

Earlier in the year we studied the letter to the Colossians. We learned that it was written while Paul was in prison in Rome around 60-62 A.D. Several times I mentioned that Ephesians was a parallel letter. It was probably written a short time later from the same place of imprisonment. While Colossae was a small and insignificant city, Ephesus was one of the top five largest cities of the Roman Empire. It was located between the Eastern and Western empire. It boasted one of the 7 wonders of the world, the Temple of Diana. You probably recall from the book of Acts how Paul's second stay in Ephesus converted so many Gentiles to Christ that the silversmiths that made images of Diana caused a riot. (Acts 19:28-29) So many were converted from magical arts that there was a great book burning of books of magical instructions and incantations that was worth an enormous sum of money. (Acts 19:19)

They church had some excellent teachers other than Paul. Aquila and Priscilla, Apollos, (Acts 18:18-19, 24) and even the Apostle John spent time instructing the church of Ephesus. It was from Ephesus that the Gospel spread to much of the known world.

The earliest manuscripts do not have the words "in Ephesus", which has caused a great deal of speculation. Since Paul had asked that the letter to Laodicea and the Colossian letter be passed along to other churches (Colossians 4:16), the best assumption is that this was also a letter that was to be circulated and so the location was left out. That would explain why there are no personal greetings. It is for all believers.

The letter to the Colossians focused on Christ the head. Ephesians is focused on the body of Christ. There are some verses that are exactly the same as the letter to the Colossians, but there are a number of new topics that are raised. The letter is abounding in praise and wonder at what God has done and is doing through Christ in the church. It has been called "the divinest composition of man".⁶

¹ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, Paul begins by stating his authority to write this letter. The Apostles were the men that God had chosen to convey the life and teachings of Jesus, and who were witnesses of His resurrection. They were inspired to convey the words that would become what we have as the New Testament. When choosing a replacement for Judas, Peter said it had to be someone that was with them from the beginning and witnessed Jesus alive after the resurrection. (Acts 1:21-22) Paul tells us he was one of them but born out of sync with the timing of the others. (1Corinthians 15:8) We know about his conversion on the road to Damascus. It is believed to have taken place around 33 to 34 A.D.⁸ That is just a short time after Jesus' death. "On the Damascus off-ramp he met the Lion of the Tribe of Judah... The effect

Commented [Paul1]: Acts 19:28-29 (ESV)

²⁸ When they heard this they were enraged and were crying out, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

²⁹ So the city was filled with the confusion, and they rushed together into the theater, dragging with them Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians who were Paul's companions in travel.

Commented [Paul2]: Acts 19:19 (ESV)

¹⁹ And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver.

Commented [Paul3]: Acts 18:18-19 (ESV)

¹⁸ After this, Paul stayed many days longer and then took leave of the brothers and set sail for Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila. At Cenchreae he had cut his hair, for he was under a vow.

¹⁹ And they came to Ephesus, and he left them there, but he himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews.

Commented [Paul4]: Acts 18:24 (ESV)

²⁴ Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures.

Commented [Paul5]: Colossians 4:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea.

Commented [Paul6]: Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Commented [Paul7]: Acts 1:21-22 (ESV)

²¹ So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us,

²² beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection.

Commented [Paul8]: 1 Corinthians 15:8 (ESV)

⁸ Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

Commented [Paul9]: C.H. Dodd, The Apostolic Preaching, p 16

was radical conversion, so radical that in a few days Saul "baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ" It was a *miracle*, and nothing else, that made him one with the Twelve!"¹⁰ Paul didn't fit the criteria of having been with the 12 disciples to witness the life of Jesus. God apparently vetoed Peter's criteria of having been with Jesus from the beginning. Remember, Peter made that statement before the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Commented [Paul10]: Kent Hughes, Ephesians, Mystery of the Body of Christ

While Paul did see the resurrected Christ, he had to learn of the life and teachings of Jesus from the disciples. The rest was revealed to Paul by revelation from the Lord himself. (Galatians 1:16) Paul never boasts about this special status, in fact he refers to himself as the chief of sinners. (1Timothy 1:15) Notice that he said it was the will of God that made him an apostle. He would never have chosen it for himself. In fact, apostles were once the target of his wrath. **It appears that God chose this persecutor of Christians to show the riches of His grace and His power to transform the even those dogmatically opposed to Jesus.** (1Timothy 1:16)

Commented [Paul11]: Galatians 1:16 (ESV)
¹⁶ was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone;

Commented [Paul12]: 1 Timothy 1:15 (ESV)
¹⁵ The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.

Commented [Paul13]: 1 Timothy 1:16 (ESV)
¹⁶ But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.

When I prepare a sermon I never know who will be in the congregation that Sunday, but God does. If you are here this morning and you think you are beyond believing in Jesus, that following Christ is for weak minded people, or if you think you have been too bad for Jesus, you are the one for whom God made Paul an example. Paul was sure Jesus was a false prophet that was turning people away from true Judaism, but the way those followers of Jesus died was tugging at his heart and mind. Then he met Jesus on the way to persecute the Christians of Damascus and he made a 180 degree turn. (Acts 9:18) My prayer is that you meet the real Jesus this morning and find His grace is reaching out to you.

