

EPHESIANS 1

EPHESIANS 1:1-2

- Why should we want you to pay attention to this letter that was written 2000 years ago? Because it is in the Bible, the word of God.
- Why is Ephesians in the Bible? It was written by a man named Paul, a prisoner in Rome (3:1), about A.D. 60, to Christians in Asia Minor (western part of modern day Turkey). Is it relevant in the 21st. century? But it is not only of historical interest because Paul was a very special person, God's spokesman.
- Why explain it verse by verse? Why not pick just a few interesting verses like 2:8 and 5:25? Because it is a letter with a beginning and an ending that can only be understood by reading through it. By considering the whole content you will be exposed to new things, and old things will be more deeply understood.

EPHESIANS IS WRITTEN BY AN APOSTLE OF CHRIST JESUS

"Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God" (1:1)

According to custom, Paul identifies himself at the beginning (we sign off at the end). We know much about Paul's life before he became a Christian – he was a pure Jew, brought up in Cilicia, educated in Jerusalem under Gamaliel, a Pharisee, a persecutor of Christians (Phil. 3:5-6). Then he was appointed by the risen Christ to be His apostle (Acts 26:14-18). As an apostle he was sent as an ambassador of the Lord, to bear witness of Him, especially of his resurrection (see Acts 1:22, 4:33). Paul was not self-appointed, not by the other apostles or by the church (so also Gal. 1:1). The herald of the great king Nebuchadnezzar proclaimed the king's command in Daniel 3 and those who disobeyed reaped the anger of the king himself. Paul may be an ordinary human being, but as an apostle he speaks in the name of Christ Jesus who sent him. When you read this letter you are reading Christ's word, and if you refuse it you refuse Christ. What a privilege we have to have this letter and many others from Christ's apostles. It has wonderful teaching about what God has done in Christ for our salvation (chs. 1-3), and how this works out in our daily lives (chs. 4-6). It is about God, His glory and sovereignty, His will and His grace. It is about Christ, how both Jews and Gentiles are saved by Him and united into one body (the church). Without such words we would not know what to believe, who God is and how we can come to Him, what pleases or displeases Him, or the work He has given us to do. Come to grips with Ephesians! You will be sure what it means to be a Christian, and you will grow in maturity as a Christian to the glory of God.

EPHESIANS IS WRITTEN TO CHRISTIANS GENERALLY

"To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus"

Although the letter is addressed to Christians in the town of Ephesus there is evidence that it was intended for a wider audience. Although Paul had spent 3 years there (Acts 19 and 20:31), the letter has no personal references, no greetings, and the only individual name is Tychicus, the bearer of the letter (6:21). Many exclaim that it is one of the most wonderful parts of the Bible. "One of the most significant documents ever written" (O'Brien). Christians are described in 3 ways:

(1) *As saints*: All Christians are commonly described this way (1:15,18, 2:19, 3:8,18, 4:12, 5:3, 6:18). It is Biblically wrong only to refer to 'special' Christians like Paul as saints. A 'saint' is a holy one, one set apart by God and for His service, one whose life is devoted to God. Just as many Ephesians were devotees to the pagan goddess Artemis, so all Christians are devotees to God in Christ. Is this how you see yourself as a Christian? One purchased by God through Christ's blood, God's eternal possession, who lives only to do God's will (see Ex. 19:5-6)?

(2) *As faithful*: This word may be translated 'believing' as opposed to not believing (as in Jn. 20:27). Out of the population in Ephesus Christians have responded to the gospel message with faith, and have continued in faith. Note that Christians are both saints and faithful. No one is a true believer who is not also devoted to God with the appropriate changes of lifestyle. Imagine someone claims to be building a house but there is no evidence that he has any money, he is never on site, and he never talks about its progress. It is equally doubtful if someone just says he is a believer. If you put your trust in Christ you will be fully and lovingly devoted to Him.

(3) *As in Christ Jesus*: Christ is not so much the object of faith here, but the One "in" whom Christians live. Just as the branch gets everything from the vine, so Christians get everything by being united to Christ (the language of "in Christ" is repeated from vv. 3ff., see Jn. 15:1-5). The Christian is one who is totally dependent on Christ, and who glories in Him and His cross (Gal. 6:14). If you are a saint and a faithful one, it is only because of Christ, for every spiritual blessing is in Christ (1:3).

EPHESIANS HAS THE ANSWER TO OUR BASIC NEEDS

"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (1:2)

Paul completes his introductory words by a wish that combines the Greek (Jas 1:1) and Jewish greetings (3 Jn. 15). Pay attention to these words as having deep Christian meaning.

- Our basic problem. As Paul goes on to explain, by nature we have no spiritual life; we are very active in serving the world, the devil and the flesh; and we are opposed to God and objects of His wrath (2:1-3).
- We must receive **grace**. Deserving only wrath we are without hope, unless God deals with us apart from what we deserve. Praise be to God! He is the God of all grace (1 Pet. 5:10), and He saves by grace (1:6, 2:8-9). If God deals with us according to grace and not demerit, then all blessings can be ours.
- We must have **peace**. We need peace with God, peace in ourselves, and peace with our neighbour. It is a great need in Kenya. Tribes cannot coexist, and this is an extension of lack of peace in homes, originating in a heart that does not have peace with God. Peace is exactly what God gives in the gospel of His grace (2:13-17, 6:15).
- **God the Father** and the **Lord Jesus Christ** give them. It is God alone who gives, not even the apostle. God gives as our heavenly Father; Jesus Christ gives as our exalted heavenly Lord. Grace and peace are given out of the fullness of divine resources, and with divine power to guarantee reception. Note how easily the risen Lord is made equal with God the Father, equal in person and work. It is Christ who links all together: who appointed the apostle, who makes Christians and blesses them.

Grace and peace are what you need and they are freely available. If you desperately need a medicine, but it is too expensive, you will struggle all you can to purchase it. As a sinner

before God you are in desperate need, you have nothing with which to pay, but you may simply ask God and you will receive (Matt. 7:7-11).

NOTE: The apostles of Christ are special; there are no such apostles today.

- (1) Apostles are the foundation of the church (2:20). Christ appointed apostles to give an inspired and thus infallible interpretation of His work of redemption. For this reason the Spirit taught them in a special way (Jn. 14:26, 16:13-15). So the doctrine of the apostles is the only faith of the church, and has the same authority as the Old Testament (1 Thess. 2:13, 2 Thess. 2:15, 3:6, 2 Pet. 3:15-16).
- (2) Apostles had special powers, confirming they were sent by Christ with His true message (Acts 14:3-4, Rm. 15:18-19, 2 Cor. 12:12, Heb. 2:1-4)
- (3) Apostles have spiritual authority over all churches (2 Cor. 11:28). Paul wrote letters with commands to churches he had never visited, such as to the Romans.
- (4) No one today can have the necessary qualifications to be an apostle (see Acts 1:21-22). Their work as foundation was completed when the Scriptures were completed.

EPHESIANS 1:3

THE BLESSINGS GOD GIVES

It is the custom to read a *eulogy* concerning the deceased at the funeral, referring to the character and achievements. Eulogy means 'blessing' (literally 'a good word') and is transliterated from the Greek word which is found 3 times in Ephesians 1:3. God has blessed us, with blessings, and Paul wants the Ephesians to join him in returning blessing to God. We aim to describe these blessings with which God has blessed us, and the response we must give to God.

The letter to the Ephesians properly starts here with a very long sentence of more than 200 words (as Paul wrote it) from verses 3 to 14. It is one of the most amazing and encouraging passages in the whole Bible and ought to be examined in detail. We ought to take a magnifying glass so as to give very careful thought. It is possible to divide the passage into 3 sections, each of which ends with the phrase, "to the praise of (God's) glory" (verses 6,12,14). All the blessings are listed so that God's greatness might be revealed and so praised.

- Verses 3-6 emphasize what the **Father** has done in eternity in election and predestination.
- Verses 7-12 emphasize what the **Son** has done in time in redemption.
- Verses 13-14 emphasize what the **Spirit** does in view of the future inheritance.

Verse 3 is introductory, and verses 4-14 list 6 specific blessings from eternity to eternity. This is the full picture, although not every detail is given. So also in a eulogy, only highlights from birth to death are given. May the result of our reading this and subsequent studies be that we will 'eulogize' our great God more and more. Assuming that you are a Christian, consider the following 2 questions.

1. WHAT BLESSINGS HAVE YOU RECEIVED?

We Christians have received "*every spiritual blessing*".

- (1) Our blessings are SPIRITUAL = of the Holy Spirit, given by the Spirit and not by man (see the same word in 5:19). They are listed in the subsequent verses as election, adoption, redemption, knowledge, inheritance, and sealing. These are new covenant blessings; they are to be distinguished from old covenant blessings which were largely earthly and material:

progeny, harvests, military victory, prosperity (see Deuteronomy 28:1-14). Nowhere in the New Testament are such things called blessings!!

*Earthly and material things are not
termed blessings in the New Testament*

Our Lord's teaching is very clear, that we must be content with what we have, and not be anxious even about basic necessities, but to seek first the kingdom of God (Matthew 6:25-34). We are not denying that everything we have is from God, but it is possible for earthly things to turn to be a curse rather than a blessing. For example, getting the job prayed for has often caused Christians to become unfaithful to the Lord by neglecting the means of grace because of the demands of the job. Likewise, riches are dangerous (think of Proverbs 30:8-9, 1 Timothy 6:9-10). On the other hand, spiritual blessings are pure blessings, and we have every one of them! How rich we are spiritually. At best you may have some earthly gifts; you may have riches without health, or health without riches.

(2) Our blessings are IN THE HEAVENLY PLACES, where Christ is (1:20), and where we are (2:6). This is not heaven as opposed to where we are now on earth, but it is the unseen world of spiritual activity, where the real battle is going on (so 6:12), what is otherwise called "the kingdom of heaven". Non-Christians put all the emphasis on what they can see, on the things here and now. But we are strangers and pilgrims passing through this world; our citizenship is heavenly (Philippians 3:20). We are different, in the things we love, what we aim for, for our life is hidden with Christ (Colossians 3:1-4). What do you consider are your great needs? That will clearly show if you have a true interest in these blessings.

- Sin as the greatest enemy – God has chosen us to be holy (v. 5), and redeemed us by the blood of Christ (v. 7).
- Knowledge of God – God has revealed His will to us (v. 9).
- A true and certain hope – God has given us an inheritance (v. 11) and guaranteed it by giving His Spirit (v. 14).

(3) Our blessings are IN CHRIST. Nine times in these verses Paul repeats this (vv. 3,4,6,7,9,10,10,11,13). Christians are united to Christ, just as a branch is joined to a tree and gets its life from the tree (John 15:1-5). Our Lord is not only our representative in heaven but lives in us (Galatians 2:20). All the blessings we receive through Him, as it were from His hand. This is why Christ, and especially His cross, is so central that there is nothing without Him.

We have **already** received all these things, in the sense that they are absolutely guaranteed. Once we had no personal possession of these blessings, but we now have all. This is not a hope that can be disappointed; it is not an unwarranted assurance. If Christ is yours by faith, then everything that is in Him is also yours. Even in this world if you are a son you rightly expect an inheritance from your father.

