the world with special authority to speak on His behalf, and on behalf of His kingdom. There was no church as we understand it today, no tradition, no context, for such an understanding as a church office holder. This was a person that was assigned to a designated purpose as an “envoy” or an “ambassador” of the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. Paul was the “ambassador” of Jesus to the “Gentiles,” or literally to the “nations” (ἔθνῶν - *ethnon*).² **Paul, an ambassador of Christ Jesus, because of the desire of God, to the holy ones who are [in Ephesus] and the faithful in Christ Jesus.**

How has Paul come to this role? He comes to this role because of the “desire” often translated as “will” (θελήματος³ - *thelematos*) of God. Paul is an ambassador for Christ because it is the “desire” or “will” of God that this be the case, he was chosen by God, through His divine will. We find this same type of

² Romans 11:13


³ “25.2 θέλημα^a, τος *n*: (derivative of θέλω^c ‘to desire,’ 25.1) that which is desired or wished for — ‘wish, desire.’ εἰς τὸ μηκέτι ἀνθρώπων ἐπιθυμίαις ἀλλὰ θελήματι θεοῦ τὸν ἐπίλοιπον ἐν σαρκὶ βιώσαι χρόνον ‘you must live the rest of your earthly lives controlled by what God desires and not by human passions’ 1Pe 4:2.” Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 2nd Ed., 2 Vols. (New York NY: United Bible Societies, 1988-1989).

understanding at 1 Peter 4:2.⁴ Ephesians contains more references to the “will” or “desire” of God than any other book in the New Testament, with the exception of the Gospel of John. Barth suggests translating this word as “decision” rather than “will” because of the context.⁵ I still prefer “desire” over either of these other translation options because it causes us to focus on a different aspect of God and to see what I believe is an emotional aspect to this decision on the part of God rather than a merely an intellectual decision on His part. I believe that all too often we make God far more Stoic in our interpretation of Scripture than is actually warranted. Such an understanding distances God from us in a manner that is unhealthy and unbiblical for us.

It is important from the outset to understand that as we plunge deeper into this letter by Paul that the notion of impersonal fate, or some kind of impersonal cosmic blueprint that underlies historic events, or an impersonal, or somehow unchangeable divine rule that determines all acts of human obedience is not supported by Ephesians. The “decision” of God is

⁴ **so that for the rest of his days on earth he may live, not to satisfy human appetites, but to do what God wills.** REB.

⁵ Markus Barth, *Ephesians*, in The Anchor Bible, Vol. 34 (Garden City NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1985), p. 65.



not impersonal, or mechanistic, in nature. Ephesians here describes an action and a manifestation of the nature of God Himself. This nature is that of a God “...who is living, personal, wise, and powerful.”⁶ There is the tendency among many to perceive this idea of “a plan” as some type of immutable and mechanistic plan that resembles the ancient concepts of “fate” in a way that is unbiblical, unchristian, and does not reflect the personal nature of God as described in Scripture and conveyed in the life of Jesus as the image of the invisible God.⁷ God does not remove the element of choice, of trust, of faith, from those that follow Him. Somehow He blends His will with ours in a way that respects our freedom to choose, while empowering us to live into that choice in a way that is beyond our innate abilities.

Paul addresses this letter to those that are among those that are set apart for a specific purpose, what purpose? The purpose of God for these “holy ones” (saints) will be outlined more fully as we progress in the first three chapters of this letter. We will come back to this more later. In the first lesson I gave information

⁶ Markus Barth, *Ephesians*, p. 65.

⁷ Colossians 1:15 - **The Son is the image of the invisible God, the one who is first over all creation,....** CEB.

regarding the textual variant “in Ephesus” found in the ancient manuscripts of the letter (if you want more detailed information, I would refer you to lesson 1). It was written to those who are described as those who are “faithful” (πιστοῖς - *pistois*). Paul describes these people as “trustworthy,” “genuine,” people that are “worthy of credit.” These are the people that God has set apart for Himself, for His purposes, to implement His will and His desire in the world.⁸

Those that trust God are those God chooses as His instruments of change and transformation. The phrase “in Christ” (ἐν Χριστῷ - *en christo*), or variations of this phrase only occur in the writings of Paul within the New Testament, though the Gospel of John contains some close analogies. This will be an important phrase and it would be good to keep your eyes open for occurrences of this phrase as we move further into this letter. In verses 1:3-14 alone this phrase is found no less than eleven times. There have been a great many efforts made to define the exact meaning of the phrase “in Christ” by scholars and there has not

⁸ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, p. 5.

yet been a generally accepted consensus as to a singular final definition.

