



ephesians

a church becoming

Sunday, September 15, 2024

Ephesians 1:3-14

This past week we launched into a brand new Fall series on the Book of Ephesians where we learned that the apostle Paul had a very close and unique relationship with the church in Ephesus, due to the 3 1/2 years that he spent there during his third missionary tour. Throughout the entirety of the letter, we can see that Paul's goal is to see the church reignite their love and passion for Jesus Christ. For them to remember the 'why' behind the 'what.' That they would not get stuck in the routine and duty of living for Christ, but that every day, they would be reminded of the incredible gift of grace that He has poured out amongst them, and that would inspire them to live for Him and to do the good works that He has prepared for them.

In our reading today, Paul dives right into the deep end as he starts to explain and walk through this incredible gift of grace that Christ Jesus has given us.

Ephesians 1:3-14

'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, 5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.

7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace 8 which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, 9 having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, 10 that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him. 11 In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, 12 that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

13 In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.

So, if you are anything like me, after reading, this, I was immediately brought back to the classic 80's worship song, 'In Him we live and move and have our being!' Probably because Paul incorporates the saying 'In Him...' so often here. And this is the general theme of this section - that we find our identity and self-worth fully and completely in Him. Paul is reminding the Ephesians to steer clear from using their works and deeds to establish their value or self-worth. Jesus would do the same thing 30 odd years later in his message to the church in Ephesus to really drive home the point by saying that He had seen their good deeds and hard, hard work but that they had lost their first love. The church in Ephesus was in danger not only of going through the motions but also falling into the trap of works=righteousness where we find our value and self worth in what we do for Christ. What you need to have a sense of self-worth; a sense of significance; and consequently happiness, and joy, and meaningfulness is simply to understand your position in Christ. You see, your value comes because you are in Him. That's your self-worth. And this is why Paul is so over-joyed in this section here, because he desperately wants them to see this.

And if we were to look at this entire section in the Greek, we would see that it is actually an entire run-on sentence - 202 words exactly. Now, any English teacher worth their salt would flunk you on that, but Paul is so caught up in the riches of the Gospel that the words simply tumble out of his mouth and heart. Similar to what happened to Zachariah, the father of John the Baptist, when he began to realize what God was doing in the birth of his son. He spontaneously broke out in song: 'Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited us and accomplished salvation for His people...' (Luke 1:67-79). And like the Virgin Mary, how she began to realize what God was doing in the birth of her son. She spontaneously broke out in an outpouring of praise: 'My soul, exalts the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior...' (Luke 1:46-55). Or even like my kids when they were younger, coming up to me so excited about something that they just saw or experienced and they would just keep going on and on and on. To the point where I would have often have to say, 'Take a breath!'

And so, Paul opens up this section by stating the obvious: 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing...'

And in this opening line, he's trying to bring the Ephesians back to the point - that they are incredibly blessed. Not necessarily because of the homes that they live in, or the horses that they ride, or the food that they eat but because of Jesus Christ. He is the great equalizer. No matter what we

may 'have' presently, the real point is who we have and whether poor or wealthy, we are all incredibly rich and blessed because of the gift that we all have in Jesus Christ. That we live and breathe and have our being because of Him and Him alone!

Paul then takes the rest of this run-on sentence section to explain what he means and the 'how and why' this is so great. We've seen Paul explain salvation before in Romans and in many of his other books, but here in Ephesians, he takes it to whole other level - again because of the relationship that he has already established with these people over the 3 plus years that he spent with them. He focuses on the cosmic scope of God's plan—how salvation is not just an individual experience, but also part of a grand, eternal purpose.

And to do this, Paul now launches into one of the most widely debated themes in all of Christianity where he states that,

Ephesians 1:4a-5

'...God chose us in Him before the foundation of the world...having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will...'

