

# The Letter Of Paul To The Ephesians

*<sup>7</sup>In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, <sup>8</sup>which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight <sup>9</sup>making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ <sup>10</sup>as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.  
(Ephesians 1:7-10. ESV)*

## Message 1

### To The Saints

April 28<sup>th</sup>, 2013

Ephesians 1:1-2

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### Introduction:

Open your Bibles to Ephesians 1:1-2. This morning we are beginning a series that, God willing, will continue for the rest of 2013. In 2012 we did our Walk Through The Bible exercise which was used of God to acquaint us with the big picture of the grand story of redemption and then in the first several weeks of 2013 we did a series called X Marks The Spot where we attempted to tie up some of the loose ends and bring together some of the seeming tensions in the Biblical narrative. In technical terms, we moved from “Biblical Theology” in 2012 to “Systematic Theology” in the first several weeks of 2013. Having done that we should be ideally positioned now to undertake the task that we have set for ourselves in the Book of Ephesians.

Scholars tell us that Ephesians was John Calvin’s favourite book of the Bible and that his sermon series on this letter was among the most important works of his career. When the Scottish Reformer John Knox lay on his death bed in 1572 it was the French edition of John Calvin’s sermons on Ephesians which he had on his bedside table and from which his wife read to him until he passed. Martin Lloyd Jones preached a series of 232 sermons on Ephesians that he began on October 3<sup>rd</sup> 1954 and didn’t finish until July 8<sup>th</sup> 1962. That’s 8 years; that’s a year longer than I’ve been here as a pastor in this church. Now why is it that this letter is so favoured by preachers of the Christian gospel?

Partly I believe it is because Ephesians sets out the Gospel unencumbered by polemics or situational rebukes. Here is what I mean by that. Most of Paul's letters are written to fix a problem in an existing church under his supervision. He wrote to Galatians to fix a problem – they were sliding back into a Jewish version of Christianity that was in danger of elevating the law alongside of the grace of God in salvation. He was therefore doing a lot of tearing down alongside his building up. He wrote 1 Corinthians to correct some excesses and distortions around the ministry of the Holy Spirit. So you have a presentation of the Gospel that is specifically designed to curb excess and silliness and to establish an order for churches to guard against future problems. He wrote 1 Thessalonians to correct some wrong views on eschatology and we could go on and on and all of that is wonderful and helpful because all of those problems keep coming up in the churches but the reason people need to start with a book like Ephesians, or the reason people need to be GROUNDED in a book like Ephesians is because the best defence against counterfeit or distorted versions of Christianity is to look at the authentic, pure, undiluted Gospel and to know it like you know nothing else. Once you know the truth you can defend yourself against distortions. Ephesians is the ideal place to learn the truth in its purity and simplicity because that is what it was written to do. The Apostle Paul wrote this letter to a bunch of churches that had been birthed out of Ephesus. Paul spent over two years preaching in Ephesus and developing leaders and we think that a bunch of churches in outlying towns were started by the people who were converted through his Ephesian ministry. Think of them as “branch churches”. This letter is actually a letter to the church in Ephesus and all the connected branch churches. We know that because many of the earliest copies have a blank left in verse 1 where it says “in Ephesus” meaning that this was the place where the messenger would write in the name of the branch church. Paul says in the letter that he is sending this letter out in advance of a visit by one of Paul's disciples named Tychicus. He wrote the letter while in prison in Rome around A.D. 60 and he sent it to Ephesus and from there it went out to all the branch churches to serve as a Gospel plumb-line and then Tychicus went around afterward to do Q&A – to make sure they understood what Paul had written them. This letter then is not a corrective – there are very few names or issues raised – it's not a corrective – it is pure, undefiled, undiluted, GOSPEL. It is THE GOSPEL, it is the Good News of what God has done in Jesus Christ FOR HIS OWN GLORY and for our good always. It's right there! You don't have to unpack the cultural context or figure out why this stress or that stress its right there staring you in the face! Start here, nail down Ephesians and you can defend yourself against any defective version of Christianity that comes your way with help from all the other letters that addressed similar heresies in the early

days of the church. That's why it's so important and that's why great pastors like Jones and Calvin spent so much time on it. Now I am not John Calvin and I am not Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones but I have their Bible and by the grace of God I am filled with the same Holy Spirit so we expect to be greatly blessed over the next 40 weeks or so as we go through this letter together. Let me pray and then we'll jump right into the text.

