

## Ephesians 1 pt. 1 v.1-6

The author of this letter is Paul, also called Saul of Tarsus. The date of this letter is probably around 62AD during his first Roman imprisonment. It is one of Paul's latest letters only succeeded by Philippians and the Pastoral Epistles(1&2 Timothy, Titus).

He is writing to a church in Ephesus located in modern day Turkey.

The culture of Ephesus was heavily intertwined with the worship of the female deity, Diana (Roman), also called Artemis (Greek).

"Her most noted temple was at Ephesus. It was built outside the city walls, and was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world...it was the work of 220 years; built of shining marble... Behind the shrine was a treasury, where, as 'the safest bank in Asia,' nations and kings stored their most precious things." ([Act 19:23-41](#))(Easton's Bible Dictionary)

“The ritual of the temple services consisted of sacrifices and of ceremonial prostitution...”(International Standard Bible Encyclopedia)

Paul knew this church quite well. He passed through Ephesus at the end of his second missionary journey.

After that Ephesus was visited by a man named Apollos. Then, Paul returned to Ephesus on his third missionary journey as the Lord allowed and stayed with them for probably around three years or so.

While at Ephesus he taught them about the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, discipleship, the Word, and outreach. He performed miracles, and as “the word of the Lord grew mightily” it greatly challenged the culture in Ephesus. This all eventually led to civil unrest and rioting. After which Paul encouraged the disciples there and left for Macedonia. (Acts 18-19)

His final interaction with the Ephesians is recorded in Acts 20 where Paul warns the elders of the church to watch out for false

teachers, even telling them that savage wolves and men will rise up from among their own number speaking perverse things and leading many astray.

It is here that Paul declared famously: [Act 20:27 NKJV] 27 "For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God."

This is the bedrock of sound teaching - the WHOLE counsel of God.

It is from this context that we enter into this blessed letter that is rich with profound theological truth. Some scholars report that Paul uses the Ephesian epistle to address the universal church.

v.1-2 Paul sets forth this common introduction that is often repeated.

It is remarkable to think that these words are inspired by the Holy Spirit over and over again in Paul's writings.

When we consider the need for such a persistent reminder of Paul's election, we come to the conclusion that the attributes of God's true messengers are similarly marked.

They are marked as servants of Jesus Christ, brought into ministry by the will of God alone. They are chosen, elected by God to serve in His kingdom.

This is contrary to some modern notions of ministry. Some believe that an education, a commissioning agency, an ordination certificate, bring people into ministry.

We are reminded time and time again in Paul's letters that servants of Jesus Christ are called, brought into the ministry, equipped, and sustained by the will of God.

Any other attempt to fabricate such a calling will show in time as the Lord Jesus keeps His church from those frauds, and robbers who seek this blessed calling for any other reason outside of God's election.

The audience of this letter is the collective group of believers in Ephesus whom Paul calls the saints (holy ones) and faithful. These are attributes of the members of Christ's Body - holiness and faithfulness.

About such attributes, Henry Alford remarks in his commentary: "The [holy ones] ἁγίοις and [faithful] πιστοῖς denote their spiritual life from its two sides—that of God who calls and sanctifies,—that of themselves who believe...He also notices in these expressions already a trace of the two great divisions of the Epistle—God's grace towards us, and our faith towards Him." Alford, H. (1976). [\*Alford's Greek Testament: an exegetical and critical commentary\*](#) (Vol. 3, p. 69). Grand Rapids, MI: Guardian Press.

Paul commends to these saints the grace and peace of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

We must understand that these terms are not just conversational fodder - meant as flowery language but as true substantial, doctrinally significant blessings that belong to those who, as Paul says in verse 1, are IN Christ - positionally speaking.

V.3-6 This opening sentence is packed with doctrine. The underlying point, as we will see, is the doctrine of grace.

The first thing we must acknowledge is that this sentence that Paul opens Ephesians with is about God! God the Father is the subject and everything we read afterwards communicates something about God the Father and his relationship with us.