This verse, partnered with a number of other verses in the Bible seems to suggest that our salvation was predestined by God and He chose us to be saved even before we were created. In the theological sense we would call this line of thinking the 'Doctrine of Election' which teaches that God chooses to save some, and by necessity, if He does not choose everyone, then there are some who are inevitably passed over. Those whom He has chosen to save are referred to as 'the elect.' This view gains support from verses like:

In John 15:16, Jesus says:

'You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit...'

1 Peter 1:1-2

'To the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, 2 elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father...'

Romans 8:29a

'For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son...'

So you can see in just these few verses how it can seem that when it comes to salvation, it begs the

question do we even have a choice in the matter or does God simply unilaterally choose a group of people for salvation and by simple way of deduction He would also then choose those who do not get saved?

Now, in stark contrast to the Doctrine of Election is the Doctrine of Freewill that says that humanity has the ability to freely choose to accept or deny salvation. This view gains support from verses such as Joshua 24:15, where Joshua tells the Israelites to 'choose this day whom you will serve,' and John 3:16, which speaks of God's offer of salvation to 'whosoever believes in Him.' Another key verse is Revelation 22:17, which says, 'Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.'

These verses seem to suggest that whoever is willing to be saved, will be saved and that there is a natural response that happens in the hearts and lives of the unsaved when they choose to turn from evil and put their faith, hope and trust in Jesus Christ.

And these two points of view have been wrestled over and debated over for centuries, as to which one is right. And I think much of the problem with this debate is that we have often viewed these verses, in contrast with each other, instead of complimenting each other.

Let's take Jesus' words from John 15:16 for example, 'You didn't choose me but I chose you.' In this verse, Jesus is specifically speaking to His disciples about their unique calling to be His apostles. He's emphasizing that their role as His followers wasn't based on their own initiative but on His divine choice. However, this also reflects a broader truth: God, in His grace, has taken the initiative in offering salvation to all humanity, calling us out of our lost state to receive His gift of eternal life.

It's important to note that His choice to save humanity came first. Our ability to choose to accept or reject salvation only exists because He first chose us as His recipients. So at a macro level, this can be easily seen. But it also happens at a micro - or individual level as well. We simply cannot dismiss the example of Paul, the apostle. And I believe Paul writes this in part, from his own perspective. Paul was on the road to Damascus with every intent of persecuting Christians. All of a sudden, on that road, the risen Jesus appears in brilliance and commands Paul to stop. From that point forward, Paul repents and instead of persecuting believers, devoted his life to preaching the gospel. In this powerful example, we see that Jesus chose Paul, not just for a mission but also for salvation. Paul's encounter highlights God's sovereign choice and grace at work in individual lives. I often wonder about this example, and why Jesus would not choose to appear like this to all of the mass murderers, terrorists, and evil doers, knowing the response that was given by Paul. For who would deny

Jesus Christ after experiencing something like that? But these are simply questions that are outside the sphere of our understanding, and will always lead us down a rabbit hole to nowhere. Because at the end of the day we simply have to accept that we, as the creation of God can never fully wrap our minds around the creator, and how He operates, because we simply do not have that capacity. For who can truly understand the mysteries of the Gospel except for God Almighty.

And so the other element that simply must come into play when talking about this is the element of time. When we think about God choosing us before the foundation of the world, we're looking at it through the lens of our limited, human perspective of time. But because God created time, God exists outside of time and therefore cannot be limited to or controlled by time. While we are bound by time - experiencing life moment by moment - God sees the entirety of history, past, present, and future, all at once. (Water bottle example). So, for us, what might appear as a decision being made in eternity past is, from God's vantage point, an act within the full scope of His eternal knowledge and plan.

In this sense, I actually think that predestination and freewill can coexist. God's foreknowledge doesn't negate our ability to choose; rather, it works in harmony with it. God, in His sovereignty, knows who will choose to respond to His grace before it happens, and He also ordains and predestines the salvation of some as we can clearly see in Paul's own example of his salvation.

