

EYES WIDE OPEN

(Sermon Summary)

Sunday Evening – 25th September 2022

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Reading: Ephesians 1:1-14. (vv Ephesians 1:1-3)

This epistle is full of doctrine. It is not directed to a particular set of problems or issues. It contains general statements of universal Christian truths along with general applications. It was intended for the church in Ephesus but perhaps also for neighbouring churches as well.

We read of the apostle Paul's brief first visit to Ephesus in Acts 18 and then his stay of two years in Acts 19. It was a strategic city. In Acts 20:20, 27 we learn from Paul that he had brought the whole counsel of God to the Christians in Ephesus. We find something of that whole counsel in this epistle, including parts which are viewed as controversial, but which Paul evidently viewed as helpful.

This series is not going to proceed verse-by-verse. Neither is it going to be treated as though it was the only book in the Bible. But we do need to approach it eyes wide open because it presents some very big themes. It is interesting that Paul being in prison (See 3:1; 4:1; and 6:20) did not stop him writing in this way. The apostle sees so much more than the prison walls. His own personal trials do not undermine the big picture. When he speaks of grace and peace (v2), this letter is a means of conveying this. It is, at heart, about God and His church.

1. It is all about God.

This is easier said than believed! The implications of this are not happily received by all and it presents difficulties for many people.

The letter is thoroughly Trinitarian. The Father is spoken of (see 1:3; 1:17; and 3:14). The Spirit is spoken of (See 1:13-14; and 2:18-22). And the Lord Jesus is spoken of at least 46 times. Everywhere His name is attached to the doctrines and practical applications the apostle is teaching.

It is in our nature to put ourselves first. We naturally dwell on our interests, our desires, our plans, our past, our present and our future. It is not that we are not meant to think about ourselves but that we are to do it in relation to God. We are not to indulge in some weird almost 'death-wish' or to neglect the flesh. But we are to do everything in relation to God. But it is the result of sin (2:1) that we are given to thinking that the world revolves around us. We are not able to think accurately about ourselves. It is like us looking at ourselves in a cracked mirror and thinking that this is what we look like.

We are self-centred and so when we hear, for example, of a distant war we are given to think about how this might affect us. It is all about ourselves and us doing things on our own without any thought of God.

This kind of thinking has to be dislodged and God has to be put at the centre of everything. We have to think in terms of His purposes and His will. This is what it means to take seriously the First Commandment and to have no other God but the true God. There is to be no other centre to our thoughts and desires but Him.

2. Weighty blessings.

When we are speaking of God being blessed, it is not that we are speaking of adding anything to His intrinsic glory. But it does refer to us adding to His public honour by recognizing who He is and responding by praising Him. It also includes the way that other people, seeing us praise Him, are moved to do likewise, thereby adding to the total of people who publicly honour Him. That blessing is directed to the Father, as representing the Godhead. We pray to Him in Jesus' name, relying on the merits of the Lord Jesus for us to be heard in heaven.

In turn there are very real, very weighty, and tangible blessings that He bestows upon us.

These things are not trivial or sentimental. They come from heaven. They come from the throne of God. Our feeble prayers are heard in heaven. We are not worthy of the answers, and they are deeply supernatural. Common grace can receive a supernatural aspect as it comes to us in fresh ways and teaches us valuable and unique lessons.

These blessings were planned long ago, having been designed in eternity. They are not haphazard. When we look back, we are able to better understand why things happened to us when they did. He gives us every kind of spiritual blessing which affect us in the inner man. There is always more to us than we ever realize or know. God knows how to deal with our complexity. He brings to us what we need by way of rebuke, awakening, encouragement, help or mercy. We are able to make valuable discoveries which help us to think differently, and perhaps enjoy peace and happiness. All these things come to us 'in Christ'. Our connection to Him is the key. All of this only happens because of our

linkage to Him. All His actions, ministry and achievements connect to us. We receive what His life, death, resurrection, ascension, and reign accomplish for us.

These blessings confer to us power over temptation. We receive joy and peace. Truth comes to us more strongly so that we can rejoice in it. We have knowledge that gives us real wisdom.