2. HOW HAVE YOU RESPONDED TO THESE BLESSINGS?

God blesses us by acting; we bless Him by speaking. Paul's purpose in writing these things is not just to give information, but to bless God, and to make all who read the letter to bless God with him. He is the leader and we join in the chorus. Whether in speaking before others (like Paul here), or singing, or praying, let us bless the Lord! God alone is the blessed One (Mark 14:61), the source of all blessing. In the Old Testament God's people said, "Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel" (Psalm 106:48); now we say, "Blessed be the God and Father of

our Lord Jesus Christ" (also 2 Corinthians 1:3, 1 Peter 1:3). There is no blessing from God as He is in Himself; all is through Christ (2:18). We must be thoroughly cleansed from our sins which is only possible through the blood of Christ. Note three things that are taught about Jesus Christ in this blessing:

- God is the *God* of the Lord Jesus Christ (1:17) as regards His becoming our Mediator. He humbled Himself and became obedient to death on a cross (Philippians 2:8).
- God is the *Father* of the Lord Jesus Christ, His eternal relationship within the Trinity (John 17:24). When Jesus called God "His own Father", He made Himself equal with God (John 5:18). It is because Jesus is both God and man in one Person that we receive blessings.
- Jesus Christ is *our* Lord and we own Him as such, joyfully giving Him unreserved submission. As our Lord He saves us by presenting us to His Father having fully reconciled us to Him. We were chosen in Him, we are adopted through Jesus Christ, we have redemption through His blood, in Him we have obtained an inheritance, in Him we were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit who is the guarantee of our inheritance. From eternity to eternity it is the Lord Jesus Christ.

"*Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits,...*" (Psalms 103:1-2).

"Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and *blessing*!" And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be *blessing* and honour and glory and might forever and ever!" And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" and the elders fell down and worshiped" (Revelation 5:11-14).

Let us join them now and for ever!

EPHESIANS 1:4

OUR ELECTION OF GOD IS A BLESSING!

It might be a surprise to you that the very first blessing of God that Paul refers to is, "He chose us". Ephesians 1:3 is a general statement stating that we have been blessed "with **every** spiritual blessing". Verses 4-14 explain many of the great blessings we have in Christ. If you start to think about the blessings God has given you as a Christian, where would you begin?

*When you think about the
blessings God has given you,
from where do you begin?*

With the time when the Lord saved you and brought you from darkness to light? Or perhaps you would go back 2,000 years to the cross of Christ? This is not where the Bible begins! It begins way back in eternity past with God's choice of us to be saved. *This* is when God began to bless His people, and all other blessings are dependent upon this one. Or to put it in another way, 'Why are you a Christian today, and not others?' The real answer is that it is

because God has an eternal plan for you. And when you come to understand this more it will cause you to **ble**ss God.

1. THE BLESSING OF ELECTION

“even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world”

When we choose one amongst the many candidates who wish to be our Member of Parliament we call it an ‘Election’. Throughout life we are making choices, or electing. When you buy bananas you do not just take what is given to you but you pick those you want from all the ones before you. God is represented as having the whole human race before Him and He chooses some (“us”) to receive the blessings, the choosing itself being the very first blessing. “Us” are the Christians to whom Paul is writing (verse 1), with Paul and his companions. We are not chosen as a group, but as individuals because becoming “holy and blameless” is for each one.

When did God choose us? “Before the foundation of the world” (see John 17:24, 1 Peter 1:20). This is before Adam was made, before anything was made, when only the triune God existed. Therefore God’s choosing us cannot be dependent upon anything in us, anything we are or do. This is the implication that is drawn from the fact that God had elected Jacob but not his twin brother Esau “though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad” (Romans 9:11) – it was “not because of works but because of His call.”

If He is truly **God** then He must have an eternal plan which is guaranteed to be fulfilled. And this teaching that God has made an eternal choice of a great number of sinners to be saved, that He has elected them, is common in the Bible.

- Jesus refers to “the *elect*, whom He *chose*” (Mark 13:20,22,27).
- No one can successfully prosecute “God’s *elect*” for “It is God who justifies (Romans 8:33).
- There are some Israelites who have believed, “a remnant, *chosen* by grace” and not “on the basis of works” (Romans 11:5-6). These *elect* alone obtained the blessing (11:7).
- The Colossian Christians are “God’s *chosen* ones” (3:12); Christians generally are called “God’s *elect*” (Titus 1:1), “*chosen*” (Revelation 17:14).
- Paul knows God “has *chosen*” the Thessalonian believers because of the way they received the gospel (I 1:4-5), and he thanks God for them “because God *chose* you” (2 2:13).
- Peter exhorts Christians “to make their calling and *election* sure” (2 Peter 1:10).

It sounds strange but we may call one another ‘the elect of God’!

IMPLICATIONS

(1) God is sovereign in our salvation. Let us humbly confess that God does what **He** chooses.

*Sadly, although it is contrary to what many say,
He did choose us first, before we turned to Him.*

Jesus reminded His disciples, “You did not choose Me, but I chose you...” (John 15:16). God saves who He wills (Romans 9:16); it was “as many as were appointed to eternal life” in Antioch who believed (Acts 13:48). Ask yourself the question, ‘Why am I saved?’ You know there is only one answer, because of God and Him alone.

(2) We are helpless to save ourselves. We are sinners. God chose us in order to make us holy. We have no spiritual ability as we are dead in sin by nature (Ephesians 2:1-3). Even our

wills are unable to choose Christ that we might be saved (see John 6:37,44,65). It is like bananas in a wheelbarrow that depend on the will of the buyer.

(3) Salvation is all of God's grace. The only reason you are a Christian today is because of God's eternal choice of you to be saved. You are no better, wiser or more powerful than any other. Rather, you deserve eternal punishment. The remnant of Israel did not deserve to be chosen; it was grace and grace alone (Romans 11:5-6, see 2 Timothy 1:9). Election and grace stand together. Because it is of God's grace it must also be of God's choice, otherwise it is something in us. Also read Deuteronomy 7:6-8.

(4) Election is an encouragement to godliness. Many have insisted that the doctrine of election necessarily leads to carelessness of Christian living. But no, consider how election leads to:

- Humility – You confess, 'I have done nothing to save myself, all glory is due to God alone' (1 Corinthians 1:26-31).
- Assurance – If God has made choice unto salvation, then full and final salvation is guaranteed (Romans 8:29-30).
- Praise – Ephesians begins with, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ..." (1:3).

3. HOW DO YOU KNOW YOU HAVE THE BLESSING OF ELECTION?

"that we should be holy and blameless before Him"

As you read these words you may be saying to yourself, 'This is a wonderfully encouraging doctrine, but how can I know if my name is written in the book of life in heaven?' Now all choices have consequences and we can work backwards from consequences to choices. If

God's choice of His people is the first step in a great chain of blessings.

there are bananas on a plate at home then you reason they must have been chosen and bought from bananas in the wheelbarrow down the road. In the same way, God's choice of His people is the first step in a great chain of blessings. If you are receiving the later blessings, then you must also have received the first one. There are 2 things in Ephesians 1:4 you can examine:

(1) Are you **"in Christ"**? God's plan was to save sinners through the work of His Son by making Christ to represent the chosen ones (the elect). He gave us to Christ (John 6:37,39, 17:2,6,9,24). He saw us as united to Christ, so that all Christ came to do He did on behalf of us for our salvation. In our own experience we are united to Christ by faith, so that He lives in me, and I in Him, as the branch is in the vine (John 15:1-11). Is this your experience? If you are united to Christ then you have the spiritual life the Lord gives to every 'branch'. You have no difficulty determining whether or not a branch is truly joined to the tree. If it is not joined then there is no fruit as there is no life. If you are in Christ you are **"a new creation"** (2 Corinthians 5:17), a totally transformed person, brought out of death into life, rescued from sin to be Christ-like. You confess Christ as your Lord and Saviour and you follow Him daily. If you are so in Christ today, then it is because God put you in Christ before the foundation of the world and chose you to be saved.

(2) Are you seeking to **"be holy and blameless before Him (in love)"**? This is the specific purpose why God chose to save us sinners. Because it is God's plan it will certainly be fulfilled. A gardener may graft a chosen cutting into a tree but it may fail to unite and so bear fruit.

But God is not man that He should fail in anything He does. Those whom God has chosen can be identified because they are striving to be “holy and blameless”. They are on the straight and narrow path that leads to life. They want to be like God, not just outwardly before men, but even before God who sees the heart. If the words “in love” are added then the very common Biblical truth is being emphasized that love is the great mark of the Christian life. Love is not characteristic of the world where hatred, gossip, tearing down, rivalry, bitterness, selfishness, anger, revenge, impatience, coldness, pride all abound. If you are a Christian you are seeking to love God with all your heart, to love your neighbour as yourself, and even to love your enemy. You are not doing it to try to earn God’s favour. Rather, you want to do it out of love for God who has loved you in Christ. You will be recognizing your lack of love, that you are not loving as Christ loved you (Ephesians 5:2). Above all things you are seeking to grow in love. How can this be done? By looking more and more at the love of God in Jesus Christ (1 John 4:7-12). And you are longing for that time when you will be made “blameless” (Ephesians 5:27)?

So, does this doctrine of Election really matter? Is it important to believe and understand? Yes:

It puts God in His rightful place as the Sovereign God on whom we totally depend, and who is to be worshipped.

It puts man in his rightful place as totally dependent upon God as one who must walk humbly before Him.

It is thus the foundation of true religion.

If you are not a believer and becoming a Christian depended upon you, then there would be no hope. But thank God it depends upon Him. You know that God has graciously chosen to save a great multitude of sinners on the basis of His grace in Christ alone. He does not mock you by asking you first to find out if He has chosen you (you cannot read the book of life). But He speaks to you as a sinner and invited you to come to Him and says He will not cast you out. When you have come to Him you will find out that it was because the Father first gave you to Christ (John 6:37). Coming to Christ to be saved by Him is the very evidence of election. Blessed be God!

EPHESIANS 1:5-6

PREDESTINATION IS A BLESSING!

A young man inherits a fortune and starts to plan the rest of his life as to how he will use the money. He is not married but he plans the education his son will have and the career he will take up, and so on. Would you object to being that son, that such good things were planned beforehand? We Christians are so blessed by God that He thought about us even “before the foundation of the world” (v. 4). First, He *chose* us, He selected us from out of the world of sinners to be in Christ and so to make us saints. Second, He *predestined* us, He made plans for our future, to adopt us into His family (v. 5).

Do not be afraid of the word
‘predestination’ as it is in the Bible!

Read these verses about predestination in their context: Acts 4:28, Romans 8:29-30, 1 Corinthians 2:7 (“decreed”), Ephesians 1:5,11. The difference between the plans of the young

man and God's plans is that what God plans always succeeds (see Isaiah 46:10-11). Our blessings are not an afterthought with God, not 'good luck', but the fulfilment of God's eternal purposes. This gives us even more reason to bless God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (v. 3).

