

Chosen and Sealed

Ephesians 1:1-14

Today we're starting a new series called "In Christ". And we're going to be walking through the book of Ephesians. This is a truly remarkable book. It's only 6 chapters, but it contains an unbelievable amount of rich doctrine as well as practical life application that flows from it. The rich doctrine is primarily found in chapters 1-3, where Paul discusses glorious truths—things like election, adoption, the work of the Spirit, the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles, the unity of all things in Christ. And in 4-6 we see the application of these truths; how they should inform the way we should we're patient one another, gentle, the importance of pure speech, fighting sin and pursuing holiness, living in community, marriage, parenting and a variety of other topics. The richness of this book that lead, John Calvin the magisterial reformer of Geneva to say that this was his favorite letter in the NT. 18th century poet Samuel Coleridge to say that "Ephesians is one of the divinest compositions of man." ~~More recently, one NT Scholar, P.T. O'Brien said that "the Letter to the Ephesians is one of the most significant documents ever written."~~ And so we are in for an exciting and impactful journey as we walk together through Paul letter to the Ephesians.

Now you may have guessed already that the book of Ephesians is a letter written by Paul to the church in the city of Ephesus. At somewhere between 200-250k people, Ephesus was the third largest city in the Greco-Roman world after Rome and Athens. It was located about a mile east of the Aegean sea on the west coast of modern day Turkey (pic). And was important politically as it served as the capital of its province. It was important economically because it was located at the intersection of multiple trade routes. Its infrastructure was impressive: the theatre (pic) built in 2nd century B.C. which was capable of seating 24,000 people. It had the library of Celsus (pic), which one of the biggest libraries in the ancient world, and lastly it had the great temple of Artemis. In Greek mythology she was the daughter of Zeus, her temple in Ephesus was one of the biggest structures in antiquity and one of the seven wonder so the ancient world. And while the temple represents the impressive architecture in Ephesus, it represents the complex religious culture of Ephesus—and it wasn't very Christian.

As you could imagine, religious life in Ephesus centered around Artemis and her temple—but Artemis worship was not the only game in town. In the Greco-Roman world ,worship of the emperor was also widespread. Emperor Augustus was thought to be a God and a savior and people worshipped him as such. Add to that the fact that sorcery and witchcraft were also prevalent in the city of Ephesus. We see just how prevalent in Acts 19 as the Gospel is beginning to make inroads to Ephesus some of these sorcerers repent and burn their scrolls we read that it wasn't just a few, they burned scrolls worth 50,000 pieces of silver or over 130 years of wages.

And so as you can imagine that being a Christian in Ephesus was extremely difficult. These people are in a religiously toxic environment, they don't have Paul or any other apostle there to help them out at this point, and it's in this context in the early 60's that Paul writes them this letter, probably during his Roman imprisonment.

And he starts with a standard greeting where he identifies himself as an apostle and then launches into one of the longest sentences in the NT. In the original language of the NT, verses 3-14, which are the verses we're covering today...are all one sentence—should be a short sermon!—202 words of praise for the glory of God in his plan to reconcile all things in Christ—God and man, heaven and earth, Jew and Gentile—all things coming back together because of the work of Christ.

And starts in verse 3 where we see Paul starts with praise for God right out of the gate, “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.” Now don’t miss that little phrase “in Christ”—who has blessed us “in Christ”—not only is it the name of our series, but it’s one of the central truths of this book. The phrase “in Christ” or “in him”, “In whom”, is used 11 times in these 12 verses to describe the way we participate the benefits of Christ’s work. We are chosen in Christ vs. 4, adopted through Christ vs 5, blessed in the Beloved vs 6, redeemed in him vs 7, obtained an inheritance in him vs. 11, heard the word of truth in and believed in him vs 13. All of these things are ours in Christ.

When I was a kid, I used to say things like, my house, my room, my bike, my clothes, my backyard. But of course, I didn’t buy any of those things. I didn’t work for any of those things. My parents did, and because I was in the family, I participated in the benefits of their work—as someone who was in the family, my parents took what was theirs and gave me permission to call it mine. Their backyard was mine to play in. Their second bedroom upstairs was mine to sleep in.

And in the same way, in Christ, all the benefits of his life and death and resurrection belong to you because you’re united to him. What’s is rightfully His is, according to him is now rightfully mine. He offers me his joy, his peace, his kindness, his grace, his power his love, his kingdom, even his throne—this is amazing, Rev. 3:21, “The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.” Everything that’s his is now mine. And because of that we have every spiritual blessing in Christ—everything you need for abundant life now and eternal life then. And Paul spends the rest of the passage verses 4-14 walking us through those blessings.

And he starts in verse 4 saying “...he chose us in Him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love, he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ according to the purpose of his will...” And because unity in Christ is one of Paul’s central messages in this book, it’s a tragic irony that this doctrine tends to be divisive among people who are in Christ. As soon as we hear words like predestined and chosen, we stop worshipping and begin cycling through an endless amount why’s and what if’s. And we’re going to address some of those, I’m not going to ignore them, but for I moment I want us to worship with Paul. He’s not talking about this like an analytic philosopher, he’s standing in awe of God’s grace. And we need to do the same.