Commented [Paul14]: Acts 9:18 (ESV)
¹⁸ And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized;

To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus: We've seen this word "saints" before. Israelites of old were called saints. (Deuteronomy 33:3) It means those set apart for service to God. All those who believe in Jesus are called saints in the New Testament. It's not because of what you have done, but what Christ has done for you. (Titus 3:5) It isn't even about your current behavior, but about the work that will be completed in you. (Philippians 1:6) Look at the person next to you and tell them, "You are a saint!" Out of all the people in the world, you were set apart for service to Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Commented [Paul15]: Acts 9:18 (ESV)
¹⁸ And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized;

Commented [Paul16]: Titus 3:5 (ESV)
⁵ he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,

Commented [Paul17]: Philippians 1:6 (ESV)
⁶ And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

The believers are also called the "faithful in Christ Jesus". Paul will use this expression of being in Christ 10 times in the first 14 verses. Paul saw that every good thing we have is in Christ. (Philippians 4:19) When we are in Him, we have every good thing. When we are in Him we are faithful, for we are credited with His faithfulness. Not only that, His life empowers us to live in faithfulness to God. It is not that we are already

Commented [Paul18]: Philippians 4:19 (ESV)
¹⁹ And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

perfected, but when we are in Him, and not in our old nature, we can choose to obey God and have the power to live it out. (Philippians 2:13)

Commented [Paul19]: Philippians 2:13 (ESV)

¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

² *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.* This combination of Greek and Hebrew greetings took on a much greater depth to the Christian community. They had received the grace of God that led them to Jesus and through Jesus to a right relationship with God. They received grace daily as they lived in Christ and He in them. Their lives were becoming truly gracious, not in the eyes of man, but in the eyes of God, the Creator of true beauty. (John 1:16)

Commented [Paul20]: John 1:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.

The peace they knew from God of the Old Covenant had now taken on a richer and deeper sense because they had peace with God through Jesus. (Romans 5:1) It was not the blood of bulls and goats that covered their sin for a time, but the blood of God's own Lamb that redeemed them once and for all that gave them true peace. Peace was not only the lack of conflict between their life and God's standard, but also the presence of every good thing they have in Christ. (Colossians 1:19)

Commented [Paul21]: Romans 5:1 (ESV)

¹ Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Many in the Ephesian church were Gentile slaves. Imagine them hearing that greeting. It elevated them to a whole new status. Though their social status didn't change, when they were with the church of Ephesus, they had the same grace and peace that everyone else had in Jesus. Being in Jesus gives life a whole new meaning and purpose. Notice that in the first two verses we have three doubles. The authority for writing the letter is Paul's apostleship in Christ and by the will of God. It is to the saints and faithful in Christ. Those saints are greeted with grace and peace.

Commented [Paul22]: Colossians 1:19 (ESV)

¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.

Though Paul was in prison, his heart was soaring in the heavens. In the third verse he burst forth with a declaration of praise, one long run on sentence that goes all the way through verse 14. It speaks of what God has done, is doing, and will do for believers in Christ. It focuses on the three persons of the Trinity in order, the Father (3-6a), Son (6b-11) and Holy Spirit (12-14). Today we'll only cover the first section, what God the Father has done.

³ *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,* Here is an example of how the Jews frequently pronounced God blessed. It is a declaration of praise. (See NIV translation) We see this in almost every Jewish prayer. Paul blesses God because God has so blessed us in Christ. Paul tells us that we are blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ. In other words, there is no true spiritual blessing outside of Christ. **The treasure room of heaven is open to us in Christ.** Every good spiritual thing man can seek is found in Christ. He is the source.

Commented [Paul23]: Ephesians 1:3 (NIV)

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Do you want to have real love? it's in Christ. Would you like to know the unshakeable peace that never leaves? It's in Christ. Would you like to experience joy in the depths of your soul? It is found in Christ. How about patience and kindness and goodness and every other godly virtue? Every one is a spiritual blessing we have in Christ. All good things in heaven we can already experience here right now in Christ. "For in Him all the fullness of the Godhead lives in bodily form." (Colossians 2:9). Praise God the Father for giving us His spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus.

Commented [Paul24]: Colossians 2:9 (ESV)
⁹ For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily,

⁴ even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. We praise him for the spiritual blessing of being chosen. This is a difficult doctrine but it is clearly in the Word of God. God chose us. We did not choose Him. (John 15:16) He chose us before He created us. The only thing that helps me understand this is that in several passages (Romans 8:29 and 1Peter 1:1-2) His choice is related to His foreknowledge. Certainly the Scriptures teach that we can do nothing. (John 15:5) None truly seek after God. (Romans 3:11) It is the grace of God that draws our heart. I can't explain how we choose to surrender our life to Jesus, I just know He draws us and enables us. I know He is perfectly just. Does He draw all and only choose those who respond to the enabling of His Spirit? I think so, but that sounds dangerously close to us having something to do with it. We'll understand the wonder of freewill and the sovereignty of God when we see Him face to face. In the meantime, we must trust in the fact that He is just and righteous but also loving and merciful and not willing that any should perish. (2Peter 3:9)

Commented [Paul25]: John 15:16 (ESV)
¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.