1. GOD PREDESTINED US "FOR ADOPTION"

God "predestined us for adoption ..." (1:5a)

Can you think of a greater blessing than to be adopted, of being made a member of God's family? What a blessing for AIDS orphans to have a family where they are loved and cared for. In the Roman society of Paul's day an older rich man might choose to adopt someone to be his heir. So Abraham said that Eliezer of Damascus would be his heir if he had not son of his own (Genesis 15:2). In adoption one who is not born into the family is taken and given all the rights and privileges of a naturally born child. So Israel under the old covenant was adopted and given a status before God above all other nations (Romans 9:4). Consider what it means for God to adopt us into His family. We have a new -

- *Father*. Now the eternal God acts towards us as a father. This is the closest possible relationship in which we receive all we need (Matthew 6:32, 7:11).
- *Name*. If someone gives her name as Grace Obama you might think she is closely related to the U.S. President. We have a name that shows who our Father is, and what a high status we have.
- *Family*. There are many siblings in the wonderful family united in the chords of Christ-like love (Mark 10:30).
- *Image*. We are to be conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29). As the hymn says, "Adam's likeness now efface, stamp Thine image in its place".
- *Inheritance*. We are heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17), and we have an inheritance that is "imperishable, undefiled, and unfading" (1 Peter 1:5).

2. GOD ALONE IS RESPONSIBLE FOR OUR ADOPTION

"In love ... (He predestined us for adoption) through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will, ..." (1:4-5)

In the text there are three prepositional phrases that give us the details about how and why God predestined us for adoption.

(1) God's **love**: "in love". It is only deep, deep love that could make such a glorious plan for such unworthy sinners who deserve eternal

Predestination is not a cold unfeeling decision that God made. Rather He made the plan with a heart of love.

rejection. We have not shown any love to Him to make us worthy of such adoption. God has no need of us, He is complete in Himself as the eternal Trinity, yet He wants us as part of His family for ever.

(2) God's **Son**: "through Jesus Christ". Blessings only come to us because of Jesus Christ. We are not sons of God because God created us; that privilege was forfeited by of father Adam through sin. In fact, before we become Christians the devil is called our father (John 8:44, 1 John 3:10). We need to be made fit to be a part of God's family, and only Jesus Christ can do

that by His redeeming work. Only those who believe in Jesus's name have "the right to become children of God" (John 1:12).

(3) God's **will**: "according to the purpose of His will". We have done nothing. It is not by our will that somehow we persuade God to adopt us as His children. We have no claims on God. It is not even because God has foresight, looking into the future and seeing that we will believe. No, it is God's own sovereign will. His will includes all things (Ephesians 1:11), creation (Revelation 4:11), showing mercy in salvation (Romans 9:16,18), and even everyday events so that we say, 'If the Lord wills' (James 4:15). We joyfully recognize that it will come to pass only if it is the will of God. "Purpose" may also be translated 'gracious will' or 'pleased you well' (Matthew 11:26). God takes delight in His predestination of many for adoption. He is most willing and needs no persuasion. The emphasis is that it is the will of God alone, no consultation outside the Trinity. It is nothing like a referendum, or a calling of representatives to agree on a decision. Whatever God Himself wanted, whatever was pleasing in His sight, that He planned, and that is done. You ask, 'Why?' There is only one answer, 'So it pleased Him to will for His own glory' (see Romans 9:19-24).

3. SO GOD ALONE MUST RECEIVE ALL THE PRAISE

"... to the praise of His glorious grace, with which He has blessed us in the Beloved."

When we begin truly to understand the blessing of "predestination for adoption", then we will clearly see –

(1) **Grace**. The grace of God shines so brightly in His plan to adopt many children. Think about a magistrate who not only pays the huge fine for the convicted street boy but also brings him into his own family as his heir! So God did to Israel (Ezekiel 16:4-7). We are all descendants of rebellious Adam, children of the devil, whose hearts are inclined to sin, and who are unable to please Him (Romans 8:8). Why should He not throw us into the lowest hell? Yet He has granted us the highest privilege (see Ephesians 2:5,8)!

(2) **Grace in the Beloved**. This blessing of grace is only in God's Beloved One, the Lord Jesus Christ. What did it cost Abraham to sacrifice his only son, therefore his beloved (Genesis 22:2)? How hard it was for Jacob to send Benjamin whom he loved to Egypt (Genesis 44:20). "In this is love ... that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation" (1 John 4:10).

With reverence we say that it cost God everything to adopt anyone into His family, because He did not even spare His own Son (Romans 8:32).

(3) **Glorious grace**. That God is a gracious God is all part of His great glory (Exodus 34:6-7). Joseph Hart's hymn has it, 'The bright glories of Thy grace among Thine other wonders shine'. God has no lack in Himself, He has no need of us at all, yet He abounds all the more in grace (Romans 5:20). For us sinners, God's grace is the brightest jewel in God's kingly crown. What did John see around God's throne? "A rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald" (Revelation 4:3), a sign of God's grace that there would never again be a flood.

(4) **To the praise of God**. This is the result, so it must be God's ultimate purpose. God shows such grace to sinners in order to display His glorious character so that He, and He alone, might be praised. God forbid that any other should be praised (1 Corinthians 1:31). Our hearts should be filled with wonder and our lips with praise. Are you thinking that all this is too much

talk about doctrine? But do you not delight in the Father's plan and purpose and to give glory to Him for it? Are you not full of enthusiasm that God has predestined you for adoption? Those who watch Premier League soccer see an amazing goal scored and they keep talking about it. What is that compared with the immeasurable grace of God? And do not stop at praising God for your blessings; praise God for *Himself*. There is none like Him. Exalt His name above all.

EPHESIANS 1:7

THE BLESSING OF REDEMPTION

Governments are always setting goals. Kenya set a Vision for 2030 that the country be developed. It is not sufficient to set the goal; steps have been planned to achieve it. We ask, 'What is the situation in Kenya now? What is needed to attain the goal?' For example, in north Kenya the basic problem is infrastructure, so one of the first steps must be to build roads to develop trade. Similarly God has made His eternal plans, "before the foundation of the world", and His goal is to adopt us as His sons by making us to be holy and blameless before Him in love (1:4-5). But it does not just happen because God says so, as one great obstacle must be cleared – **sin**. This is the blessing of redemption.

1. WE NEED TO BE REDEEMED FROM TRESPASSES

We cannot receive the full blessing of heavenly glory while we remain in our trespasses. Remember the wedding guest who did not have proper garment, and who was thrown out (Matthew 22:11-13). To 'trespass' literally means to fall from proper path, God's path. All are guilty and conscience testifies to this fact. That you are a trespasser may not be a big thing to you. You say you do not feel guilty, but nor does a driver over-speeding feel guilty until sees a policeman! Peter did not feel guilty until he came face to face with Christ in the boat and the great catch of fish (Luke 5:8). Perhaps you say that none are free from trespasses, but you do not do the really big evils like murder, and you do do much good. Could you use these defences in court if you were accused of over-speeding? Could you defend yourself by claiming that most drivers over-speed, that you try to be courteous and that you have never been a drunk driver?

A trespass is not just something you do and perhaps regret, for it has serious consequences. You become guilty of breaking the law, you are liable to prosecution, then to condemnation, and finally to imprisonment. Now think of a terrorist who realizes he is doing wrong, and wants to change, and even is willing to surrender. But he will almost certainly be arrested and condemned, *unless* there is an assurance of pardon. God has said as the Judge, "the soul who sins shall die" (Ezekiel 18:4). So how will you escape? We are like Israel as slaves in Egypt; and how could they possibly release themselves? But what if God promises pardon...?

2. CHRIST REDEEMS US THROUGH HIS BLOOD ALONE

"In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses"

'Redemption' is to set free from bondage, usually by the payment of a ransom price. Like Israel, we are set free to belong to God and serve Him as a firstborn son (Exodus 4:22-23). It is a very big idea involving all that happens to us to deal with our sins until we reach glory

(1:14, 4:30). Here, just one aspect is brought forward, “the forgiveness of our trespasses”. To be redeemed means there is no condemnation, but release! An opposition politician is pardoned from a life sentence; what a blessing! God Himself pardons us and says He has nothing at all against us to convict us (see Psalm 103:12, Isaiah 44:22, Micah 7:19).

How is this possible? The only answer is “in the Beloved” (v. 6), “through His blood” (v. 7, see Heb. 9:22). There is *no other way*; it is the only way that actually redeems us. What if Israelite, on the night of the Passover in Egypt, had laid out money, or signed declaration to keep the law, but had not smeared the blood of the sacrificed lamb? The firstborn would have been slain as in all the dwellings of the Egyptians. It was only by the blood. On the Day of Atonement, one goat was offered as a sacrifice (Leviticus 16:15ff.), and another had the sin of the people of Israel confessed over it and was then sent away into wilderness never to return (vv. 20ff.). These two goats together beautifully illustrate that through the blood (death as a sacrifice) of Christ we are forever set free from our sins. What a cost! It shows how determined was God to redeem us from our sins!

Question: How do you know you are forgiven by God? There are many false answers to this question.

Answer 1 – ‘Because God is merciful’ some claim. God is truly merciful, and this mercy is seen above all in the giving of His Son. However, a problem remains: how can God forgive and remain just? The answer is in Romans 3:24-26.

Answer 2 – ‘Because I have repented’ others claim. Again, it is true that there is no forgiveness without repentance. But repentance by itself only opens to you to judgment as you are confessing your sin which deserves to be punished.

Answer 3 – ‘The blood of Jesus Christ’ is the only true answer. The song asks, ‘What can wash away my stain?’ and it gives the answer, ‘Nothing but the blood of Jesus’ (see also Hebrews 9:14, 1 Peter 1:18-19, 1 John 1:7, Revelation 5:9).

3. GOD REDEEMS US BY HIS GRACE ALONE

“According to the riches of His grace, which He lavished upon us”

Once again the **grace** of God is magnified as the only reason why such a blessing comes to anyone. Redemption, the forgiveness of our trespasses, is such a great blessing that it shows God’s grace is ‘rich’ and ‘lavish’ (or abounding).

Let us meditate on this blessing that it might cause us to rejoice.

- *What did we deserve?* Nothing good, only judgment from God, because God sees us as trespassers against His holy law. Are we better than Noah’s contemporaries? Or the Canaanites? If there is one thing God hates it is formal religion, hypocrisy, words without corresponding actions. Paul could never get over fact that God had redeemed him (1 Timothy 1:12-16). Surely, all of us who are redeemed must ask, ‘Why me?’
- *Who decided to send Christ for us?* It was not any man who thought of this great plan but God. Remember it was the one and only Beloved Son whom God gave, whom He did not spare (Romans 8:32). As the plan of God, He gave freely out of pure love, and we cannot claim any merit. Christ was sent to do everything for us that we could not begin to do for ourselves.
- *How can we measure His grace?* Do not measure it by your own character, but by God’s. There were two bothers John & Richard: Richard the ‘lion-heart’ was away fighting but on

his victorious return he found the treachery of his brother. He forgave him as was his practice, but John himself would never have done that. To redeem sinners by forgiving their trespasses is what you would expect God to do. Do not measure grace by your ideas of forgiveness for perhaps you say that are certain things that you could never forgive. And do not say that how much you are forgiven depends on how much faith you have. That also limits God's grace.