It says “in love he predestined us for adoption” Now the word pre-destine simply means to determine beforehand, and in the Greek it means...to determine beforehand. And what Paul is saying *to believers* is that before the foundation of the world, before there was a star in the sky, before there was a sun or moon, God set his affection on you. God knew you. And from eternity past he loved you and chose you to be holy and blameless and predestined you for adoption as sons and daughters. What an amazing truth.

And think people push back on this because somewhere in their heart they feel, just right off that bat, that there’s something not fair about it. It would be wrong of God to do this. But this betrays the fact that we tend to see grace as something God owes people. Do we not? Do we not feel like deserve an opportunity to be forgiven? Do we not tend to think that God owes people a second chance? Because if that true, then when Jesus is dying on the cross, he’s simply giving us the second shot we all deserve. It’s not grace, it’s obligation. He’s just doing the right thing. It would be wrong of him not to, because after all, an opportunity at redemption is simply something we deserve.

But friends this couldn’t be further from the truth. By definition, we don’t deserve grace. Rom. 6:23 says we deserve hell. And God would be perfectly just to condemn everyone. We need to be very careful when

we say things like “I want a fair God that gives everyone what they deserve.” No you don’t. You don’t want what you deserve. You deserve wrath. And because of that, it’s not amazing that God would condemn someone, it’s amazing that he would save anyone! And you’re more amazed at God’s justice than God’s grace, then you simply haven’t understood the weight and consequences of your sin. And when we talk about salvation—much less the doctrine of election—this is where the Bible forces us to start. And when it comes to this doctrine, this changes the whole conversation...

Some people say, “Well when it says that God chose and predestined, it means he looked down through the corridors of time and saw who would choose him, then he rewound the tape and chose them back and hit play. God’s choosing us wasn’t determined by his will, but by our will which he saw in advance. The problem with that is the text says in vs. 5 that “**he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ according to the purpose of his will.**” And when you understand the effects of sin, you realize that this is the only way it could work.

The reality is that God looked down the corridors of time and knew that because of sin, no one would love him. What did he see when he looked down the corridor of time? Gen. 6:5 “The LORD saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time.” Paul continues this in Romans 3:11 “...no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”

People talk about free will like what’s we need. Our will is our problem not the solution. Our desires and wants and cravings are enslaved to sin. I don’t want a free will I want a freed will. My constant prayer is not my will be done but your will. Make my desires your desires. Make my thoughts your thoughts. I don’t ask God to show his love for me by giving me what I want, I ask him to love me by helping me want what I should. By changing my will.

Even if you’re uncomfortable with this, isn’t this how you pray for our lost friends? Does anyone say dear God I pray that you would not unduly influence them, but allow them to make a balanced free-will choice. No! We say God open their eyes, produce repentance and faith, cause them to hate their sin and love their righteousness. Well this is exactly how God saves people anyways—and without this kind of heart-changing eye opening grace, no one will ever come to him. That’s why in Jn. 6:44 Jesus says, “**No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them. And I will raise him up on the last day.**”

This is why when it comes to salvation, the Bible talks about it from beginning to end as the work of God’s grace. And it’s not an accident he’s designed it that way so he gets the glory! That’s why verse 6 says that all this is to the praise of his glorious grace this helps us guard against thinking that God might have chosen someone because of something in them...like chooses based on their potential or merit. Because if he did, this whole doctrine would be for the praise of our excellence.

As if God saw something good in you and said “Oh he’s going to be so intelligent, I want him on my team” or “Oh wow, she’s going to be so courageous and bold I’m going to choose her.” Deut 7:7-8a “**It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you. It’s by grace. God didn’t set his love on you because you were lovely. He set his love on you simply he chose to.**”

Spurgeon said “I believe the doctrine of election, because I am quite certain that, if God had not chosen me, I should never have chosen Him; and I am sure He chose me before I was born, or else He never would have chosen me afterwards. and he must have elected me for reasons unknown to me, for I never

could find any reason in myself why he should have looked upon me with special love. So, I feel like I am forced to accept this doctrine.”

You say, well the Bible clearly says you have to choose Christ? Yes it does! In fact we see that in this in vs. 13, ‘In him you also, when you heard the Word of truth and believed, were sealed with the Promised Holy Spirit.’ And believed. You have to believe on Christ to be saved. You have to choose Christ. And the Bible couldn’t be more clear that anyone without exception who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. And maybe these two ideas seem like they’re in conflict so I have a chart here that may help. You when it comes to this discussion unfortunately you have people pick their favorite verses and then put them against each other like their in conflict. **Chart.**

Have you ever asked yourself why you trusted Christ and the next person didn’t—maybe even someone in your family who grew up in church. Why did you see Christ and beautiful and he or she didn’t? Was it because you were smarter or more sensitive? More discerning? Why did you see Christ as beautiful? I hope you wouldn’t start that answer with “because I”. Because God chose to open your eyes to see and savor his glory!