Let me read to you now from God's Holy and inspired Word:

<sup>1</sup>Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,

To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus:

<sup>2</sup>Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 1:1-2. ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God. Now you need to know that what we have read is not a throw away greeting. Paul doesn't throw away greetings. The Apostle Paul used his greetings to introduce and summarize the content of his letters. The standard Greek letter had three basic components in the introduction. It identified the author, the recipients and it included a polite greeting. Paul would take that basic formula and he would add to it and modify it in order to indicate the substance of what he intended to talk about. The greeting tips us off as to some of the things that Paul wants to emphasize in his presentation of the Gospel. Each line in that introduction tells us something very important. Look at the first line:

<sup>1</sup>Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus **by the will of God**, (1:1. ESV)

That little phrase "the will of God" is used by Paul 4 times in the first 11 verses of this letter. Obviously this is important to Paul. We can't understand the Gospel unless we understand that the Gospel is from first to last BY AND FROM AND ABOUT THE WILL OF GOD. Paul wants to draw our attention to:

## **1. The Sovereignty of God over all things particularly all things pertaining to salvation**

Look at all the times he uses that phrase just in the first 11 verses. You see it there in verse 1 now look down to verse 5:

<sup>5</sup>he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will (1:5. ESV)

That's a strong word about God's Sovereignty over your salvation. He predestined us. He chose us. We didn't chose him, he chose us. Verse 4 says that he chose us before the foundation of the world so this choice must not have had anything to do with us because it happened before we were even born. Before we did anything good or bad he chose us. According to the purpose of his will. Not according to his foreknowledge of our relative goodness or badness, not according to some insight he had into our future decisions. NO! A thousand times no, that is not what the Bible says! The Bible says he chose us, before we did anything, according to the purpose of his will. God had his reasons but they have nothing to do with us, they have to do with the purposes of his will. Doesn't that make you feel small? It's supposed to! It is also supposed to make you feel grateful. God chose us. I don't why, you don't why. God knows. He's not going to tell us, but he knows. It was his will.

Look at verse 9 now:

<sup>9</sup>making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ <sup>10</sup>as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. (1:9. ESV)

Here Paul isn't talking about WHY GOD CHOSE US; that isn't the mystery that God is making known to us – it isn't the why it is the WHAT and the HOW that God is making known to us. God has a will, God has a plan to save for himself a people – that's the what and the how is through the life and death of His Son Jesus Christ – that's the how and that is the mystery of God's Will that he is showing us and that Paul is talking about in verse 9. Paul is saying that God had a plan! He had a plan to accomplish redemption through Jesus Christ and to apply that redemption to people of his own choosing and he is unveiling that plan now through the church – he tells us that in chapter 3:10, we'll get to that in due time. The point here is that Paul wants you to know that the entire story of redemption – how it was accomplished and how it is applied – that whole thing, that whole marvellous glorious thing – is not the creation of a man or a group of men – the apostles didn't gather in a room in Jerusalem and make this up – this is the Sovereign Will of God conceived in God from before the foundation of the world! Before the world began God conceived of a plan. He had a conversation in himself as a Trinity. In my imagination but informed by what the Bible is saying I think the conversation might have sounded like this; the Father would say: "I am going to make a people for myself in my own image." In his infinite