Barth puts forward the supposition that this may be the case because Paul uses this formula in more than one sense in his writings.⁹ This idea seems highly likely to be the correct understanding of this phrase (“in Christ”). We will also address this phrase more fully as we move into the letter deeper, but it indicates an incorporation into that which is Christ in a way that combines the followers of Christ with Him and with each other in a powerful and transformative manner. Those who are “in Christ” are injected into Christ in a way that joins them with Him.

In verse 2: the form and content of the words of Paul: **Favor (grace) to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**, are different from the standard good wishes found in the first lines of standard Greek letters. This blessing constitutes an independent sentence that stands apart from the body of the letter. The word “favor, or “grace” (*χάρις - charis*) is used here instead of the usual Greek word that would be found here, “rejoice.” After this there is the Semitic greeting

⁹ Markus Barth, *Ephesians*, p. 69.

“peace” (*Shalom* in Hebrew -in Greek *εἰρήνη* - *eirene*) is added and then there are the very distinctly Christian references to “God our Father” and “the Lord Jesus Christ” in this greeting.¹⁰ All of this provides a distinctly Christian and Pauline air to this correspondence. This will be very much what those receiving Paul’s letter had come to expect. Even here Paul seeks to emphasize matters that are of great importance, God’s favor, peace/unity all centered on Jesus Christ.

Moving on to the next section we have the words: **Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the one who blessed us in every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies, in Christ.** This sentence acts as the beginning of the opening blessing. Even here, in this blessing Paul will begin to lay out the details of how God has saved and empowered His chosen followers to live their lives as His saints, those called out for service to Him. The “saints” are not just some select few among the followers of Jesus, this is a way of referring to all of those who truly are His followers. They are all called into His special service as His Holy Ones by God Himself and transformed.

¹⁰ Markus Barth, *Ephesians*, p. 69.

Temple of Artemis then and now.



Some have argued that the thanksgiving of Paul here in Ephesians is liturgical in nature (to be used in a formal worship setting), but it seems at least as likely that this is the language derived spontaneously from the occasion itself and not some formal liturgical set piece.¹¹ Certainly, this passage lends itself well to liturgical purposes and has been used in this way since that time, but it was likely simply the spontaneous outpouring expressed by Paul when it was originally composed. The blessing consists of the acknowledgment of God's saving activity in Christ and the fullness of the divine blessing that can be described as "spiritual" not because it belongs to a person's inner, hidden life, but because it is bound up with the Holy Spirit. This spiritual blessing comes from its source the Holy Spirit and so gets its description from its source there, from God's Holy Spirit.¹²

The phrase "in the heavenlies" is a reference to sphere of the spiritual blessings, which is the heavenly realms. The word (heavenlies) used here is a synonym for the more common word, heaven.¹³ The source of the blessings Paul is writing about is from

¹¹ Thomas B. Slater, *Ephesians*, in Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary series (Macon GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing Incorporated, 2012), p. 41.

¹² Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, p. 19.

¹³ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, p. 20.

God and His realm of total dominion, heaven, not simply some location in the sky. Sometimes the word heaven is used in Scripture to describe a place, a location, like the sky, or the dwelling place of God and at other times it is used to describe a realm of dominion, or rule. Here it describes a realm of dominion more than just a locale. Sometimes the two usages may overlap, because where God is there also is His dominion. Here the focus is upon God seen as extending the realm of His dominion further afield than what is normally the locale of what we understand as heaven. God's dominion (heaven) is growing and expanding as His influence and power of God are projected further and further through those who, in faith, entrust their hearts and destiny into the hands and into the plans of God. Where these people exercise the will of God and express His dominion the dominion of God is encroaching further and further into enemy-held territory.