Paul begins by praising God. He is holy, good, gracious and many other things deserving our praise. He is the One who delivers peace to those who are in Christ.

And God the Father, whom we bless and praise, has blessed us with every spiritual blessing - read that again: “who has blessed us with every SPIRITUAL BLESSING.”

The blessings that Paul focuses on here are spiritual in nature. God is Spirit and the blessings He provides are also spiritual. Yes He cares for our physical needs, but don't forget Jesus words:

[Mat 6:31-32 NKJV] ...do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 "For after all

these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.

How do we value our spiritual blessings compared to physical blessings or physical provision? Are spiritual blessings sufficient for us? I pray so! In Paul's mind they are everything, and He praises God that by His grace He has given us all of these spiritual blessings.

Also note - where are these blessings? Paul tells us these are "in the heavenly places."

\*Note the redundancy of the preposition "in" - in Christ Jesus, in the heavenly places, in Christ, in Him, in love, in the Beloved. This informs where our focus is to be placed!

We focus so much on what is right in front of us while Paul was refocusing very early in this letter on the weighty, substantial, eternal blessings of God the Father given to those in Christ.

This is a bold and poignant reminder of how the Father relates to us and how we relate to him as He directs our cares to the heavenly places.

Heavenly places - a phrase five times found in this Epistle, and not elsewhere (Eph 1:20; Eph 2:6; 3:10; 6:12); Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). [\*Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible\*](#) (Vol. 2, p. 341). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

It has often been said disapprovingly that some Christians are too heavenly minded to be any earthly good. I would contend that if we are not heavenly minded, if we are not reliant on those spiritual blessings found in the heavenly places, then we can be NO earthly good.

Saints, this is where we are supposed to be looking - at our Heavenly Father, in the heavenly realm, by the Spirit as we exist in Christ.



[Col 3:1-2 NKJV] 1 If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.

Furthermore we find in v.4 the unsearchable depth of God's grace bestowed upon the saints through election. God has elected those who are to be His from before the foundation of the world!

Just as Paul is an Apostle by the will of God, likewise we are chosen by the will of God to work in His kingdom as well.

This is a great mystery and one that has caused great consternation among the saints. It is on this divisive subject that we love to divide. We are quite willing to fight each other tooth and nail to demonstrate how smart we are and how sure we are in our own theological framework.

On this doctrine we have split the church into -isms.

The two camps are known as either Armini-ists or Calvinists and rely on the teachings of either Jacobus Arminius or John Calvin respectively.

Armini-ists are known for their focus on the importance of the will of man in making a choice for Christ. On the other hand Calvinists assert that it is God alone who elects people either to salvation or wrath.

Each camp has adopted a 5 point model to communicate their position opposing the other view.

I would make it known to you today that many Christians believe they have a more complete view of these arguments than they actually do. These conversations deserve much more nuance and grace than only free-will or only election.

Here's the long and short of it: both the will of man and election by God are taught in the Bible. That is why the conversation is on-going. The problem is not careful theological thought but rather that some people have tied their identity to these doctrines rather than to Christ.

One of our distinctives is a balanced theology. We don't deal in -isms. The center and core of our doctrine is Christ.

Additionally, Christians are to be known by their love for one another not how well we can defend one side or the other. More than often what happens is that in our zeal, pride, and ignorance we end up wounding other dear believers whom Christ died for just to prove a point.

One of my favorite examples of the intersection of election and free-will is found in the Old Testament. God's covenant people, the Israelites, were chosen by Him and yet they had to make a choice.

[Deu 30:14-20 NKJV] 19 "I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, [that] I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; 20 "that you may love the LORD your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He [is] your life and the length of your days..."

With Christ and the disciples Jesus is very clear that He chose them!

[Jhn 15:16 NKJV] 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 remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.

Again, Jesus teaches on election:

[Jhn 6:37 NKJV] 37 "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.

And in Revelation we find the open invitation to “whoever desires.”