mind he says back to himself: “But if a man is made in the image of God with capacity to determine and will and create and love and give and sacrifice and trust then he will need to have free will. If he has free will and if he is finite then he will chose imperfectly and dishonour his creator. Our holiness will make intimacy with such a rebel impossible. Our righteousness will flash forth and react to that rebellion in a way that will be fatal for that creature.” And inside God’s infinite mind he said: “I have a plan. I have a plan whereby I will be JUST and the JUSTIFIER of the one who has faith in the sacrifice I myself provide to atone for man’s sin. I will draw a people to myself. I will allow man to be tempted and to rebel and to experience the awful tragedy of life apart from me and I will show him that the wages of sin is death. I will show him that sin makes enemies and creates strife between man and God and man and man. Sin will harden his heart and close his eyes and mankind will drift into death and dark. And then I will send the Light.” He says to the Second Person of the Trinity: “You will go down there and take on flesh and do for man what he could never do for himself. You will keep the law and CHOSE TO OBEY and you will earn salvation and reward for all my children. You will pay the price for all their sin in your body on the cross”. And he said to the Third person of the Trinity: “You will open the eyes of my people and draw them unto the Son and you will change their hearts, stir up faith, convict them of sin and lead them into holiness for the praise of my glory and grace.” And the Son said: “I delight to do your will” and the Spirit said: “I delight to exalt the Son” and so that’s exactly what happened. That’s the plan! Conceived in the mind of God from before the foundation of the world! The plan of redemption is all about the marvellous will of God and Paul says that this plan is now being revealed – like a cave being lit up by a light we saw a little bit of it in the Old Testament – we saw outlines and shadows but now in the Christ we see it all! We see clearly, we see the glory and we respond with faith and gratitude!

Look now at verse 11:

<sup>11</sup>In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things **according to the counsel of his will**, <sup>12</sup>so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. (1:11-12. ESV)

That’s another Sovereign verse isn’t it? We were predestined according to his purpose who works all things according to the counsel of his will so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. Now, if you are going to fall asleep right now and stay asleep until we finish this series in December then hear this and you will have heard the most important

thing I'm going to say anyway: The Gospel at the end of the day is not ultimately about you. The Gospel has as its ultimate end the GLORY of ALMIGHTY GOD. The plan, Paul says, this plan that God conceived from before the foundation of the world was not devised first and foremost to save lost people from hell! The plan that God conceived of from before the foundation of the world was so that we could be the reason that God receives praise and glory in heaven and throughout all the earth. Paul is introducing that idea here but it is ALL OVER this letter. God's GLORY is the ultimate end of all things. That's ultimately where this is all going. God will be known by his creatures as GOOD and BIG and KIND and JUST and HOLY and AWESOME – that's where this is going and we are going to be the place where that plan is made MANIFEST to all creation. Now you might say: "What kind of a being makes a plan that results in his own glory?" Now I will admit that if anyone other than God made such a plan that person would be arrogant and narcissistic and evil but when God makes such a plan he is doing exactly the right thing, exactly the most LOVING thing that he could ever do. Why is that? Because all life in this universe flourishes and thrives when God is at the centre; just like all plants do best when the sun is shining, so all life does best, all life flourishes most when God alone is glorified. When God is seen, known, trusted and delighted in as good and as God, all life explodes into flourishing. If the sun had a plan to clear away the fog so that the flowers could see the sun and be blessed by the sun then that would be a good plan and likewise when God makes a plan that will allow us to see and know and trust and believe and delight in his goodness and his holiness then that is the greatest plan in all the universe. That is the most loving thing God could do for the sake of humanity. God loves his own glory because it is good and because he is the source of all life and creaturely flourishing. So if you're going to fall asleep until December, I want you to hear that before you drift off: The Gospel is not ultimately about you. It is about God's glory. This church is not ultimately here for you or me or even the lost people of Orillia. Listen to me, the highest goal of this church is not to reach lost people with the Gospel. That is not why this church exists. The first and highest aspiration of this church is to glorify God and to spread his fame throughout all the earth! That's why we're here. Now, we do that by delighting in God's goodness experienced through the Gospel and advancing that Gospel outwards to lost people – so lost people get blessed by this church – found people get blessed by this church – but they get blessed because when God is glorified – when the sun is shining – everything grows and comes back to life! So if we seek God's glory, people are going to be blessed, but if we go about with the goal of blessing people then God is not going to be glorified and people are not going to be

blessed so we have to keep this straight. We exist for the glory of God. This plan, this will of God is all about the glory of God. Keep that straight and you will get Ephesians.