just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of world to be and holy and blameless before Him in love. This verse and the one that follows have been the source of a great deal of misunderstanding and misapplication. Some have seen in the “choosing” that is described here an indication that God picks and

chooses individuals in a somewhat random or casual manner, but this is not the case at all. To be honest we often want to transform what Paul says here into some form of scientific formula like $E=MC^2$. I do not believe this was Paul's intent here and such a view certainly does not align with the perspective found in the rest of Scripture either. God chose Israel as a nation while in Egypt, He liberated them and led them to the border of the promised land and yet only two of those that were considered adults when leaving Egypt actually crossed over as settlers into the promised land. Did God fail in His plan? Did God choose all the nation of Israel? Yes and no: He chose all of Israel who would faithfully trust Him and choose to listen to, to obey His voice in faith and trust.

Those that were the ones who were in fact chosen in the exodus, were those who held faith with God, and were obedient to Him even in the face of what others saw as overwhelming odds (Joshua and Caleb). Does that mean that Moses was not chosen and that all those who died in the wilderness were condemned? No, it is not that simple, or mechanistic. God judges the heart and

His judgments are not the way of man.¹⁴ It is important for us to note that it is God that is the judge, not man, not the Law, not some mechanistic formula, but the living, loving, gracious, relational, God. God chooses to save those that will trust him, or as we often say have “faith” in Him. They are not saved by their actions, but their actions are an indication, a reflection of their trust in God. God chooses to bless such trust with His divine “favor.” The question is, will the people of the exodus follow God, will they choose to face the giants of the promised land with God leading or will they cower in fear and turn back and wander and die in the wilderness? This letter from Paul is addressed to those that seek to trust God (to face the giants of the land as did Joshua and Caleb) and follow Him. God will judge and His judgment will be gracious, compassionate and yet still just. Those who trust Him will be made by Him: **holy and blameless before Him in love.**

The faithful, those that trust are those that are spoken of as those that are “predestined.” Not some random individuals, but those who will submit humbly to God in trust. ⁵ **After predestining us unto adoption through Jesus Christ unto Him,**

¹⁴ 1 Samuel 16:7 **But the LORD said to Samuel, “Have no regard for his appearance or stature, because I haven’t selected him. God doesn’t look at things like humans do. Humans see only what is visible to the eyes, but the LORD sees into the heart.”** CEB.

according to His good will and desire, ⁶ unto His praise, glory and grace, which He bestowed freely on us in the beloved One.

What did they do to merit or earn salvation? Nothing, God bestowed it upon them because in their humility and openness of heart they turned to Him and admitted their hopelessness and utter dependence upon His mercy. It is such as these that God has chosen to save, they are the chosen, the predestined, the trusting ones. They have been predestined to be declared as righteous through His great mercy and grace. This is the message of the sermon on the Mount from the lips of Jesus, this is the message of the exodus, and it is still the message of God today as it was in the day of the ambassador of Jesus, Paul.

Next we have at least one of Paul's really long sentences, where he just seems to be so excited by what he has to say he cannot seem to catch his breath or pause. **⁷ In whom we have redemption through His blood, the remission of the trespasses, according to the riches of His favor, ⁸ which He lavishly poured on us, in all skill and wisdom ⁹ making known to us the mystery of His desire, according to His good pleasure, which He set forth in Him ¹⁰ as a plan for the**


**fullness of time, to bring together all things in the Messiah,
the things in heaven and the things upon the earth in Him.**

In this powerful, and long, selection Paul lays out the source of our salvation, the blood of Jesus, and its basis, which is **according to the riches of His favor.** Paul will expand upon this more fully later, but here he sets out the motivation for our salvation; it is an act of mercy, of grace, of favor, it is due to the good pleasure of God. It is connected to the heart of God in a way that reflects God's very nature and provides hope for His children, His creation, His image-bearers. The plan of God is to bring unity to division and chaos, order to disorder (just as God brought order out of chaos at the beginning of creation), and to unite everything under the auspices of His Son Jesus. This Son is the one who once and for all proclaimed the heart of God to the universe as His true image-bearer. God seeks reconciliation and He calls to His erring, and selfish children in favor and in merciful love. He calls them to understand who, and what, they were created to be. He calls them home.