Commented [Paul26]: Romans 8:29 (ESV)
²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

Commented [Paul27]: 1 Peter 1:1-2 (ESV)
¹ Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,
² according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you.

Commented [Paul28]: John 15:5 (NIV)
⁵ "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

Commented [Paul29]: Romans 3:11 (ESV)
¹¹ no one understands; no one seeks for God.

Commented [Paul30]: 2 Peter 3:9 (ESV)
⁹ The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

I think we need to focus more on how to live in gratitude for God choosing us than trying to figure out how God can do something our little minds can't comprehend. That would seem to me to be the humble response of gratitude that a follower of Jesus should have. After all, Jesus humbled Himself when found in the body of man and became obedient to the Father. (Philippians 2:8)

Commented [Paul31]: Philippians 2:8 (ESV)
⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

God chose us to be holy and blameless before Him. When we received that gift of forgiveness of sin and received His righteousness in exchange for our sin, we became holy and blameless in the eyes of God. God sees the work of Christ on your behalf. But He also knows that you are in the process of working that out in your life. (Philippians 2:12) The day will come when you will be not only holy and blameless positionally but experientially as well. We will be like Him when we see him as He is. (1John 3:2) Every day should be another step in that direction because we are in Christ.

Commented [Paul32]: Philippians 2:12 (ESV)
¹² Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,

Commented [Paul33]: 1 John 3:2 (ESV)
² Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, We have been adopted by God the Father into His family. "In love" is added to the previous verse in the KJV, but more recent translators it is meant to be

a part of verse 5. As part of verse 4 it would apply to the reason He chose us. If applied to verse 6 it would be in reference to our predestination to adoption. They are very similar ideas, but the familial aspect of verse 5 tends more toward the phrase being applied to it. God adopted you because He loves you. He loves the world (John 3:16), but as John wrote, ¹² *But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,* ¹³ *who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.* John 1:12-13 (ESV)

The consequences of being a part of God's family should cause us to praise God as Paul is doing here. Paul says it makes us joint-heirs with Christ. (Romans 8:14-17)

⁶ *to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.* The purpose of God's will was to demonstrate His glorious grace. The fact that you and I are children of God, adopted sons of God, is an incredible demonstration of that grace. That is the reason we should be praising God as Paul is doing here. Have you ever stopped and just taken time to thank God for choosing you in spite of what you've done and the mess you've made with your life? It wasn't that He had faith in you. It was because of His glorious grace that Jesus calls you brother or sister. (Romans 8:29) You are an heir of all things with Jesus. (Revelation 21:7)

He blessed us in the Beloved. What a beautiful name for Jesus, The Beloved! He is the Beloved of the Song of Songs. (Song of Songs 2:13) He is the beloved part of the Trinity to the Father. Why would the Father love His Word? Because His Word is true and holy. As I mentioned earlier, this long sentence, which we'll conclude next week, has 10 expressions of us being in Christ, in Him, in the Beloved.

We've gone over the greeting and the reason that Paul praises the Father for what He has done, the same reason we should praise the Father. Next week we'll see the praise to the Son and Holy Spirit for what they are doing and will do for those who are in Christ. **Are you in the Beloved?** There are only two choices, to be in yourself, which is the fallen nature you were born with, the prideful, independent, selfish being we know we are, or who we can be in Christ. We either value the things of this world, or we value every spiritual blessing in Christ.

I believe God chose us all, for He loves us all. Sin made every one of us an object of wrath (Ephesians 2:3), but grace has enabled you by His grace to say "Yes" to His love. He leaves the choice up to you. He has done everything for us, but He graciously lets us choose. The invitation goes out to all that God loves, and He loves the world. Choose this day whom you will serve. (Joshua 24:15) You cannot remain god of your own life and choose Jesus. Choosing Jesus is surrendering to His Lordship over your life.

Commented [Paul34]: John 3:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Commented [Paul35]: Romans 8:14-17 (ESV)

¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" ¹⁶ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

Commented [Paul36]: Romans 8:29 (ESV)

²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

Commented [Paul37]: Revelation 21:7 (ESV)

⁷ The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son.

Commented [Paul38]: Song of Songs 1:13 (ESV)

¹³ My beloved is to me a sachet of myrrh that lies between my breasts.

Commented [Paul39]: Ephesians 2:3 (ESV)

³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

Commented [Paul40]: Joshua 24:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.

(Matthew 16:24) Praise be to God the Father for His unspeakable gift of every spiritual blessing in Christ!

Commented [Paul41]: Matthew 16:24 (ESV)

²⁴ Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

Questions

- 1 Describe the city of Ephesus?
- 2 What is the authority behind this letter?
- 3 What is the double description of the recipients?
- 4 What is the double blessing in the greeting? Can we use it?
- 5 How do we access God's treasures?
- 6 When did God choose you?
- 7 What is the end result of that choice?
- 8 Explain freewill and God's sovereignty.
- 9 What does adoption mean to you?