Let's look now at that second line:

To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus: (1:1b. ESV)

In this second line Paul is signalling that he means to talk to us about:

## **2. The immediate result and the immediate means of our salvation**

Paul has already indicated that the ULTIMATE end of our salvation is the glory of God and the ULTIMATE means of our salvation is the Sovereign Will of God but now he wants to talk to us about the IMMEDIATE result and the IMMEDIATE cause of our salvation. The focus drops down now from the Divine perspective to the human. In our X Marks The Spot series we talked about how important it is that we keep in proper tension the Sovereignty of God and the real responsibility of human beings. We might not be able to understand entirely how both of those things can be true but they are – the Bible says that they are – the Bible says that God is Sovereign and yet still we do things and decide things that really matter and that really have an impact on how things turn out in the end. There is a Divine aspect to salvation and there is a human aspect and both are real and Paul speaks to both but notice where he puts the emphasis. He begins with Sovereignty – he begins with the will of God in verse one. Then he talks here in the second half of verse 1 about the human side but now look forward to what he says in verse 2:

<sup>2</sup>Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (1:2. ESV)

That's a Sovereignty sandwich! He begins and ends with God and he ends with God and then in the middle he says we also do some things and those things are important, but the emphasis is always on who God is and what God does. This is typical Paul. Look quickly at 1 Corinthians 15:10, Paul spoke like this all the time:

<sup>10</sup>But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. (1 Corinthians 15:10. ESV)

That's a Sovereignty sandwich! Paul begins with what God does and what God gives and he ends with what God gives and in the middle he says I did some stuff too, I worked really hard but not I, but the grace of God in me. That's how you give a testimony! You put the emphasis on what God does and what God gives and you hide in the background. I get flack from time to time because we don't do a ton of testimonies and people like testimonies and so they say why don't we do more testimonies. The reason is because Evangelical Christians have become terrible at giving testimonies. The 1980's were called the Me Decade and that has changed the way we give testimonies. Now we talk about how I FOUND THE LORD and how I MADE A DECISION and how I INVITED JESUS INTO MY HEART – where is any of that in the Bible? I don't see that language anywhere. I see people saying: "The Lord rescued me from the pit", "God opened their eyes", "the Father drew them to Jesus", "as many as were ordained unto eternal life believed" – that's what I see in the Bible. We need to get better at talking like that. Instead of saying things like: "When I was a little boy I invited Jesus into my heart and made a decision for Christ" we need to say: "By the grace of God I was born into a home with a believing mom and dad. I don't how that happened, I had nothing to do with that but God was so gracious to me. He gave me a mom and dad who had just months before been led to the Lord by a pastor named Earl Lackey. How did that happen? How is it that by the grace of God I was born to two people who had just months before been born again? I didn't lead them to Christ, I didn't choose them. God did that. He did that so that I could hear the Gospel as a little boy. He did that so that my mom could take me to DVBS when I was 6 and so that Pastor Lackey could send me to the JIM Club when I was 9. He did all that. I didn't do anything. By the grace of God I am what I am." We need to get better at sharing our testimonies so that the emphasis is on what God did and on how gracious and kind God is for us in our salvation.

The emphasis here first and last is on God and what he did but Paul shines the light now in this verse on the human aspect because that is real and it is important. He says:

To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus: (1:1b. ESV)

The immediate result of our salvation the Bible says is that we are changed and we are made holy. The word translated here in the ESV as "to the saints" could just as literally be translated as "to the holy ones"; some of your Bibles may have it that way. Both are correct. Paul addresses them as "holy ones". What does he mean by that? He doesn't mean that they no longer sin; he



spends the last 3 chapters of the book telling them not to sin, so obviously he doesn't mean that. No, what Paul is doing here is what he does in all his letters; he is establishing an indicative fact as the basis for an imperative command. Let me explain that. An indicative fact is a statement about what is or in this case about who you are in Christ. In Christ you are HOLY. You are. As far as the east is from the west so far has he removed our sins from us. In his body on the cross he has paid for your sins, if you are in Christ and they are GONE! They don't exist! They can't be spoken of before the Father. That's why the devil is cast out because the devil is the accuser of the brethren and there is NO BASIS NOW for his accusation against any of God's elect. They are HOLY and God will not hear them spoken of as otherwise. They are covered over in the Robe of Righteousness provided by Jesus Christ. They are HOLY ONES! That is who you are Paul says, that is where this plan of God is going, look at verse 4:

he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, **that we should be holy** and blameless before him. (1:4. ESV)