They are called to unite with Jesus in a gracious union so that in this unity their wills merge with the will of God and the

image of God may be expressed in the lives of these His blessed children. ¹¹ **In whom we have been chosen, having been destined according to the purpose in all things (of Him), all things being accomplished according to His counsel and desire, ¹² so that we who were for the praise of His glory, the ones having trusted first in the Messiah.** Human beings were created to praise God, to proclaim who He is, and what He is, to the entire universe, to all of His creation. This is our purpose as human beings: this is our destiny. When we try to pursue other things, to pursue a different destiny, we will always find that we are not fully complete and whole. This is what we were created for as image-bearers of our God.

Central to all of this is that we must trust in Jesus Christ. We cannot earn our place. We cannot do enough to deserve our place or make up for the wrong that we have done, or our wrong thoughts. In the great short story by Robert Louis Stevenson, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* the story touches on something that is very much a human tendency. There came a time when Dr. Jekyll sought to separate himself from that part of himself that was Mr. Hyde, who was totally evil, selfish, and subhuman. He did this in



part by trying to be as good, as compassionate, as kind as any human could be. At this point he stopped taking the formula of transformation that changed him into Mr. Hyde, but despite his best efforts one morning he woke up and instead of being in the form of Dr. Jekyll he was in the form of Mr. Hyde, without the formula. Now he had to take his formula in order to transform back into the good doctor from Mr. Hyde. His transformation into his evil side had become complete despite his best efforts.

This story, though fictional, touches on the duality of our nature as human beings. We contain a tremendous capacity for doing and being good, but we also contain the capacity for great evil and selfishness. The solution to becoming one or the other is found within our ability to choose, only when coupled with the power of God. We cannot choose to be one or the other simply in our own power. We need help. In the story of Stevenson the power to transform is contained in the formula, at least initially, to transform into the embodiment of evil. For us, we must have help not to transform into our lower nature, because we have all tasted the formula of Dr. Jekyll. We need the help of our God and creator, that can only be found in Jesus Christ, the one who God sent in

order to help us to fulfill our destiny, to become what we were created to be. It is “in Christ” that our true transformation is possible. Paul reveals this truth to his audience in his letter. This understanding opens new possibilities and a new “way.”

Our destiny, our calling is a divine calling. Paul wants his audience to understand this at the outset of this letter and it is upon this foundation that Paul will continue to build the understanding of his audience. This message is critical for understanding what Paul has to communicate here to his audience. Paul is not transmitting human understanding, or human wisdom, he is transmitting what he has received from God. He understands that his audience will not be able to accept this message or comprehend this message on their own. They will need divine help. This divine help will come through the sealing of the Holy Spirit.

¹³ In whom also you having heard the word of truth, the good news of your salvation, in who also believing, you were sealed with the Spirit of promise, the Holy One, ¹⁴ which is the down payment of our inheritance unto the redemption of His possession, unto the praise of His glory.

Those that truly trust in Jesus are “sealed” by God. The people of Western Asia Minor have a worldview that is heavily dominated by a view of the world is infiltrated and dominated by magical powers. They saw the world as filled with a variety of powers that required navigation in order not to be crushed or effected by these powers in a way that could be detrimental to one’s well-being if not properly handled. Today, we might see this as superstition, or in some way as backward and infantile, but for the original audience these forces were extremely real, they were a part of how the universe worked. Their view perceived the world as being inhabited by demonic powers that were opposed to the well-being of human beings. The ancient mystery religions offered a number of “magical” rites that promised protection from these demonic powers.¹⁵

Upon conversion to Christianity, it is highly unlikely that these ideas and concepts with regard to how the world functions would change and transform instantly. In Acts 19, Luke makes it clear that the practice of “magic” was widespread in the city of Ephesus. This was a city noted for its connection to “magical”

¹⁵ Rodney Thomas, “The Seal of the Spirit and the Religious Climate of Ephesus,” *Restoration Quarterly* 43:3 (2001), pp. 155-166.

practice. Artemis of the Ephesians was particularly connected to the practice of magic with “magical” rune-like characters engraved on the crown, the girdle, and the feet of the image of Artemis, the goddess of the Ephesians. The Ephesia Grammata were a form of magical spell and were especially noted for their ability to ward off evil demons. They were often used either written as amulets or as spoken charms by the people of the ancient world.¹⁶