So when Paul speaks of being 'chosen' or 'predestined,' he is celebrating God's grace and the assurance believers have that their salvation is rooted in God's eternal plan, not in their own effort. At the same time, verses that emphasize human choice and response also remind us that we are all called to respond to God's invitation with acceptance through faith and obedience.

Ultimately, we have to hold these two ideas - God's sovereignty and human responsibility - together in tension. While our minds may not fully grasp how they fit, both are seen throughout Scripture, and they work together to paint a fuller picture of God's redemptive plan. The fact that God knows and chooses doesn't mean that our choices don't matter. Instead, it underscores the depth of God's grace and the seriousness of our response to it.

In this way, Paul's teaching on predestination shows us that God chose salvation for all of humanity as His response to our sin. And although He ultimately knows how each of us will respond, He doesn't stop pursuing us because His heart is that none should perish, no not even one.

Now, the next thing that we see, is that Paul now uses the term adoption as it relates to the rela-

tionship of God and humanity upon salvation. Now the doctrine of adoption is so incredibly important, because it shows that God views the relationship between himself and humanity not just as creator and created, but now upon salvation, we are family.

In Roman culture, which Paul's audience would have understood well, adoption was a powerful concept. When someone was adopted, they were given full rights and privileges as a legitimate son or daughter within the family, with all the legal standing and inheritance that came with it. Paul uses this concept to show that when we are saved, we are not just forgiven and left as servants or outsiders - we are brought into God's family as His children, with the full rights of sons and daughters. In his letter to the church in Galatia Paul talks about this as well and shows them the extreme difference in how they are viewed pre and post salvation.

Galatians 4:7

'Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.'

This means that upon salvation, we don't just move from a slave to a servant or to a friend or even to a guest in God's house, we are elevated to the status of sons and daughters of God, with all the privileges, rights, and inheritance that come with being a member of His family.

This is what makes the doctrine of adoption so profound - it shows that salvation is not just about being saved from sin, but about being welcomed into God's family. We now relate to Him as 'Abba, Father,' a term of endearment and closeness, and if that's not enough Paul says in Romans that we are now actual co-heirs with Christ!!

Romans 8:17a

'and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ,

Are you kidding me!?!? Again, this is why Paul is just going on and on and on here because there's no natural stop - it's that Good!!

This is why Paul uses adoption to describe our new identity in Christ. It reminds us that we are fully accepted, deeply loved, and eternally secure in our relationship with God. Our salvation not based on our performance, but based on His. This familial relationship is at the core of what it means to be saved: we are not just servants or forgiven sinners, but beloved children of God, with all the rights and privileges that come with being part of His eternal family.

You are no longer a slave, but a son. You are no longer a slave, but a daughter. Is there a greater love than this? I think not. But for me it still begs the question: why do so many Christians still live like they're in chains. It's time we started living in the freedom, authority, and confidence that come with being children of God. Time to step out of the shadows of fear, doubt, and striving for you are a beloved child of the King, fully accepted, fully loved, and fully empowered. And it's time we embraced our true identity and walked in the fullness of what God has called us to be.

2 points to consider as we close:

1. You are valued because you are in Christ. Not because of how often you volunteer on Sundays or how much money you give or how many people you invite out to Christmas or Easter. You are loved because you belong to Him - because He chose you, redeemed you, and calls you His own. Your worth comes from the fact that you are a child of God, adopted into His family through the grace of Jesus Christ, not from your performance or achievements. It's His love, not your works, that defines your value.
2. This was Paul's run-on sentence and it was clear that he was so passionate about what God has done that it just flowed out of him. What's your run-on sentence? What are you so passionate about that it just flows out of you? My hope and prayer is that this morning you understand that you are chosen and loved by God. Called to be a son or a daughter and no longer a slave. In no other kingdom or environment do we ever see people go from slaves to sons but for the kingdom of God. This is how great His love is for you. Do you see it now??

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