When God determined to save you from before the foundation of the world he determined not just to save you from hell but also to save you UNTO HOLINESS and BLAMELESSNESS BEFORE HIM. That's where this is going! That's who you are now and increasingly in Jesus Christ. That is a key phrase: now and increasingly. The "now" part of that is the indicative truth. You are justified – you have a clean slate – right now before God in Christ. That's the now, theologians sometimes refer to that as positional righteousness. And increasingly, if you are in Christ, you are being transformed by one degree of glory to the next into the same image as Christ as the work of the Holy Spirit – that is what theologians call practical righteousness. Right now you are righteous and holy and you are becoming increasingly and practically holy by one degree of glory to the next. Paul will hit both aspects of this "holiness" in this letter. He'll talk in the first three chapters about how we came to be positionally holy in Christ through the Gospel and then in chapter 4 he says "I:

urge you to **walk in a manner worthy** of the calling to which you have been called . (4:1. ESV)

This is who you are by the call and grace of God – now WALK WORTHY! He moves from the indicative to the imperative, from a statement of identity to a command to holy living. Real Christians are holy people who are walking in the direction of practical holiness. That is the consistent teaching of the New Testament. In fact Jesus says that this is so characteristic of true

believers that if you don't see that then you are not looking at a real believer. In Matthew 7 he says that you might be looking at a person who seems powerful in the spiritual realm, maybe they seem really strong in charismatic gifts but if they are not people who care about righteousness then they are not real believers they are not truly saved, he says that in Matthew 7:21-23. A desire and a movement in the direction of holiness is the characteristic mark of a true believer – it is the immediate result – not the cause of salvation – it is the immediate result of a person's being truly saved.

Paul is also writing to the saints who are in Ephesus and are FAITHFUL in Christ Jesus. That is the Greek word *pistois* and it really has the sense of “those who are having faith in Christ Jesus”. We tend to hear the word “faithful” as meaning “trust worthy” or “reliable” but here it literally means “those who are full of faith” in Jesus Christ. They are FAITH-ful. They are believing. Paul is here talking about the immediate means by which we are saved. Now remember we are in the middle of a Sovereignty sandwich. The ultimate means of our salvation is the Sovereign Grace of God in Jesus Christ but the immediate means of our salvation is FAITH. Look at Ephesians 2:8-9:

<sup>8</sup>For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup>not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (2:8-9. ESV)

That's another Sovereignty sandwich isn't it? Our salvation begins with grace – that's something God gives and it ends not in boasting in our selves or our works but in the gift of God. So it begins and ends with God and his Sovereign grace but in the middle you have this bit: it's by faith. We need to do something. We need to respond with faith. Faith is more than simple belief – it is more than just knowing what God was doing in Jesus on the cross – the demons have that kind of faith – saving faith is seeing and understanding and trusting in and casting oneself wholly upon what God has done for our salvation in the person of Jesus Christ. It is looking at Jesus Christ upon the cross and understanding and declaring: “I need that! I am a sinner! My rebellion against the goodness of God really was THAT vile and THAT horrific and THAT offensive and I really do deserve death and hell. But thanks be to God for his glorious grace! He paid the debt I could not pay! His death pays for my sin. His life earns for me the blessings I could never earn. Thanks be to God for our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ! Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to the cross I cling!” That's faith! That's faith and it is necessary. You need to respond. You need

to repent. You need to see and understand who God is and what he is doing in Jesus Christ upon the cross. You need to do that today if you have never done it before. But when you do that, if by God's grace you find yourself today holding on to the cross of Jesus with both hands – holding on in faith for all you're worth – before you start boasting in how smart you are or how wise you are to do this, just look behind you for one second. Look at your hands one more time and see that God's hands are on top of your hands. Notice the chords of his love around your waist that drew you to this place. See that you are standing on the lap of the Father even as you kiss the feet of the Son. It is by faith that we are saved – it really, truly is – and this not of ourselves it is the gift of God. And there we end. We end where Paul ends his beginning. With:

### **3. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**

That's what we are going to be talking about for the next 40 weeks. Grace to you; the Sovereign kindness of God to you in Jesus Christ. And peace with God and with one other. Birthed in the infinite heart of God from before the foundation of the world and accomplished through the life and death and resurrection and ascension of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ to whom be all glory and praise and thanks. This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.