The sentence that comprises Ephesians 1:3-14 is a long sentence that is in fact an abridgment of the whole of this letter of Paul, which is replete with key terms and topics that anticipate the contents of the remainder of the letter. This section in fact takes the form of an extended Jewish blessing. The Old Testament and Jewish worship in general provide the background for this form.¹⁷ The usage of the concept of “sealing” will have touched on the “magical” understanding that the original audience will have held. In response, Paul sought to replace their reliance upon “magical” means of protection with something better; with the Holy Spirit Himself. Their protection is assured. This is intended to change

¹⁶ Rodney Thomas, “The Seal of the Spirit and the Religious Climate of Ephesus,” *Restoration Quarterly* 43:3 (2001), pp. 155-166.

¹⁷ Rodney Thomas, “The Seal of the Spirit and the Religious Climate of Ephesus,” *Restoration Quarterly* 43:3 (2001), pp. 155-166.

their focus, to release them from their fears; those things that had played such a dominant role in their life before they came to faith in Jesus.

Today, we may not rely upon “magical” means in the same way that the ancient audience of Paul did, but instead we have often replaced one focal point for another; we now rely on what we see as rational and scientific means of protection. In reality this is simply substituting one form of “magical” practice for another. In the ancient world science and “magic” were in fact considered one and the same. Paul would seek to replace reliance upon such things with something far more secure and reliable, God Himself through the agency of His Holy Spirit. This “seal of the Holy Spirit” is given as earnest money, as the downpayment, as the pledge of something more that is to come in the great salvation promised by God through Jesus Christ.

¹⁵ Because of this I also having heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love of all the holy ones ¹⁶ I do not stop giving thanks for you remembering you in my prayers. ¹⁷ In order that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, might give to you a spirit of skill and revelation in

knowledge of Him, ¹⁸ enlightening the eyes of [your] heart, so that you might know what is the hope of His calling, who are the riches of the glory of the inheritance in the holy ones, ¹⁹ and what is the overwhelming greatness of His power for us, the ones believing according to the working of His great power.

In light of the understanding and the faith of his audience Paul challenges his audience to live into that great calling, not simply in their own strength, power, and understanding, but in the skill and knowledge that can come through God's gift to them. Even here Paul telegraphs what he will make more plain in chapter 2, that the accomplishments of the Christians are not the result of their own power and strength but are manifestations of God working through them and accomplishing these great things in them. When we see the magnificent things done by the followers of Christ, what we are in reality seeing is the hand of God and it is to Him that all glory, honor and praise belong. It is His great power that is work in His people accomplishing his will and revealing His glory, His love, and His power.

The inheritance belongs to those who are the children of God, those who are “in Christ,” those who have now become a part of the family of God. They will inherit the legacy of their Father and of their Savior, Jesus Christ, because they are now united with Him. Their honor, glory and power will be His honor, glory and power, because they are joined with Him. It is those who trust God, who believe through Jesus Christ who will receive this legacy. Paul is challenging them to focus upon the inheritance that they are promised “in Christ,” as long as they continue to be united with Him through their faith in Him, that will be made manifest in the lives that they live. Their lives will display the traits of their family, their parentage, the divine “favor” (grace) bestowed upon the disciples of Jesus.

These things are accomplished in the Messiah, the one raised from the dead, and now seated at the right hand of power, at the right hand of God. ²⁰ **Which He accomplished in the Messiah; He raised Him from death and seating (Him) at the His right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name being named, not only in this age but in the one coming. ²² And He**

has subjected all things under His feet and He made Him the head over all the assembly, ²³ which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. In the Messiah God is bringing His dominion into the fullness of all the cosmos: heaven, earth, and all else that exists. All will be filled by Him who has subjected all things under His feet and made him to be ruler over all. Paul sets in context the basis for all that he will say further in his letter. These things will be called into being on the basis of this foundation, which Paul here describes.

Synopsis

In this chapter Paul will lay out the plan for his entire letter. He will seek to remind his readers of what God has done for them in Christ Jesus. The motivation for transformation will be based upon what God has done for the readers. Paul will challenge them to live in ways that reflect their understanding and their belief in Christ. This concept of being “in Christ” will be of crucial importance in Paul’s presentation of the reasons for what he calls them to do and to become.