[Rev 22:17 NKJV] 17 And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.

And in John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

This is precisely why this debate has continued for the last 500 years or so - because the Bible teaches both that God has elected us to salvation and that people are invited to the kingdom.

If you want to consider this even more deeply consider this parable taught by Christ:

[Mat 22:8-14 NKJV] 8 "Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. 9 'Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.' 10 "So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding [hall] was filled with guests. 11 "But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. 12 "So he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. 13 "Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast [him] into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' 14 "For many are called, but few [are] chosen."

So...some respond to the invitation but they're not dressed for the occasion!

Loved one, you are chosen by God, invited to the wedding, robed in Christ's righteousness. Know that! AND you have to make a choice.

When we partition these two views as competing rather than complementary we find some real nasty anti-gospel implications.

At its worst free-will only becomes a works based theology where we are the hero of our own salvation because we made the RIGHT choice. That which you earn you must sustain - this leads to legalism.

At its best, the doctrine of free-will informs the christian who has been elected by God that we have to make a choice everyday, every moment, to follow after Jesus though we may fail many times, we continue to take up our cross daily.

At its worst the doctrine of election condemns people to eternity in hell with no hope of reconciliation because one is either chosen or

not. This leads to a disconnected evangelism by those of us who are ambassadors AND this leads to an uncommitted discipleship by believers who never grow in holiness rather choosing to abuse grace.

At its best the doctrine of election acknowledges the depravity of humanity, promises us that we are saved by grace alone, and that we shall be carried to holiness by grace because Christ is faithful even when we are not. It renews our hope in Christ daily because it is not dependent on our own work.

V.5 - This was the plan! God was not caught off guard, scrambling to figure out how to save His creation when we decided to go off the rails!

God is not reacting to a series of tragic mis-deeds but is carefully ordering things to reveal Himself, His grace, His love, His mercy, and His holiness.

He determined before time to reveal His character and nature to mankind through Christ.

This means that the cross, the resurrection, the church, the saints, the work of the saints are all predetermined by God! And that is beautiful! God has eternally desired to reveal Himself and has been revealing Himself to His creation.

“The very time when the election took place proves it to be free; for what could we have deserved, or what merit did we possess, before the world was made? How childish is the attempt to meet this argument by the following sophism! “We were chosen because we were worthy, and because God foresaw that we would be worthy.” We were all lost in Adam; and therefore, had not God, through his own election, rescued us from perishing, there was nothing to be foreseen.” Calvin, J., & Pringle, W. (2010). [\*Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians\*](#) (p. 198). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

Now, pause for a minute and consider the purpose of our election, the purpose of predestination? What is it? What does Paul communicate to the church here?

The purpose of election is the glory of God.



We are chosen, adopted by Him, to be holy for His good pleasure, (not our own) to be reconciled to Him - to have closeness with Him wherein we are made holy as He is holy. We are predestined to His kingdom so that He may be praised for His grace.

When the world looks on at us wretched, crooked souls who God [Col 1:13 NKJV] "...has delivered from the power of darkness and conveyed into the kingdom of the Son of His love," that glorifies, magnifies, the grace of God.

Who would do such a thing for people like us!? Only the living, one true God, our Father in heaven.

And this thing is done by Christ, who is called the Beloved. Because He is Beloved - we are too.

This is the good message that we bear to others - God the Father has chosen you to come near to Him by Christ before the foundations of the world will you choose to answer that call. You are chosen - choose life.

“We dare not diminish what Paul writes here. Believers are chosen by God, and they are chosen before they *have done* anything or *have been* anything for God. The great light of this truth casts some shadows; namely, in trying to reconcile human responsibility with divine sovereignty. Yet the purpose of light is not to cast shadows but to guide our steps. The light of God’s selection gives us assurance to the permanence of His plan and His love towards us.” Guzik, D. (2013). [\*Ephesians\*](#) (Eph 1:3–6). Santa Barbara, CA: David Guzik.