Has God freely and fully forgiven you? How then can you live as if you are still in a prison cell awaiting execution! You do not expect a prisoner to be happy who is only waiting for the noose to be tightened around his neck. But if the prison door is opened and he is set free, no words will be able to express his joy! Have you come as 'miserable sinner' under condemnation or as one knowing the grace of God in Jesus Christ? If there is joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, ought not sinner himself to be joyful?

To you who have never asked for forgiveness, what are you waiting for?

- ✓ Is it because you not greatly feel your need? If not it makes your situation worse, as many go to doctor too late because their disease is too far advanced..
- ✓ Is it because you are not sure if God will forgive you? If God forgave criminal in his dying moments, if the prodigal son was forgiven, if Saul as chief of sinners was forgiven, if most wicked Manasseh was forgiven...; if God sent His only Son that is proof enough of His absolute willingness to save any and all who come.
- ✓ Is it because you do not know what to tell God? Tell Him you know you are a trespasser, you deserve condemnation, but you are putting your trust in blood of Christ. If you were pleading before earthly judge you would know what to say. Forgiveness is a blessing you may have now in Christ. God is rich in grace.

EPHESIANS 1:8-10

THE BLESSING OF KNOWING GOD'S WILL

Paul's letter to the Ephesians begins with blessing God for the blessings we Christians receive in Christ. So far he has referred to election, predestination and redemption. He does not even consider the so-called blessings many emphasize today, health and prosperity. And who would even consider that knowing the will of God is such a great blessing?

When someone makes a legal document for the disposal of his property when he dies, we call that a 'will'. If we who are made in God's image can think so far ahead, what about God who made us? So we shall consider the fact that God has a will, what that will is, and why it is such a blessing to know it.

1. GOD HAS A WILL

*"making known to us the mystery of **his will**" (1:9)*

God's will is simply what God wants to be done. It was God's will that Saul of Tarsus become an apostle (1:1), something Paul himself was totally opposed to! For an example about the will, child upbringing is basically a conflict between the will of the child and the will of the parent. You want your child to be at church, but she wants to hang out with friends. Adoption is God's will for His elect (1:5). God works all things according to His will (1:11). In Theology we call God's will the 'Decrees of God', what God has willed to do in eternity (as election in

1:4). God is not like a man on a journey who stops to make a decision at every junction, even to retrace his steps! There are 3 things these verses tell us about the will of God:

➤ GOD'S WILL IS HIS DELIGHT: "*according to his purpose*" (1:9)

The word translated "purpose" is literally what 'seems good, well-pleasing' (see Philippians 2:13). God takes special delight in willing whatever needs to be done for the salvation of His elect. So if we ask why God allowed sin to enter into His perfect world, there can only be one answer – it is to highlight with intensity God's delight to be known as the God of salvation.

➤ GOD'S WILL IS CENTRED IN CHRIST: "*which He set forth in Christ*" (1:9)

All our blessings are "in Christ", the choosing of us (1:4), predestining us (1:5), and redeeming us (1:7). Nothing that God does in salvation is apart from Christ. Outside Him is no blessing. So there is no greater need than to be united to Christ. For example, you may have a wonderful tank, with a capacity for thousands of litres, and the most durable pipes, but it must be joined to a source of water to be filled! So you must be joined to Christ.

➤ GOD'S WILL IS FOR ALL TIME: "*as a plan for the fullness of time*" (1:10)

God's will does not concern just a part of history but **all** history from beginning to end (see Galatians 4:4). There is special emphasis on times being filled, "the end of the ages" (1 Corinthians 10:11), "these last days" (Hebrews 1:2). One writer tells us how important this is: 'This verse states what is the central theme of all Scripture', and we "find ourselves looking at God's final purpose with respect to this world" (Lloyd-Jones). What a privilege we have to consider this!

2. GOD'S WILL IS "TO UNITE ALL THINGS" IN CHRIST

When God has done everything He wills to do, then all things will be united in Christ. This is the future of the world, not as many predict with foreboding that the present state will continue until we self-destruct (nuclear holocaust?), or the sun burns itself out. There have been many interpretations of what "all things" means, but it certainly cannot mean that ultimately *all* will be saved. If "to unite" is a spiritual unity then it can only include true Christians, and perhaps good angels. But it should probably be given a wider meaning so that "all things" is literal, because sin has affected all of created reality. The word translated "to unite" literally mean 'to sum up by recapitulating, putting everything under one head'. It may thus be understood as a *re*-uniting all things in Christ by putting everything under His rule (see 1:22, Philippians 2:10-11, Colossians 1:20).

Even before there was sin on the earth, the devil and other angels rebelled in heaven and were cast out of God's presence. He, with his followers, declared war on God and all His works and became the great deceiver and slanderer. God had made the heavens and the earth to be "very good" so that everything was functioning together in perfection. But sin entered in and brought division between man and God, the man and the woman, the brothers Cain and Abel, and so on. God's will is to fully remedy this situation by restoring His creation to its original condition of peace. Consider such beautiful prophetic pictures as are found in Isaiah 11:6-9. The devil, with all his angelic and human followers will be confined to the lake of fire where they will be under total subjection. Especially the great division of Jew and Gentile will be brought to end by reconciliation in Christ (2:14-16). There will be no more thorns and thistles, no more sickness or death. In this sense there is healing in the atonement, as in the fullness of time all sin and its results will be conquered. Christ will reign as the

undisputed Head (1:22). There will be “new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13).

3. GOD HAS BLESSED US BY MAKING KNOWN HIS WILL TO US

It is impossible to bless God for His gracious will unless we know what that will is! Do not take it for granted that you know God’s will, but bless God if it is revealed to you.

- GOD’S WILL IS REVEALED / MADE KNOWN: “*making known to us the **mystery** of His will*” (1:9)
A “mystery” is not something so complicated that it is impossible to understand, but something that can only be known if it is revealed. In Ephesians the mystery is that “the Gentiles are fellow heirs” (3:6) with their Jewish brethren, and this is something that is not difficult to understand. But given the wall of separation between Jew and Gentile who could have believed it unless God had revealed it? It is God who chooses to make it known when and to whom He pleases. He has no obligation to us to make these things known.
- GOD’S WILL IS REVEALED BY THE SPIRIT: “*in all wisdom and insight*” (1:8)
This is not a reference to God as we cannot say of God that He has *all* wisdom, nor does He have *insight*. Rather, it is we Christians who have been given this wisdom by God, wisdom which means spiritual understanding, so that we are able to understand the gospel. “Insight” is the gift of love for the truth, so it is a lively application of the truth in our daily life (read Colossians 1:9-10). For this wisdom and insight we are totally dependent upon the Holy Spirit (see 1:17 and compare 4:18), and He gives “all”. “All” means that we lack nothing. It is amazing how different kinds of believers have the very same understanding, with different backgrounds and educational levels. It is because the same Spirit has revealed it to them. There was a time when we heard the gospel but we could not understand and so had no joyful appreciation of the truth. Perhaps as you read this you feel this is true of you, and it needs the Spirit of God to open your heart, like Lydia of old.
- IT IS ALL BECAUSE OF GOD’S GRACE: “*according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished on us*” (1:7-8)
If you have wisdom and insight it is not because you deserve it because you are good or more clever than others. Why was the heart of Lydia opened, but not the other women who were with her at the riverside? Why did the Lord appear to Paul the Pharisee and not to other Pharisees? Why to you, and why to me? It is another of the blessings of God revealing the riches of His grace, for which we must ever bless Him. Jesus says: “Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me” (John 6:45). This grace is ‘rich’ for it is not given in small measure. The Spirit of God reveals all we need for life and godliness through the Scriptures. We are as dependent upon God for this grace as we are for election, predestination and redemption. As the hymn states: ‘Lord! I was blind, I could not see in Thy marred visage any grace; but now the beauty of Thy face in radiant vision dawns on me’.

EPHESIANS 1:11-12

THE BLESSING OF AN INHERITANCE

Why should you be daily blessing God? Ephesians 1:4-10 has been reminding us of four great blessings that we have already received – we were chosen (elected) to be holy, we were

predestined for adoption as sons, we were redeemed by Christ's blood, and we have come to know the will of God to unite all things. As Paul describes the fifth and sixth blessings he makes reference first to the Jews ("we" in verses 11-12) and then to the Gentiles ("you" in verse 13), then returning to the Jews ("our/we" in verse 14). Whatever the ethnic background of the Ephesian Christians, if anyone is "in Christ" then these blessings are theirs. Now add a promised inheritance to the reasons why you should be always blessing God!

1. WE HAVE THE BLESSING OF AN INHERITANCE

"in Him we have obtained an inheritance" (1:11)

Children who have been orphaned, or whose parents are so poor, cannot expect to receive an inheritance. Many children who are now grown up would have nothing in this world unless they received it as an inheritance. Some translations, such as RSV and NIV have "destined/chosen", but we will take "obtained an inheritance" in agreement with the thought of verse 14 and Colossians 1:12. So we not only possess great blessings *now*, but we also have a title to the greatest possible blessings *to come*. Read 1 Peter 1:4 (inheritance), Matthew 19:29 (eternal life), and 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 (the Kingdom of God). The salvation you have begun to experience is only a foretaste of something far greater to come. This is what distinguishes the Christian from a worldly person who has no hope apart from the present things. So the Christian is content with much or little now as our real joy not dependent on our circumstances in this world, but from having Christ and all the blessings that are in Him. Whatever you have now you will leave behind, and if that is all you have you will have nothing in eternity. The Israelites had Canaan as their inheritance, a land 'flowing with milk and honey'. Our inheritance is the new heaven and the new earth, with Christ our Saviour there, and the greatest problem of sin completely gone.

2. WE OWE THE INHERITANCE TO GOD ALONE

"having been predestined according to the purpose of Him..." (1:11)

It is not by chance or our own efforts that we have been so highly favoured, but only because of the predestining purpose of God (see verse 5). The only reason why anyone receives the inheritance is because God has determined it (compare Acts 4:28). God had His own "purpose", a purpose that originated with Him, and on this basis He predestined who would receive the inheritance. It is so important to have a living faith that we owe everything to God (Rm. 11:36). Today's version of Christianity is too man-centred. According to many God can do nothing without man's consent, man can manipulate God, and the 'man of God' gets so much glory. But the Bible has a totally different picture, one where man is totally dependent upon God, and especially for salvation as God finds us as dead as Lazarus in his burial chamber. You may find this difficult to accept because it is so humbling, as it takes the key from your hands and puts it into God's alone. Listen to Jesus after His ministry in Galilee was generally rejected: "no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son *chooses* to reveal him" (also John 6:44,65). Don't think the will and power to do is in yourself. That is why you must cry out to God for mercy.