Paul will make it very clear to his audience that the good works that the believers are called to do are not something that they do in their own will, or power. They do these things because of the power and faith granted to them through the Holy Spirit, which is given to them as a down payment of what is to come. The Holy Spirit will empower them, enrich them, give them the courage and the strength to do and become what God has called His children to be in Christ Jesus.

Some have used Ephesians to express the idea of double predestination: to say that God chooses not only the individuals that He saves, but He also chooses the individuals marked for

condemnation. This is, I believe, an overly-simplistic and flat reading of what Paul says here. There are passages of Scripture and episodes that they use to bolster their case. However, those who hold such a view fail to take into consideration the personal nature of God and the fact that God actually challenges people to trust Him. Both of these factors, I believe, must be factored into what Paul is talking about here. Paul challenges his readers to do something to trust and walk in this world as disciples. It would seem sadistic and disingenuous on the part of God to ask people to be and to act in a way that they were not able to do. God allows people to truly choose; He did not create robotic creatures incapable of choosing.

None of this must take away from the fact that salvation comes through the “favor,” or the “grace” of God. This is the basis for all that Paul says to his readers and it is on this basis that Paul calls his readers to walk in partnership with God, empowered through His Holy Spirit, to extend the kingdom of God in love and unity into the world. Paul points this out in the first chapter and will continue to elaborate on it further in the chapters that follow.

Questions

1. When you think of an ambassador what are some of the images that come to your mind?
2. How does understanding that Paul is an ambassador for Jesus challenge you to view him ways that are different than the word “apostle” does?
3. When you think of the “plan of God” what are some of the thoughts that this brings to your mind?
4. Do you believe that God has written the script for your life before you were born? Why, or why not?
5. Do you think God has chosen who to save and who to condemn even before they are born? If so, what then is the point of this life?
6. If Paul believed that people had no choice in their direction of life, why do you think he seeks to persuade his audience?
7. What are some things that you trust? Why?
8. Why do you think trust, or faith, is so important to Paul?
9. How do you perceive the Holy Spirit” to be the guarantee of something greater to come in your own life?
10. What are some ways that you see the overwhelming power of evil manifested in the lives of people in a way that is beyond their power to overcome?
11. What are some ways that you understand the word “grace” or “favor”? Are these words different for you, or the same? Explain your answer.
12. How would you define “faith?”

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13. What do you think it means for your life to be “in Christ?”
 14. How do you understand the role of the Holy Spirit in your salvation?
 15. What are some ways that you have powerfully seen the hand of God at work in your own life?
 16. Why do you think only Joshua and Caleb crossed the river Jordan to dwell in the promised land? What message is in this understanding for us today?
 17. What part of the lesson today provides you with the most hope? Why?

To Take Home

What is Important to know?

It is important to know that Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians does not lay out some kind of a mechanistic formula for how God chooses some and condemns others. This is often the way that the words of Paul have been interpreted by some in the church. Such an understanding is a perversion of what Paul says there. What are some ways that you see the relational nature of God in Scripture?

Where is God in these words?

God is in these words helping us understand His nature and His purpose for our life. We can see God in the emphasis upon Jesus Christ and in the laying out of the calling for humanity that is found here. Paul, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, seeks to guide his audience into a richer understanding of their destiny as those who are examples of the power of His favor in the world. What are some ways that you have seen the favor of God in the actions of people seeking to follow Christ?

What does any of this mean for how I live my life?

The words of Paul in this section of his letter challenges its readers to step into a deeper, fuller, richer, understanding of who God is, what He has done for those who trust in Him and what He expects from them. He expects them to trust Him and to follow the example set forth by Jesus as His true image bearer, through the power given by His Holy Spirit. In this section Paul will set out what God has done for His children and begin to challenge them to stop acting like they are orphans. He wants them to reflect their Father. What are some things that you think Paul is calling His readers to change about their lives?

What is the word of God calling us to do?

As we read this section of Paul's letter He seeks to inspire His readers to follow Jesus Christ more fully, more completely, and to trust God. The basis for this trust is founded upon the stories from Scripture and what Jesus Christ has done in His ministry and in the giving of His life on behalf of others. What are some ways that you see the life and death of Jesus challenging people to live differently than those who do not believe?