

Study 2: Ephesians Chapter 1

Introduction

Paul presents the “bagful of presents”, describing what we have as a result of being “In Christ”. It is the feeling of “I don’t deserve this” when someone gives us a wonderful gift. The feeling of “pinch me am I awake, is this too good to be true?” The feeling of overwhelming joy and excitement.

The message of the chapter is “Look at the blessings you’ve got in Christ – why would you want to go anywhere else?”

Body of the Study

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Introduction

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Homework and preparation for next week:

Read through chapters 1 and 2 together in one sitting.

As you read, meditate on the ways that you have been blessed in your life as a result of becoming a Christian (or how you could be blessed if you are not a Christian already). Make your own list of how God has blessed you (you don’t have to show this to anyone).

Meditate on where you would be in your life if you had not become a Christian (or where you are right now if you are not in Christ). Think about the difference Christ makes in our lives.

Read the notes as a review of the study

Notes for study 2: Ephesians Chapter 1

What is the greatest present that you have ever been given? Do you remember what it was like waking up on Christmas morning and getting all the wonderful presents? Cast your mind back to those times. The feeling of overwhelming joy and excitement. The unconquerable smile on our face beaming with joy. The feeling of “I don’t deserve this” when someone gives us a wonderful gift. The feeling of “pinch me am I awake, is this too good to be true?”

Paul presents the “bagful of presents” as he writes to the Ephesians describing what we have as a result of being “In Christ”. Notice the sentence structure through the chapter – it is very long sentences with multiple blessings described: “You’ve got this, and this, and this, and this, and this.....” (But wait, there’s more.. you also get six steak knives absolutely free!!!). It is true that in the original language (Greek) the letter was written without punctuation, but the translators understood what Paul was trying to get across here, and expressed it for us in language and punctuation so that we would get the message that he was trying to have us understand.

Address and Greetings

Paul writes with his customary greeting as “...*Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God...*” (1:1 NKJV). As in many of his other letters, he is well known to the recipients of the letter, and has no need to establish his credentials. He is writing with his “apostolic hat” on. Paul’s apostleship seemed to be challenged everywhere, and by asserting his apostleship, he establishes the authority for what he has to say as instruction from God that must be listened to. Apostles were not *self appointed*, nor were they appointed by *any* action from man, but they were chosen and appointed by God (see Luke 6:13; John 15:16, 17:6; Acts 1:2, 24; 9:15; Gal 1:1, 11-12).

The letter is addressed “...*To the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus...*” (1:1 NKJV). Whilst the earlier manuscripts omit this verse, the structure of the letter fits within other things that are written concerning the Ephesus church (see comments in study 1). The address of ...*the saints who are in Ephesus...* shows that “saints” are not people who lived many years ago and have had some form of “recognition” for their lives, but are living people – the people of God (christians) wherever they may be in the world (in this case Ephesus). The addition of ...*and the faithful in Christ Jesus...* is not the addition of another group, but an emphasis of the faithful state of the christians. Straight away Paul leads to the purpose of the letter as a call to faithfulness!

The usual and common greeting of “...*Grace and peace to you...*” (1:2) is found in other New Testament writers as well as Paul. He adds “...*from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ...*” (1:2 NIV) which again shows his apostolic authority for his writing. The greeting goes right to the heart of the things that he will address in the first chapter – look at the blessings that we have in Christ – since the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ are the originators of the blessings that we have because of God’s grace.

Use of “structure” in the NT letters

We live in a literate society. Most of us – at least 95% – can read and write. When we want to communicate, it is simple. We just write down what we want to say, send it by Australia Post to the person we want to get it, and they read it. Or even better we email it directly to them - they can have it two minutes later on the other side of the world.

In the NT times, communications were not so easy. Society was mostly illiterate. Perhaps only 20% of people could read and write. Further, there was the cultural and language barrier, let alone the problems with the postal service!!!

To communicate, it would be necessary to firstly find a scribe who could write down the message. Often the scribe might not personally know the author of the message. The message would then be sent to the recipient, who also might not be able to read or write. He would then have to take it to another scribe who may have to translate it from a different language, and also might not know the recipient.

This required *STRUCTURE* in the letters that were written, and if we look for it we will find it in almost all of the New Testament letters. Whilst we know that Paul could read and write, his letters followed the *structure* that was extant at the time, and we should look for it every time that we read one of the letters – it is there!!!!