3. WE HAVE FULL ASSURANCE OF THIS INHERITANCE

"Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will,..." (1:11)

How can you be sure that this glorious inheritance will really be your portion? Students have a purpose in mind when they take their examinations. However, getting low grades or not

having the necessary finances may hinder all that they have planned. In the same way you might imagine that something could come in to prevent God from giving what He has planned to give. So it is written that God not only predestines, He also **works**; He makes the plan and He carries out the plan. This is what the Bible is all about, God working out His wonderful plan of salvation, planned in eternity, from Adam, through Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, and David, to Christ. What makes it certain is that this working includes “all things” that take place. Everything happens according to “the counsel of His will” = His will resolved to do it, that is, to give an inheritance, and His counsel devised the best way to fulfil the plan. God did not take counsel with anyone (Isaiah 40:13-14), not even with His foreknowledge, as it was dependent on His will. Everything happens according to the will of God – Psalm 115:3, Daniel 4:35, Matthew 10:29-30, Romans 9:19. You know that so many of the details about Christ’s life on earth, and especially His death, were revealed beforehand in the Old Testament. It is with this Biblical view of God that it is possible to have a properly grounded assurance and not just wishful thinking.

4. THOSE WHO HOPE IN CHRIST HAVE THE INHERITANCE

“we who were the first to hope in Christ...” (1:12)

“We” is a reference to Paul, the apostles and fellow Jews, who were the first to receive the gospel. Those who participate in the blessing of the inheritance are those who “hope” in Christ. This is one way a true Christian can be described, one who has a firm hope in Christ. It is another way of looking at faith (see Romans 8:24-25, Hebrews 11:1). You might ask, ‘If it because of God’s purpose, then why does it also depend on having hope?’ The answer is that God purposes the means as well as the final result. God purposes that it is through hoping in Christ, and that hope is also His gift.

Christ has made promises which have not yet come to pass, but ‘hope’ means it is sure they will be fulfilled. He promises forgiveness of every sin, that there is no condemnation, and there will be the full inheritance on the last Day. We have no hope in our own efforts, but that Christ will bring it all to pass when He appears. Your one great hope and expectation is to receive from Christ the promised inheritance. Sadly, some cannot see further than exams, job, marriage, retirement; then, What?

5. GOD IS GLORIFIED IN GIVING THE INHERITANCE

“to the praise of his glory.” (1:12)

For the second time Paul reveals that God’s purpose in giving these blessings is that He might be glorified (see verse 6). There is certainly no place at all for boasting as if I have done something that deserved the blessing. There is absolutely nothing in me that makes me worthy (see 1 Corinthians 1:29,31). This is a further proof that the blessing of the inheritance originates in God and is secured by Him, because **all** the glory is to Him. Whether a doctrine is true or not can be tested by this touchstone – does it bring the glory to God?

How is God glorified? The inheritance is indescribably wonderful, it is given according to His will, and it is not based on anything in us, as we are all completely unworthy. How great God is to do this for one like me! What would you say about a rich man who gave his inheritance to a street boy? We glorify God as we bless Him with voice and heart for such a blessing as the inheritance; as we talk with others about what God has promised to us in Christ. We are very good in complaining, yet we have so much more cause to glorify God for His blessings. Think about it: what you have in Christ, things about which the world knows nothing. The

world only has hope for this life, so it struggles only for the things of this life. We Christians have *eternal* hope. Whatever happens in this life can never take away your inheritance (Romans 8:35-39).

EPHESIANS 1:13-14

THE BLESSING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

This is the sixth and last of the blessings for which Paul in his letter to the Ephesians, and all Christians, for which we bless God. It is most assuring and comforting and has to do with the gift of the Holy Spirit Himself. It is sad that the subject of the Holy Spirit is so often controversial, giving rise to arguments and even division. This is because the focus is on the gifts the Spirit gives, rather than on His indwelling in all believers. We should first appreciate who the Spirit is for *all* Christians, rather than emphasizing the gifts that make differences between Christians.

Paul writes specifically of the Gentile believers (“you also”), and then returns to the normal first person plural (“our”) that includes himself. This is his way to show conclusively that Gentiles are equal with the Jewish believers having the same gift of the Spirit (see Acts 11:17). Gentiles and Jews are united in Christ.

The great question after considering the fifth blessing of the inheritance is, ‘How can I really be sure that I belong to the Lord and will finally receive the inheritance promised?’ God is so gracious that He not only gives His word as One who works all things according to His will (v. 11), but He also gives special evidence to add to assurance – the gift of the Holy Spirit. For example, your father tells you that over the December holidays he will take you to a special place. Of course you believe because it is your father who told you. But because it is the first time for him to do this, and he wants to leave no doubt in your mind, so he shows you the receipts for the bookings. The gift of the Holy Spirit is like those receipts.

1. THE HOLY SPIRIT IS THE SEAL

“... were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit” (1:13)

Seals have many inter-related uses – to show ownership, to prove genuineness, and to protect. The brand on an animal shows its true owner; the seal on a document shows its genuineness (Ezra 3:10,12); the wax seal on an electricity meter shows if it has been tampered with (so Jesus’ tomb, Matthew 27:55-56). Here the emphasis is on protection of the Christian in order to receive the full inheritance on the final day (so also 2 Corinthians 1:22, Ephesians 4:30). Note that the seal is the Holy Spirit Himself by virtue of His indwelling the believer, and not something that the Holy Spirit does in the believer. He is given as the One “promised”, in the Old Testament (Joel 2:28), by John the Baptist (Matthew 3:11), by Jesus Himself (John 7:37-39, Acts 1:4-5, compare 2:33,39). So the gift of the Spirit is the fulfilment of a great expectation. There is special emphasis on His being “holy”, for His presence separates us from the world.

It is not true to Biblical teaching that this sealing of the Spirit is some special experience *after* conversion, so only for those who qualify to receive it. The extended passage from 1:3 is an exhortation for ALL Christians to rejoice in the blessings they have in Christ. How important it is for you to know that you have the Spirit, for then you know you belong to God (1

Corinthians 6:19), that you are truly a son of God (Romans 8:16-17, Galatians 4:6), and you will be sure of receiving the inheritance. How can you know if the Holy Spirit indwells you? How do you know if there is life in a tree? You look for the fruit, for the effects of that life. The Spirit convicts of sin (John 16:8) – have you been convicted? The Spirit produces fruit (Galatians 5:22) – do you have any such fruit? Natural man, without the Spirit, is unable to produce such fruit.

2. THE HOLY SPIRIT SEALS BELIEVERS

“In him you also, when you heard the words of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in Him, ...” (1:13)

Who experience this blessing of being sealed with the Holy Spirit? It is all those, and only those, who believe the message they hear.

(1) *You hear the message.* In the days of these Ephesians hearing was almost the only way you got to know anything. We do not know who first went with the gospel to Ephesus, but we know Priscilla and Aquila were there when Apollos arrived (Acts 18:24-26), and afterwards Paul himself came (19:1). They brought the gospel of “salvation,” for the Ephesians were idolaters worshipping a stone that had fallen from heaven (19:35), and they had a life-style that corresponded with idolatry, as described in Ephesians 4:17-19. The message the servants of God brought was good news of a rescue operation to such in spiritual death, under God’s wrath, and in bondage to evil powers, to sin and the flesh. For example, Lot was dwelling securely in Sodom but he was rescued by the angels (Genesis 19). Like Lot, you may not realize that judgment is determined, but you are in the most dangerous predicament needing rescue. The good news is that Jesus Christ has come to save even the foremost of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15).

(2) *You believe the message.* The Ephesians believed in Christ when they heard the message. What is this response that is called ‘believing’? It is to say to God: “I have sinned, my conscience testifies against me, and I know that whatever is called righteousness is rubbish before God, so I put all my trust in Christ for forgiveness and acceptance.” Think of the tax collector, filled with shame and sorrow, crying out, “God be merciful to me, a sinner!” (Luke 18:13). Cry out to God as he did, but do not say in your heart, ‘I am not a sinner like others; I am not willing to give up those things I enjoy (you do not call them sin); maybe later I will give some thought to the matter.’ That is foolish. If you are drowning and I throw two things to you, a bag with one million shillings and a rope, which one will you hold on to, the money or the rope?

(3) *You are sealed with the Holy Spirit.* All those who hear and believe are sealed. In giving His Spirit to indwell you God is assuring you that you really belong to Him, that you are a true Christian, and that He will protect you to the end so that you will receive all promised blessings. It is not a matter of spiritual gifts you might think you have, for these can be counterfeited (2 Thessalonians 2:9). The devil has such great power that he can do wonderful things (remember the magicians in Egypt, Exodus 7:11-12, 22, 8:7). But the devil cannot produce holiness because he is evil. Take note of Jesus’ warning about what surprises will take place on the day of judgment – Matthew 7:21-23. But if you continue to put all your trust in Christ then it is the evidence that you are sealed.

3. THE HOLY SPIRIT IS THE SEAL TO GUARANTEE THE INHERITANCE

“who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it,” (1:14)

Sometimes when a person sends a letter through the postal service he adds cellotape to make sure it arrives at its destination unopened. In the same way, the indwelling Holy Spirit is God’s guarantee to us that we shall arrive safely at the final destination. The word translated “guarantee” is an interesting one (see also 2 Corinthians 1:22, 5:5). If you obtain a loan from a bank you may be required to deposit a title deed as security should you fail to repay the loan. The title deed is worth at least as much as the loan but it is different in kind, and when the loan is repaid the deed is returned to you. The Holy Spirit as the guarantee (*arrabōn* in Greek) is also a deposit, but it is the same in kind, a down payment, added to when everything is finally given. Like the “firstfruits” (Romans 8:23) it is a guarantee of the ingathering of the rest of the harvest. So the gift of the Holy Spirit is a foretaste of the inheritance. In other words, then we are going to know the indwelling of the Spirit in all possible fullness. It includes receiving a “spiritual body” (1 Corinthians 15:44), a body totally controlled by the Holy Spirit. Presently the body is dead because of sin; then life will be given through the very indwelling Spirit (Romans 8:11). This is why we will have no sin, and be able to dwell in God’s immediate presence, and so worship and serve Him. This is the final act of ‘redemption’ (alternative translation in ESV footnote) for which Christ died, for we are God’s possession and He must bring to the end He has determined what belongs to Him.

Who now dares to proclaim that a true believer may be finally lost? How can one be lost who is sealed with the Holy Spirit from God? If God has sealed, who has power or authority to unseal? If you are a sincere believer in Christ this gives you absolute assurance of perseverance in the faith. What hope is here when you are in the midst of so many trials and temptations! So strive from the Scriptures to be sure that you have the Holy Spirit indwelling you.

4. PRAISE BE TO GOD!

“to the praise of his glory.” (1:14)

For the third time in this section (vv. 3-14) the Scriptures emphasize that God does all this first of all for His own glory. He is to receive the glory for we are totally unworthy and it is all of Him. He is to receive the glory for the blessings are so large. He is to receive the glory because these blessings stretch from eternity past into eternity for ever and ever!