Well why didn’t he choose everybody? Well, understanding that God isn’t obligated to save anyone and that he would be perfectly righteous to condemn everyone, we can two things...J.D. Greear points out that the Scriptures always place the responsibility on man for their unbelief. **“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!” (Mt. 23:37)** He says I wanted to but you weren’t willing, not that I didn’t choose you. Last we simply have to bow in reverence to the wisdom and mystery in the way god works. **Deut. 29:29 “The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.”** God doesn’t expect us have some exhaustive knowledge of how he’s working out all the details in Ephesians 1, but he has asked us to believe his Word and trust him for the rest. And when we do, when we believe that our salvation from beginning to end is a work of God’s grace then we’ll be driven to at least 4 things.

Worship.

You look in these 12 verses and you see that everything is centered on God’s glory...it’s mentioned in three places vs. 6, 12, 14. The way god has designed all of this is specifically so he’ll receive glory. So when we read this, we don’t simply analyze it but we take it in and worship like Paul! Like if I die tonight, the only reason I will not spend eternity apart from Christ in hell, is because of one thing—God’s sovereign grace before the foundation of the world setting his affections on me and on you. And not just to save you...look at the language here in vs.5 he predestined us for adoption.

We don’t simply relate to him as our God, we relate to him as Father. Ephesians mentions God as Father 8 times which twice as much as any other NT letter. J.I. Packer argues that the highest privilege of adoption isn’t getting saved but getting adopted. God could have saved us from hell and made us like angels—but he took it a step further. He personally adopts us as sons and daughters and gives us an inheritance. This drives us to worship. Second it produces humility.

Humility.

One professor said, “Salvation is like this, you take the first step, God takes the second step, and at the third step you realize that God took the first step.” This doctrine should humble us because now that we’re saved, we know what Calvin called the family secret, we realize that our salvation doesn’t have to do with how good, intelligent, discerning, or gifted we are. The idea of a prideful Christian is absolutely ridiculous. William Temple said it this way, “All is of God; the only thing of my very own which I contribute to my redemption is the sin from which I need to be redeemed.” It’s all of God... Greear points out that in this passage, 24 verbs, or action sequences in it: God does 20 of them, and only 4 of them we do. § Vs. 3, God blesses; vs. 4, he chooses; vs. 5, he predestines and adopts vs. 6, he bestows grace; vs. 7, he redeems and forgives; vs. 8, he lavishes; vs. 9, he makes known and he purposes; vs. 10, he unites together in Christ; vs. 11, he works; vs. 13, he seals. listen; we receive; we believe; and we hope. And this should produce in us a spirit of humility. Third it should produce assurance.

Assurance.

This doctrine gives us amazing hope for the future. Our salvation is completely secure. To the one afraid that God is going to stop loving you because you’re struggling with some sin. God chose you when you hated him. God didn’t choose to love you based on some foreseen potential or devotion or good performance. If good performance isn’t what gained his love, poor performance won’t lose it. In fact, look at look at 13 it says that when you believed, “you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of this glory.” The word guarantee can be translated deposit or down payment...it carries the idea of earnest money. The Father has made a down payment at an incredible cost—his Son vs 7 in whom we have redemption through his blood the forgiveness of our trespasses. See every member of the trinity working in your salvation, the Father, electing, the son redeeming, the Spirit sealing—have assurance believer—the entire godhead is at work to bring you safely home. Last, a belief in unconditional election gives us confidence in missions...

Confidence in Missions.

Now this may surprise you. In fact you may say, “well Chase, if God chooses who he’ll save, then why do missions at all? Won’t they just get saved? No they won’t. God hasn’t designed his elect to simply be activated like robots. Look in the text here, Paul says and you also, when you heard the word of truth—you see they had to hear it. And then look, and believed. And then they were sealed...So all of these are essential in salvation. God has designed his elect to come into the fold by hearing and believing and then being sealed so they don’t fall away...

Election is what God used to encourage Paul when he was ministering in Corinth, (Acts 18:9-10) “And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, “Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people.” Paul didn’t say. “so I don’t have to say anything?” No you do, because I’ve designed their faith to come from hearing and hearing from the word and they won’t hear if you don’t preach. This gave him confidence.

It also gave him motivation to press through persecution, in 2 Tim. 2:10 he says, “Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.” He knew that his efforts would be worth it because he would preach God would do the saving. Friends this means that we can go to the hardest most unreached places in the world and God will save people and it won’t be because of our persuasive gospel presentation or our fancy rhetoric. The only

way people are going to follow Jesus at the risk of their lives is if God does a work in their heart and brings them to repentance and faith.

That's why I preach the Gospel each week and plead with people to repent and believe. I can't make you trust God I can't open your eyes. I simply preach the Word and let God do the work. All who trust Christ will be saved. We're not saved by understanding whether or not we're chosen. Repent of your sin and trust Christ.