Introduction: Greetings, keywords & thoughts, doxology.
Body: Expands on the keywords & thoughts.
Often commences with “...*Now I want you to know...*”, or “...*Therefore...*”
Conclusion: Prayer, travel plans, greetings and salutations. Often recaps on key words & thoughts.

In the Ephesian letter, we can see the end of the introduction when Paul says in 1:15 “...*Therefore I also...*” His use of “therefore” is to build his argument and take a turn in the direction based on the facts he has established so far. Clearly a marker when it occurs at such a position in the beginning of the book.

It is important to look at the key words / thoughts / phrases that are used in the introduction. Almost invariably, these are the things that Paul wants to emphasize in the letter – the important things for the readers to grasp, which helps us set the context for the rest of the letter.

Introduction

Some of the Keywords / phrases that are used are:

Blessed us, spiritual blessings, heavenly places, in Christ, chosen, before the foundation of the world, holy, without blame, predestined, accepted in God, redemption, forgiveness of sins, riches of His grace, gather together in one, inheritance, trusted in Christ, gospel of salvation, sealed with Holy Spirit, purchased possession.

Whilst several of these are repeated, or synonyms (restating the thought with different words), by looking carefully we can get a very good idea of the things that Paul wants to tell the readers through his letter, especially where these keywords occur in the introduction **AND** the conclusion we can be sure that the writer thinks that this is an important subject for us to know.

(God) ... 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.

^{EPH 1:11} 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.

^{EPH 1:15} For this reason... (1:3-15 NIV)

We are chosen by God to be His people, and consequently we receive every spiritual blessing. Having been redeemed by His glorious grace, we are freely made to be holy and blameless, and the mystery of His will has been revealed to us! There is no doubt about how we stand in God's sight, because He has given us the Holy Spirit as the seal (guarantee) of our redemption.

Our Blessings in Christ

Throughout chapter 1 Paul emphasizes the blessings that we have in Christ. We are left to draw the conclusion *why would we want to go anywhere else?* And that is the idea that fits within the thrust of the letter as a call to faithfulness.

We are "...*blessed...with every spiritual blessing in Christ...*" (1:3 NIV), so we must first be "In Christ", having obeyed the gospel and immersed (baptised) into him (Gal 3:27) because of our belief (faith) in Jesus as God's son and our Saviour.

We are "...*chosen in Him before the creation of the world...*" (1:4) This is not teaching that God chose you and me (individuals) as the ones to be saved, because we know that God wants everyone to be saved (2 Pet 3:9). God knew before He created the world that Jesus was going to have to suffer and die to redeem His people. We receive the blessings because we have become the people of God, and have become one of the chosen few. We get to choose if we want to be one of the chosen!

Christians have been selected in Christ prior to the work of creation. The verb "chose" (GK G1721) is the usual one employed in LXX in connection with God's choice of Israel. Before the foundations of the world were laid, God had determined that all who believed on his Son should be saved. (NIVBC)

As God's chosen people, we are holy (set apart) and made blameless – ie we are rightly to be blamed for our sins, but Jesus has taken the blame in our stead, and his blood covers our sins, so that we can become "...*holy and blameless in his sight...*" (1:4 NIV). Jesus has taken our blame before God instead of us! God's plan before the foundation of the world was to ensure that the eternal destination for God's people was already set in place, and "...*In love⁵ he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will...*" (1:5 NIV). Even though we were "enemies" of God (through sin, fighting against Him), and we were outside of His family, yet we have been brought in to the family of God as His adopted children, and have all of the blessings that go with being heirs in His family.

We do not deserve these blessings, since we were God's enemies, but "...*His glorious grace ...has been freely given to us in (Christ)...*" (1:6 NIV). Grace is unmerited favour. We have found favour in God's sight, even when we did not deserve it. God gives to us things (the spiritual blessings) that we do not deserve, and God was so generous, in giving these gifts *freely* – He didn't hold back on how much He gave! The blessings only come through Jesus – God gave and provided the sacrifice himself so that we might be brought back into His family as His children. [For an interesting comparison, look at the sacrifice of Abraham with Isaac as a type of the sacrifice that God made with Jesus – Gen 22:1-18. The parallels are amazing! Not only was the sacrifice made at the same place (Mt Moriah, the Temple mount in Jerusalem), they were both the children of promise through whom the blessings were to come, both were only begotten sons, and God provided the sacrifice in both cases. And there is much more.]