These six blessings ought to be the constant theme of our blessing God, yet listen to our poor prayers. We seem to be much more concerned about the physical, outward and temporary, things like sickness, travel and money. We are more like one who begs for a shilling when he has millions in bank account. Because God is our Father in Christ nothing is too little to ask, but we should always remember that the blessings we have are at the cost of the sacrifice of His own beloved Son. You hear that there are precious rubies in Pokot North. What does it matter if you have to struggle to get there, walking long distances, facing hunger and thirst, enduring many dangers, if finally you get those rubies in your hand. Our eternal inheritance is not to be compared with all the rubies in the world, so what does it matter if I face so many difficulties on the way so long as I finally arrive? In the Hymn, *The sands of time are sinking*, there is the following lines of assurance:

*The King there in His beauty, without a veil is seen;
It were a well-spent journey, though **seven deaths** lay between;*

And when we finally enter our promised inheritance we shall for ever sing His praises (Revelation 5:13-14).

EPHESIANS 1:15-16

THE VITAL IMPORTANCE OF PRAYER

Some things are important although life is not dependent on them. For example, education and even basic literacy, employment, yet so many people must live without these important things. Yet no one anywhere has ever lived without food and drink; such things are not only important but *vital*. Prayer is like this.

So far in this letter Paul has blessed God for six great spiritual blessings that we have in Christ – election to holiness, predestination to adoption, redemption, the knowledge of His will, obtaining the inheritance, and being sealed with the Holy Spirit. Now he turns to pray for those who are the recipients of these blessings.

Most, if not all, of us struggle in prayer. Our first problem is to make time, and then to spend the time without distraction. We experience wandering thoughts as there are so many things we have to do. Sometimes we do not know what to pray. Such problems are shown by few people who make the effort to come to prayer meetings, and then often a reluctance to pray audibly. There is little urgency in prayer, little pleading with God. The focus may be on immediate physical needs rather than the far greater spiritual ones. This is all a reflection of our private prayers.

In our everyday life we discipline ourselves to learn what we think is needful. For example, the learning of basic computer skills. Yet how much effort is put into learning how to pray? Is there anything more important in our lives than prayer? Can we as individuals or as a church expect any blessing from God without prayer (James. 4:2, Matthew 7:7-11)? One great way to learn about prayer is from the examples of Paul's praying, as here.

1. WHY YOU MUST PRAY (1:15)

"For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints,..."

By writing "for this reason" Paul shows two connected things that impelled him to pray for the Ephesians.

(1) Because of *the blessings of salvation already given by God*.

The Ephesians were partakers with Paul of amazing spiritual blessings, as have been enumerated in verses 3-14. At this point in his letter Paul turns back to the One who is the source of these blessings. If someone helps you with school fees, so that you can complete your education, will you not want to thank the giver? You say that you are saved, not because you attend church, or give offerings, or anything at all in you. Rather it is because God planned it in eternity (1:4-6), Christ accomplished it (1:7-8), and the Holy Spirit has applied it to you (1:9-14). To the boasting Corinthians, Paul wrote, "What do you have that you did not receive?" (1 Corinthians 4:7). "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord" (1:31). Is this total indebtedness to God what brings you to prayer?

(2) Because of *news of continued blessing from God*.

It was more than 4 years since Paul had been in Ephesus, and even in his imprisonment he is hearing news of them. It is good news, of faithful continuance in their Christian lives, and this too is all from God. We tend to focus on problems rather than on what the Lord is doing in the very midst of those problems! It would be like a farmer who only talks about the weeds he has to uproot, and the diseases he must spray against, yet all the while a bumper harvest is developing. The fact that there are problems shows there is struggle going on, but also a good foundation, otherwise there would be nothing. Two things clearly reveal a continued spiritual life from God, what we must be looking for in ourselves and others.

- **“Faith in the Lord Jesus”** – The Scriptures never congratulate us for having faith, because it is a gift from God. Many profess faith, but for various reasons sooner or later they give up. The Ephesians had continued to put their trust in the Lord. They had not turned back to the old Jewish religion as the Hebrews were tempted to do; nor had they gone back to idols despite many trials and temptations. But why should anyone trust a Saviour they have never seen, One who brings ‘trouble’ in this life in the form of self-denial and persecution? It is because faith is in Jesus as “Lord”. He rules because He died and now all things are under His feet (Philippians 2:9-11). Is the Lord Jesus central in your life enabling you to continue whatever the circumstances? Test your faith by considering your prayers. Are you conscious that you are unworthy to come into God’s holy presence, and it is only possible because of what Christ has done?
- **“Love towards all the saints”** – Faith always leads to love for others who share the same faith. ‘The magnet that draws sinners to Christ also draws such sinners to each other.’ “Faith apart from works is dead” (James 2:14-26), and this is in the context of loving a brother. Specifically, faith works through love (Galatians 5:6) as the only thing that counts in Christ. Note that Christians are called “saints” (it is never in the singular) because they are all separated from the world and consecrated to God. We love them simply because they are the people of God, and we love all of them. For example, in our earthly family we love all no matter what difficulties we have with any individual. This love is a warm, personal attachment, and genuine concern where no sacrifice is too great (so 1 John 3:16-18). What we do to our earthly family we should all the more do to the saints – delighting to be together, visiting, praying, helping when problems of sickness, etc. Don’t leave it all to the Pastors. It is easy to profess love to God, but the real test is loving the one, the saint, you can see (1 John 4:20). What an example was our Lord who with His disciples was so patient, bearing with their weaknesses. Brethren this love that the Ephesians displayed is commanded, so plan to use your time and your gifts for others, to visit and encourage, and to restore the backslider. If you are not willing are you really a Christian?

2. **HOW YOU MUST PRAY** (1:16)

“I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers,...”

Here Paul shows there are two general parts to prayer.

(1) *Thanksgiving*. Paul is always thanking God for them. Such thanksgiving is such a vital part of praying, see Ephesians 5:20, Philippians 4:6, Colossians 4:2, 1 Thessalonians 5:18, 1 Timothy 2:1. In almost all of his letters Paul expresses his thankfulness to God for those to whom he is writing. This is because of the recognition that all is from God, and so when others are blessed we delight in God. How much we have to learn about prayer, yes, *learn*. We must train ourselves to pray with thanksgiving. Prayer is not just about solving problems and

requests for more blessing, but it is about seeing God's work in others. Such thanksgiving is an expression of love and an encouragement to love, and is against jealousy, gossip, division, and such like things. Do you pray for others at all? It is a recognition that we are part of the same spiritual family; so we are taught to pray, "Our Father". We pray despite the weaknesses of others, for whatever anyone has is because of the Lord alone, so that we are thankful for each other.

(2) *Prayer*. Since all past blessings are only from God, we are totally dependent upon Him for all future blessings. Do you really believe that Christian growth is dependent upon prayer, as much as plants depend upon water? The means of growth is not prayer for myself alone, but also our prayers for each other. The great example is our Lord in John 17 as He prayed for His disciples and those who would believe through their ministry; and His servant Paul as he writes to various churches. Are we not in a spiritual battle ultimately against unseen spiritual enemies (see Ephesians 6:12)? Are we not to put on spiritual armour "praying at all times" (6:18)? Do you pray for your Pastors, or do you just criticize what you see as their failures? Rather, with thanksgiving pray for us even in those failures and the Lord will deal with us, and even you! Someone put it this way: 'All spiritual blessings are stored up in Christ, and we go to draw the supply by prayer.' This is the vital importance of prayer. What a privilege that we can pray to the eternal God through Christ. Let us repent where we have been failing or weak and not just talk about change but put it into practice by God's grace.

EPHESIANS 1:17-18a

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING TO PRAY FOR

We are continuing to look at words written by Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, from prison, to the church in Ephesus. Being in prison he is obviously not able to visit, to preach or to speak with them face to face. But he is very concerned about them. He is always giving thanks for the good news he has heard about them, and he wants them to know more blessing. So *what* does he pray for them? What was the greatest need that the Ephesian church had?

Think of your own local church. What do you need from God so that you can glorify Him? Three answers are common:

- 'Let God do a new thing for us'. Many long for a fresh Holy Spirit baptism of power. No doubt there is some truth in this, but as Christians we already have the Spirit (see 1:13-14), and have experienced 'the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us (1:19).
- 'Let us do a new thing for God'. Many speak of the need for 'full surrender', to be totally dedicated to the Lord and His service. Again there is truth in this, but Christians are already saints = belonging to the Lord (1:2), purchased by the Lord to be His.
- 'Let the church do a new thing'. People look at other churches that are growing and what has worked for them. So they say what we need is a new evangelistic programme, a crusade, contemporary music, community cell groups, etc.

None of these are the great need for which Paul prays. The great need which, if granted, addresses all other needs is for *knowledge*. He prays for "a spirit of wisdom and revelation" "in knowledge of Him" (1:17), and for "the eyes of your hearts (to be) enlightened" "that you might know...". We tend to pray for a change of circumstances when we should first be praying for a change in our attitude in those circumstances. We face the same circumstances

as unbelievers, but what makes us different is that we have Christian attitudes of joy, contentment and trust even in very difficult circumstances. How is it possible to have such godly attitudes? It is by the power of God in granting us 'knowledge'.

1. PRAY TO DELIGHT IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

It makes little difference whether we read the word "spirit" as our own spirit (ESV) or the Holy Spirit (NIV). Many think it must first be a reference to the Spirit of God as only He can reveal, and this is true. But the result is that we have knowledge. So we can understand it this way: 'May God give the Spirit who is wise and able to reveal, so that I might have spiritual wisdom and knowledge revealed to me'. This is not a prayer for a further reception of the Spirit, but for the Spirit who already indwells to continue to work and to reveal more.

And the more that you need is "**wisdom**", the knowledge of the will of God (1:8-9), the eternal saving purposes in Christ, which is only possible by the work of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:7-14). Maybe you say you will read the Bible more, but without the Spirit of God the Bible is a closed book. Do you remember Nicodemus, who was an expert in the Scriptures, yet who did not understand (John 3:10)? In the same way, you might read a poem, but if you have no appreciation of poetry it will not communicate to you. You must start with God in all your thinking, who He is, why He made you, but only God Himself by His Spirit can tell you these things. You can look at the world and see all the problems, but you do not know that it is the result of the first sin in the Garden of Eden, and that the only solution is in Christ. This is the wisdom of the Spirit in the 66 books of the Bible.

Then you need more "**revelation**", not a personal revelation to you of what no one else knows, but a spiritual ability to understand what has been revealed in the Bible. You cannot see anything in the darkness; but even in the light you must have eyes to see. So God 'enlightens the eyes of your heart' so that you can see with clear spiritual vision (see Acts 26:18). For example, you can learn about the story of David and Goliath, and know that David defeated him by trusting in the Lord, and that we can similarly overcome God's enemies by trusting in Him, and that God's promises about the defeat of the seed of the serpent will be fulfilled. But are you able to apply that to your situation today and overcome your spiritual enemies? This is what you must pray for as you read the Scriptures, assuming that you do read!

This is a very specific knowledge, "**in the knowledge of Him (God)**". It is more than an interest in Bible knowledge than can win quizzes, for even the demons have that knowledge (James 2:19). It is the knowledge of God as a Person, a personal relationship with Him based upon His self-revelation. It is the difference between being taught that fire burns, and experiencing a burn on your body. The Christian life is to be lived with God at the centre, with God as the very atmosphere we breathe. Everything is to be done in relation to Him, even eating and drinking (1 Corinthians 10:31). We tend to think that only some things are 'spiritual' but all of life is lived in the presence of God.

2. PRAY FOR A SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE

The general 'knowledge of God' has a very specific focus, in the three things that follow (1:18b-19). It is not something you do like 'Seven steps to overcoming failure', but having *knowledge* about the hope to which He has called us, His power at work in us, and God's power in us that guarantees it. We need to see our lives as part of God's eternal plan: He is the One who called us, His power is at work in us, we have hope in this world of an eternal

inheritance. This is the perspective we need to live mature Christian lives, and it is given to us in the Bible. How often the Bible brings the promises of God about eternity to bear on our present situation (for example, 2 Corinthians 5:6,10).

3. GOD WILL CERTAINLY GRANT YOUR REQUEST

This is the knowledge that is the need of the hour so that we might become mature Christians. The important Biblical principle is that we know who the God is to whom we are praying. So consider to whom Paul is praying as the assurance that this prayer for knowledge will be heard.

(1) God is *“the God of our Lord Jesus Christ”*. He is the God of the incarnate Son (John 20:17). In the Old Testament He is revealed as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But now there is a new covenant, and He is the God who has given us our Lord with the determined purpose of giving us a full and eternal salvation. It is in Christ that we receive every possible spiritual blessing we need (1:3). The God who saw our Lord through His incarnation, ministry, death, resurrection and exaltation, will likewise see us through to reach the goal of glory.

(2) God is *“the Father of glory”*. He is infinitely glorious, perfect in all His being. As there is no lack of power, wisdom, goodness or love in Him, so there is nothing that can hinder His purposes. As Father he is the source of all glory, He gives glory to the Son, who gives glory to us (John 17:22). Once again there is the certainty of receiving all we need from our Father in heaven.

What should we learn from this prayer?

- The Scriptures are the word of God but they are not sufficient in themselves to lead us to God. We need ability to understand and apply the word, and that comes by the Holy Spirit alone (see John 6:45).
- We must pray every time we come to the Scriptures, for God to open our eyes (Psalm 119:18). God’s word does not enter our hearts automatically. It is our responsibility to pray when we read and meditate on the Scriptures, when we hear the word preached, otherwise it will not be profitable. Such prayer in no way cancels mental effort, it actually encourages it (Psalm 1:2).
- The most important need for every Christian is not first of all experience, but true Biblical, spiritual *knowledge*, out of which genuine Christian experience will flow. Is this what you pray for as a priority, so that you can face whatever circumstances the Lord is pleased to bring into your life?

EPHESIANS 1:18b-21

WHAT YOU MUST KNOW

It is everywhere recognized that ‘knowledge is power’ so there is a great emphasis on education. Wisdom is stronger than might. “A wise man scales the city of the mighty...” (Proverbs 21:22). As Paul turns in this letter to pray for the Ephesians Christians he believes their greatest need is for knowledge. It is knowledge that impels us into action, even to change our course of action. A new year comes around and many people determine to change their lives with the knowledge that life is short, God requires the change, and it is for their benefit. The Holy Spirit comes to give us such knowledge (see verse 17). What specific

knowledge must we have? Having listed the blessings (verses 3-14), our need is to understand, appreciate and live by them. There are three.

1. YOU MUST KNOW GREAT HOPE IS YOURS IN CHRIST

The word 'hope' can be used in two ways, either to refer to the activity of hoping, or to the thing being hoped for. We will take it as the activity, grace of hope, expectation, assurance, as in Romans 5:4 and Acts 16:19. This is because the second thing that must be known is the thing being hoped for, i.e. the inheritance. For example, a farmer hopes that he will get a good harvest, but his hope or expectation fails when crops start drying and he gets discouraged; but when rain clouds are again seen on the horizon his hope revives. To have 'great hope' there must be reasons or grounds, otherwise such a person is to be pitied as deluded, as having false hope. If a Form Four student has great hope that he will become an Engineer yet consistently fails in his science exams there are no real grounds for his hope. So, on what ground may we as Christians stand having 'great hope', assurance. If we look at ourselves we only see continuing sinfulness despite God's grace, and weakness revealed by constant failures. We must consider the fact that **God** has "called" us, and this will give the 'great hope'.

(1) *Consider that God has called you.* You were dead in sin, so this calling is all of grace (2 Timothy 1:9). As when Jesus came to the grave of Lazarus, so God sent a messenger to you and gave you spiritual life. If God did this to you when you were His enemy, surely there is nothing He will withhold now that you are His friend! If a person is called by God it is because He was foreknown and predestined (Romans 8:29-30) and so in God's eternal saving purpose. What evidence do you have that God has called you (see 2 Peter 1:10)? Has the gospel of Jesus Christ so come to you to convince you that only God's judgment awaits you because of your sin, so that you have responded by coming to Christ and continuing to walk with Him? Being called by God leads to a total change of life, as Peter explains (2 Peter 1:3-9).

(2) *Consider what God has called you to.* We have been called to participate in the most desirable things every Christian longs for. If you call me to a football match I might go just to keep you company, but if you said 'Let's go to hear Spurgeon preach' then I would be full of eager anticipation of the blessing of God! Listen to what God calls you!

- To belong to Jesus Christ (Romans 1:6)
- To be saints (Romans 1:7)
- Into fellowship with Him (1 Corinthians 1:9)
- Into freedom from the condemnation of God's law (Galatians 5:13)
- Into one united body of peace (Ephesians 4:1-2, Colossians 3:15)
- And then into eternal glory (1 Thessalonians 2:12, 1 Peter 5:10)
- To a holy calling (2 Timothy 1:9)
- To be holy (1 Peter 1:15)
- Into suffering like Christ (1 Peter 2:21), so a privilege

Just as the smell of one's favourite food cooking excites, so the mention of these privileges to which we are called excites hope.

The world has no firm basis for any hope; it is all like quicksand. But in Christ we have a hope that can never be disappointed. It is called a 'living hope' (1 Peter 1:3) and such hope is essential to joyful, zealous and steadfast Christian living.

2. YOU MUST KNOW A GREAT INHERITANCE IS YOURS IN CHRIST

The "inheritance" is the second thing for which Paul constantly prays that the Ephesians might know. There are implications from the use of the word inheritance that are so encouraging:

- Of grace. The receiving of an inheritance reflects upon the giver and not the recipient (see Deuteronomy 7:6-8). The richer the giver, the greater the inheritance, so Alexander the Great was able to give the gift of a city even to a mean man. Receiving an inheritance depends upon the relationship to the giver; many inherit a fortune just because of blood relationship. We receive an inheritance just because God sets His love upon us in Christ.
- Of eternity. An inheritance cannot be taken away (Hebrews 9:15). Even an earthly inheritance is passed down in the family. The land of Canaan, as a type, was given to Israel as an inheritance for ever (Exodus 32:13).
- Of certainty. If the inheritance depends on the giver, and is given for ever, then it is certain (Psalm 94:19). This is the reason why God uses the word 'inheritance', to show the greatness of the blessing we have in Christ.

Paul is not content with using the word "inheritance" alone. He adds that it is "glorious" and that this glory has "riches". Ahasuerus "showed the riches of his royal glory ... (for) 180 days" (Esther 1:4). Royal glory is great enough, but Ahasuerus was determined to outdo all others.

(1) Consider "the riches of the glory" of the inheritance God gives to the saints. Actually, to try to describe it would be to greatly undervalue it, and we can only use symbols. So the New Jerusalem is pictured as glorious like precious jewels. The 12 gates are made of impossibly large pearls (Revelation 21:21); the city and streets are made of impossibly clear gold (verses 18,21). Not even considering what we presently enjoy as God's people, consider how the final and full experience of the inheritance is described in Revelation 21:1-4, and 22:1-5.

The idea of 'inheritance' may also be understood as the inheritance *God* has because the saints are His special possession, as well as the inheritance a *Christian* has because God gives it to him. In the Old Testament both are true of the nation of Israel (see Deuteronomy 4:20-21, 9:26). Likewise, Christians are the special possession of God (Ephesians 1:14, 1 Peter 2:9).

(2) So consider "the riches of the glory" of the saints as God's own inheritance. God is going to be glorified "in His saints" when the Lord Jesus returns (2 Thessalonians 1:10). For example, a craftsman takes a piece of wood and from it carves a very life-like lion, and the expertise shown brings glory to him. God likewise takes us as clay and then fashions us into a vessel which is in perfect conformity to His beloved Son. There is nothing more precious to God than us His people, whom He chose, and for whom He gave His only Son as a sacrifice on the cross. The earth and its works will be "exposed" (2 Peter 3:10), but we will be with Him for ever!

Why is this important for you to know? It is because of the inheritance that Abraham obeyed God (Hebrews 11:16), that Moses was able to refuse the fleeting pleasures of sin (verse 26), and that the Hebrews had "joyfully accepted the plundering of (their) property" (10:34). How else will you be able to pursue holiness for another year and more if the Lord tarries? Jesus Himself endured the cross because of the joy set before Him (12:2). You will abound in the work of the Lord if you know it is not in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58). It is those who are heavenly-minded who are of most earthly use. So labour to have this knowledge, prayerfully read the Scriptures, and ask the Spirit to enlighten the eyes of your heart, as it is not automatic.

3. YOU MUST KNOW THE GREAT POWER OF GOD TOWARDS BELIEVERS

All over the world there is a great emphasis in Christian meetings on 'receiving power' (see Acts 1:8). Noting the ineffectiveness of the church, many teach that it is not enough to be a Christian, but one must be 'filled' with the Spirit and demonstrate it in something miraculous, i.e. powerful, such as tongues speaking. But this is not the approach of the Bible, for if one

does not have spiritual power then he is not a Christian! This is because the working of God's power is what *defines* a Christian, and this is what we need to know, appreciate and rely on in order to reach the final goal. This inheritance is too glorious and I can never be fit for it as one always failing, so weak, and with such great enemies. If I am not sure that I have adequate resources then I will have little confidence or boldness. For example, if I am going on a long journey I need to know that the car is functioning well and that I have fuel. Paul is praying that the Ephesians will know this spiritually as they seek to live daily for the glory of God.

(1) *Know that God's power towards believers is infinitely great.*

Paul cannot find enough words to give an adequate description of this power, so he piles word upon word. God's power has a "greatness" which is "immeasurable" so that it is inexhaustible and unlimited. Supermarkets have become larger and larger; first they were called 'mega' and then 'hyper' and Paul uses both of these words here. The power is "towards us" as believers, meaning that it is for our benefit. It is not something yet to be experienced, but is already being exercised towards us and remains constant. How important it is to know you are a believer.

A question should be asked at this point. Why is such power needed towards believers? After all, it seems simple enough to say 'Yes' to Jesus and to decide to obey Him. So we shall consider the two aspects of our Christian experience.