We can have no redemption outside of Jesus, for "...*In Him we have redemption through his blood...*" (1:7 NIV). Jesus came and paid the price for us, reconciling us back to God, and putting us back into relationship with Him. We have all sinned against God, but through Jesus' sacrifice we have "...*the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace...*" (1:7 NIV).

The price paid for our redemption from bondage to sin was costly beyond measure; it was the very lifeblood of Christ himself, poured out in his death on the Cross. What was

foreshadowed in the Levitical system of sacrifices was realized at the Cross when the Son of God laid down his life in death and ransomed us from sin. (NIVBC).

Paul describes the blessings as being “...lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding...” (1:8 NIV). We do not get some minor prize in a competition, but the major prize – our eternal salvation – and the minor prizes as well!!! In times past (under the Old Testament), God’s people (and even angels) did not understand and comprehend God’s plan of salvation – to reconcile all people on earth (both Jews and Gentiles) back to Him through the sacrifice of the Messiah. It was always God’s purpose (from before the foundation of the world) to sacrifice Jesus His son, and so unite us back to Him. This was not clearly understood in previous times. But these things have now been given and revealed to us. “...And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ...” (1:9 NIV). Even in Jesus own time, the Jews tried to kill him off to get rid of him – they didn’t understand what it was that they were doing – that salvation through the death of Jesus was a “mystery” and one which man would never have thought of. Yet, this was what God always had in mind to do.

In the NT the unlocking of that mystery has now taken place by virtue of Christ's appearance in the flesh, and there is no need to wait till the last day... All this is in accordance with God's "pleasure" (as in v. 5), which has been set out in Christ (cf. v. 11; Ro 1:13; 3:25). From all eternity, the Father cherished in his own mind a plan "to be put into effect" (GK G3873) in Christ (cf. 3:9). This has now been revealed to the church through Paul. ... This plan takes place when the messianic age is inaugurated. Salvation history is regarded as unfolding in a series of "times" (GK G2789) that reach their climax in the advent of Christ (Gal 4:4). ... God will "bring . . . together under one head" (GK G368) everything in heaven and on earth under Christ (cf. 1Co 15:24-28; Php 2:10-11). This recognition of Christ's preeminence will ensure that the original harmony of the universe is restored (Ro 8:18-21). Christ's mission extends beyond the human race and assumes cosmic dimensions. (NIVBC)

The doctrine of ‘Premillennialism’, that at the Second Coming God will establish a kingdom on earth that will last for 1,000 years, is popular but without sufficient scriptural basis. Those who hold to that doctrine read this verse to support the idea that that is the time when *all things will be brought together under Christ*. By contrast, the close of the New Testament canon occurred around the end of the first century, and this was the very time that the transitional miraculous spiritual gifts ceased – because there were no apostles left after John died, to pass them on. Whilst in the first century, God’s plan was being revealed to man, it was only revealed in a partial way (1 Cor 13:12). With the close of the New Testament canon, God’s revelation is complete, and we are able to understand it with all of the fullness that God allows us to have. There is however, also a looking forwards to the time when the age will end, Satan will be overthrown for ever, all people will be called into judgement, and *every knee will bow and every tongue will confess Jesus as Lord*. The mystery has now been revealed, but its fulfilment is yet to occur. These things will “...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...” (1:10 NIV).

The previous thoughts are restated for emphasis “...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...” (1:11 NIV).

Paul, the other apostles, and some other Christians had been *in Christ* longer than those in Ephesus, and he reminds them that how long we have been christians is of no consequences in receiving the blessings “...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...” (1:12-13 NIV). Paul was also a Jew, and as a believer in God, they were some of the first to be reconciled by Jesus blood. The gospel was taken *to the Jew first, but also to the Greek*. They were saved through hearing the word, (and believing the word they heard, repenting of their sins and obeying the word through immersion into Jesus).

Our sanctification (setting apart, or making us saints) is assured, and God has guaranteed it with a seal “...*Having believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance...*” (1:13-14 NIV). The Holy Spirit is the seal, whom we receive when we are immersed into Him (Acts 2:38). The Holy Spirit identifies us as God’s children, and is the guarantee (or down payment or assurance) of our eternal salvation “...*until the redemption of those who are God’s possession--to the praise of his glory...*” (1:14 NIV). The seal was not limited to the first century, but is given to all of God’s purchased people until He comes again.

Thanksgiving for the Brethren

Paul leaves the introduction and gets down to the business of the letter, with his use of “...*Therefore I also...*” (1:15 NKJV) or “...*For this reason...*” (NIV). “...*For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints,*¹⁶ *I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers...*” (1:15-16 NIV). Whilst Paul was intimately involved with the Ephesian church, it was around 5 years since he had been there. Even when he came to Ephesus on his third journey, he found disciples who were already there (Acts 19:1). It is obvious that there were some new disciples whom Paul had not met, but he had heard about their faith, probably from Tychicus. Paul was excited to learn about them, and rejoiced because of their *faith in the Lord Jesus*. We are *in Christ* because of our faith. *Without faith it is impossible to please God. We must believe that God exists and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Heb 11:6).*

Paul’s prayer for the christians

Paul reveals his prayer for them “...*I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.*¹⁸ *I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,*¹⁹ *and his incomparably great power for us who believe...*” (1:17-19 NIV). Paul’s prayer is that the Ephesians might understand God’s wisdom and revelation better. In the context of the first century church, his prayer is that they might receive the Holy Spirit (given through the laying on of the apostle’s hands (Acts 8:18)). Whilst Paul was an apostle and had this power, he was in prison in Rome, and so the task must be left for someone else. Just because the apostles had the power, it was not automatic that God would give the gifts, and it was always accompanied by prayer for God’s will on the matter. Whilst in the 21st century we do not have the miraculous gifts, we learn God’s will and wisdom by studying and meditating on the scriptures, which were given to us through the same Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit works with our spirit to enlighten our understanding, and so the prayer is just as valid for us as it was for the christians in Ephesus in the first century.

Through our understanding of God’s revelation, we *know God better*, and understand *his incomparably great power for us who believe*.

God’s Power Revealed

God’s power has been discussed in the previous verse, and Paul elaborates “...*That power is like the working of his mighty strength,*²⁰ *which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms...*” (1:19-20 NIV). God has demonstrated His power. Jesus’ bodily resurrection was accepted as fact and without doubt by the christians in the first century. Paul calls to witness several irrefutable accounts of the resurrection in 1 Cor 15, and at a time when the witnesses were still alive and able to attest to the things that Paul said. Here in Ephesians he makes the point that the irrefutable power of God achieved the

resurrection of Jesus – and that power came to fruition *in Christ* – and we have the Power and assurance of God *when we are in Christ*.

God's power is total, and "...*far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come...*" (1:21 NIV). The context here is specifically concerning the authority and position of Jesus. He claimed to have *all authority in heaven and on earth* (Matt 28:18). Paul puts superlative upon superlative to describe the complete and total power of God, and then adds "*and every title that can be given*".

Whilst Christ's position has been described, Paul reinforces it by adding "...*And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything...*" (1:22 NIV). The description of *all things under His feet* is messianic, and appears in several places in the Old Testament, as well as its explicit fulfillment in the New Testament (Ps 8:6, 110:1; 1 Cor 15:25-28; Heb 2:8). Jesus is described as the Messiah, but Paul concludes the sentence by introducing the church "...*and appointed him to be head over everything for the church...*" (1:22 NIV). He will build on this thought later in the letter (chapter 3), when he shows that the church was always God's eternal purpose. Whilst the Old Covenant was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ (Gal 3:24), the church "...*is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way...*" (1:23 NIV). In typical Paul style, he introduces a thought, then goes onto something else, then returns and builds on the thought later on.

The church is not an institution but an organism. It exists and functions only by reason of its vital relationship with the risen Lord as its Head. This picture of the church as a body deriving life and power from its Head is developed only in Ephesians and Colossians. In Paul's earlier letters the church is regarded as a body because its members are coordinated in a common function (see Ro 12:4-5; 1Co 10:17; 12:22-27; but cf. 1Co 11:3).(NIVBC).

Conclusion

Paul calls the Ephesians' attention to their blessings as Christians. In the next chapter he will use this as a contrast to what they left behind in their former lives.

As Christians, we have wonderful spiritual family all over the world. Wherever we travel we can meet (and meet together with) new brothers and sisters and share in a wonderful bond together because of Jesus our Lord.

God continues to bless us, guide us and protect us from sin and its consequences, whilst we grow together with Him. As Christians we (ought to) separate ourselves from the corruption that is in the world, and have a deep and proper perspective on life, what it is about, and how we can grow together to serve God in our lives and worship Him through our lives.