- *In Conversion.* It is when we understand the true condition of the sinner before becoming a Christian that we understand the need for God's infinitely great power to work. In the physical realm doctors work with urgency on a crash victim, but if he dies they leave him and cover the body with a sheet. Nothing can now be done. In the spiritual realm sinners are dead, having no spiritual life, absolutely no ability to hear, understand and respond to the gospel. Read Ephesians 2:1, then Jeremiah 13:23, John 6:44, and Acts 16:14. It is totally false to think a sinner can become a Christian whenever he chooses, because of 'free will'. Like Lazarus in his tomb, your dead condition must first be overcome before you can do anything. Can a dead person do anything to make himself alive? He cannot even ask someone to do it for him! This is why the Bible refers to conversion as a 'resurrection from the dead', as a 'new birth', as a 'new creation'. Sin has affected the mind so that it cannot think straight spiritually; the heart is affected and deceived; so the will is unable to choose the godly path. Human power can do many amazing things, but not this. Even angelic power cannot, only God's great power.
- *In the Christian Life.* It is when we understand what God requires of the Christian that we understand the need for God's infinitely great power to work. We are saved in order to keep God's commandments. Far more than the Pharisees, we must keep them from the heart. If that is not difficult enough, in doing this we are constantly opposed by the world, the flesh and the devil. The world is ever near, at home, when travelling, at school and work and business. The flesh is within us ever opposing what we want to do (Romans 7:21) and so we cry, "Wretched man that I am..." (verse 24). The devil is sometimes like a roaring lion, and other times like an angel of light. He tempts, tricks and deceives. There is no hope without the great power of God. If only we know what we already have in Christ as believers! Read John 17:15, Philippians 2:13, Hebrews 13:20-21, 2 Peter 1:3, Jude 24.

Do you know what enabled you to become a Christian? Nothing less than this power of God. You know it was not you – not your deserving because you were full of sin, not your desiring because you were always fixed on worldly things, and not your choosing as you were seeking

to run away from God. You know it was God who arrested and overpowered you in His love. You know it was He who opened your eyes to see.

(2) *Know that God's power towards believers is as great as that which raised and exalted Christ.*

○ *First, consider the resurrection and exaltation of Christ.*

God "raised him from the dead" – the body of Jesus was laid in the tomb, lifeless, cold, severely mutilated by scourging, the nails and spear, a big stone was rolled against the entrance, and an armed guard posted. Although death and the devil had Him in their power they were not able to hold Him (Acts 2:24, Hebrews 2:14-15). By God's power Christ burst the bonds of death.

God "seated him at his right hand" – He was taken bodily into God's very presence (Psalm 110:1). Surrounding God's throne are countless numbers of glorious angels of various ranks, but Christ is not placed amongst them, or even at their head. He is given the place of privilege and power with the Father. There He takes His seat, He alone, and is worshipped by the assembled throng that stands around the throne. He is exalted far above any other power, by whatever name they may be called, whether rule, authority, power or dominion, whether good or evil powers (see 3:10, 6:12, Colossians 1:16). Perhaps Paul writes this because the Colossians had a background in magic and astrology, so it is being made clear they need have no fear of such 'powers'. Christ's absolute exaltation will continue for ever in the age to come. Only an immeasurably great power could exalt Christ to the very highest.

○ *Second, consider why Paul uses this analogy of resurrection and exaltation.*

There is a comparison – in both cases, ours and Christ's, the very same power is at work, that shows without any doubt that conversion is a work of the great power of God, without which no one can be saved (regenerated).

There is a typical relationship – our conversion is nothing less than a resurrection and exaltation with Christ (see 2:6), so we need the same power, and one day our bodies will also be raised.

There is a causal relationship – Christ's resurrection and exaltation bring us justification (Romans 4:25, Colossians 2:12), and bring us the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:33), and at last He will bring us where He is in glory.

Once again Paul multiplies words to seek to describe this power. It is literally, 'the working (or exertion) of the might of His strength'. In other words this power is not a tiny stream of water, but like a flood that carried all things before it.

We shall close with two points of application:

1. How great is salvation! We are not able to make anyone a Christian, nor can the greatest evangelist. Faith only comes by the immeasurably great power of God. If you see salvation in any way as something you have done, so that it is not something impossible, then you are the sort of person who afterwards needs to seek after special experiences, often seen as greater than conversion, and this results in a deformed gospel. If you devalue the power of God in salvation, and stop asking in amazement 'Why am I saved?' so that your mind is taken off the absolute necessity of the death, resurrection and exaltation of Christ, then you are in grave spiritual danger.

2. Seek assurance! May you come to know that this power is towards us all as believers. It is a power infinitely greater than anything else in the universe, and will ever be so. So what can prevent you from receiving the full inheritance? Christ is in total control. Far from making

you lazy and careless it will make you to redouble your efforts knowing that they are not in vain.

EPHESIANS 1:22-23

EVERYTHING EXISTS FOR THE CHURCH!

What do many people think of the Christian *church* today? They think it is filled with hypocrites, people who preach one thing and practice another. Of course, there is too much truth in this. In the U.K. the church seems irrelevant with fewer and fewer attending worship, church buildings closing weekly to be taken over as warehouses, garages and even mosques. The largest professing Christian church has had awful sex scandals exposed amongst its leadership. In Kenya the church seems to be growing, yet there is much formality on the one hand, and a great emphasis on entertainment on the other hand. Despite all this, the Bible clearly tells us that the *church* is at the very centre of all God does in the entire creation! God neither acts for the sake of great powers like the United States or China, nor simply for the poor and down-trodden of the world. It is not the G8 or G20, the World Bank or IMF, or the UN that rules the world. It is the *church* that God specially loves, that Christ gave Himself for, and that will be prepared to be with Him in glory (Ephesians 5:25-27). So how important it is to know what the church is, and whether you are really a part of it!

1. CHRIST RULES OVER ALL THINGS (1:22a)

Paul has been expressing his prayer for the Ephesian Christians to know the three things of greatest importance for their Christian lives (1:18-19). The third prayer concerns the power that is at work in believers, the power that is nothing less than the resurrection-exaltation power that put Christ in the highest place in the universe, at God's own right hand, for ever. But it is not a place of privilege and authority without doing anything. God has "put all things under His feet" – "put" is the same word translated "submit" (5:21,22,24). A victorious king puts his feet on the neck of his defeated foe to show their total submission (see Joshua 10:24). So Christ has been exalted to make every enemy submit, and the last enemy will be death, but it will also finally submit. Read Psalm 110:1 and 1 Corinthians 15:24-26. No one and nothing will be able to successfully resist Christ so as to come out from under His rule. He will ultimately and totally triumph! How foolish to fight against Christ. Yes, He died in weakness, but He is now in the place of glory and power, and one day He will return in all His divine power and *every* knee shall bow before Him (Philippians 2:9-11).

2. CHRIST RULES FOR THE SAKE OF HIS CHURCH (1:22b)

(1) "*and (God) gave Him*" – The emphasis in the words, "and gave Him as head" is on the "Him", that is, '*Him* it is that God gave', the One He so highly exalted. It seems paradoxical that One who has everything under His feet is 'given', but He is the Father's gracious gift.

(2) "*as head over all things*" – The Father gave Him as "head over all things". Do not think here of head and body relationships as these have to do with created things (see also Colossians 2:10). "Head" means rule, for Christ an absolute rule, for He is ruler over "all things". This must include evil and well as good powers. There is so much talk today of evil

spirits, of so-called generational curses, as if these things are independent of Christ. How false this is!

(3) *“for the church”* – The further thought here is that all this power is exercised to the advantage of, or to the benefit of the church. Ask an athlete why he is doing certain things and not doing others. You will always get the reply, ‘so that I can win the race’. If you could ask God, ‘Why are you doing this?’ He would always reply, ‘For my beloved church’. This is the answer to all the following questions we might ask. Why did you choose Abraham and take him from Ur to bring him to Canaan? Why did you get the brothers to sell Joseph into slavery in Egypt and to get put in prison there? Why was Saul of Tarsus a witness of the stoning of the first Christian Martyr, Stephen? Why was there persecution at the time of Stephen’s death? Why was Paul in prison in Rome when he might have been free to preach everywhere? And especially, why did Christ come from heaven to suffer and die on a Roman cross? In **all** that God does He has the benefit of the church in view, and this is how “all things work together for good” (Romans 8:28). Even Job’s sufferings were for good. Our own trials are for good (Romans 5:3-5, James 1:2-4).

(4) *What is this church?* It is certainly not a building; it is not an organization like Trinity Baptist Church; nor is it all who call themselves Christians as opposed say to Muslims, so 75% of Kenyans. The church is made up of a special kind of people, “saints”, those who are holy in the sense that they have been set apart from sin to God; they are “faithful in Christ Jesus” (remember 1:1). Such was the local church in Ephesus to whom Paul was writing. Here the church is not confined to one local church, but refers to all believers, at all times, in all places, what is often called the ‘universal’ church (as in 3:10, 21, 5:23ff.). The church is all those who submit to Christ (5:24), who are loved by Christ (5:25), in order to be made holy (5:27). See a woman who joyfully does whatever a certain man wants, whose needs are all met by that man, and who presents herself beautifully before him, and I will show you a wife. Does this describe your relationship to Christ? Then you are part of the church. The church is the heavenly gathering around the throne of Christ in which believers now participate.

3. BECAUSE THE CHURCH IS VERY PRECIOUS TO CHRIST (1:23)

(1) The church is nothing less than *“His body”* (also 4:4,12,16, 5:23,30). How precious is your body to you? It is obviously so precious that you clean it, feed it, protect it, in order to keep it. Christ has indissolubly bound the church to Himself. So what happens to the body reflects upon Him. Therefore He must save those for whom He died; He must keep them and raise them up on the last day. They must be with Him in glory, or He will be ‘body-less’! This is why He exercises His infinite power in their interest. Like it or not, the entire universe is subject to Him because the church is His body.

(2) The church is further described as *“the fullness of Him”*, that is of Christ. Christ fills the church. There are a number of different possible interpretations, but the one I think best fits the context is that Christ Himself is the fullness of the church. This is because the emphasis is laid upon what Christ is to the church. As the glory cloud filled the tabernacle in the wilderness (Exodus 40:34-35), so Christ who is the glory of God fills the church by His Spirit. Where does Christ delight to be and to manifest His glory? Amongst His people. “For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them” (Matthew 18:20). More amazingly, this One “fills all in all”. He completely fills everything, in every respect and in every way. But He fills the church in a special way He does not fill all other things. Think about it as the difference between a loving husband making known his presence at home, and

a major-general on a parade ground. Christ's glory is not simply His power and His wisdom, but as used in grace for our eternal salvation.

Are you someone who professes to be saved? Then I ask you, how interested are you in Christ's church? God's people under the old covenant would groan if away from God's manifested presence in Jerusalem. If Christ manifests His glorious presence when the local church gathers for worship you should groan if ever you are prevented from being together with them. Is the church then, as we have defined it, the very centre of your life, so that you fit everything else around it? This may demand a radical reordering of your life, but you must do whatever it takes. Is your failure here the reason why you are spiritually weak and not progressing as you ought? If I have a very special function and I invite you as a chief guest and you give some very lame excuse, will that not tell me something about the way you consider me? If your Saviour delights to be with His people, with you whom He has redeemed at such tremendous cost, do you not delight, as your chief joy, to be with Him? This teaching clearly shows that we should not emphasize the private over the corporate in worship and service. If anything, the corporate is more important.
