

Epistle to the Ephesians

The Epistle to the Ephesians is a general epistle in the sense that it does not deal with any specific problems, but with the *deep principles* of the Truth. It has no special greetings to, or even reference to, any individuals, as would be expected in an epistle to one ecclesia, especially where Paul had but recently spent three years, as he had at Ephesus.

It gives the appearance of being intended, not just for Ephesus, but for the brethren and sisters of all the ecclesias of Western Asia Minor of which Ephesus was the centre and hub—the same group of ecclesias to whom John wrote from Patmos.

In the first two chapters, Paul describes the eternal purpose of God to unite in one perfect, harmonious, unblemished (that's the point), spiritual whole, all things in Christ.

The epistle is addressed (v.1) to the *saints* (holy ones) and the *faithful*—not two classes of course, but two essential characteristics: those who are holy and are full of faith. Both are essential: either alone would be sterile, actually impossible.

The epistle is addressed to none other than these, except in the sense of exhorting all others to make themselves holy and full of faith. It is our wisdom to be sure we know what God means and expects as to holiness and fullness of faith, and to be sure that we—to the best of our ability—constantly and continuously labour to be in that very limited class—holy and without blemish.

Holiness is total sanctification unto God and separation from the things of the flesh—the passing meaningless, animal things of the natural world. And we are told that—

“without holiness, no man shall see the Lord” (Heb. 12: 14).

Holiness and fullness of faith are a total, every moment way of life, way of thinking and speaking and acting—*totally* different from the ordinary way of the world. They are total, absorbing, exclusive interest in God and in divine things.

Verse 2: *“Grace and peace from God, and the Lord Jesus Christ.”*

This is not, as some make it, just a technical, formal opening salutation to a letter like *“Dear Sir.”* It is a reference to the very heart of the divine purpose itself.

Paul uses the word *“grace”* twelve times in this epistle—three times in each of the first three chapters. *“Grace”* is God's divine favour and benevolence toward us—the means and the secret of our salvation. It is far above and beyond mere justice. It is even above and beyond mere mercy. It is active, all powerful, all transforming, redeeming compassionate love and blessing.

“And peace”—The peace of God—perfect peace—is that essential state of mind to which we can and must attain by laying hold upon the freely offered grace of God.

Verse 3: *“Blessed be God.”*

To those who have the least conception at all of the depth and stupendous magnitude and glory of these things, that can be the only and the irresistible reaction. And not just once, nor even just periodically, but constantly, all day long. “*Blessed be God.*” If this is not our total and continuous frame of mind in all our waking moments, then we have just not made real contact with the glory and greatness and goodness of God at all.

Verse 3: “*Who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings . . .*”

“*Blessed be God . . . who hath blessed us.*” Our blessing of God is, of course, a totally different thing from His blessing of us and the words in the original are different. “*Eulogetos*”—is always applied in the New Testament to God, and “*Eulogeo*,” applied to His blessing of men. But they are very closely related, and English has no better than “*bless*” for both of them. The former carries the idea of praise and worship, the latter more that of poured out goodness.

Verse 3: “*with all spiritual blessings.*”

The original is even stronger, “*with every spiritual blessing*” (as R.V.)

God has held absolutely nothing back of all the spiritual blessings He could possibly give us. We may think, in some of our circumstances and abilities, He could have done differently and better—but that is not wisdom.

He has done the *very best* and most possible for us spiritually. If we do not lay hold on it all in its infinite fullness, that is our fault and our loss. To lay hold on it, to possess it and absorb it, is a full time, full-hearted, full-devoted thing.

Verse 3: “*In the heavenlies.*” The word “*places*” is not in the original. It could be heavenly things. It appears to mean, more abstractly, heavenly realm or sphere—that is, spiritual relations as against natural relations.

It is used five times in this epistle; twice (as it is used here) of the present blessed state of the believer; once of Christ, as and where he is at present; and twice of the spiritual powers of the present world—those who hold religious authority and rule. In the last use (6: 12) Paul speaks of spiritual wickedness in the heavenlies against which the soldier of Christ must do battle.

Verse 3: “*In the heavenlies in Christ.*”

The whole plan is *in Christ*. All centres in him. He is the means by which God is destroying all evil and bringing the whole creation into eternal harmony and glory. Only “*in him*”—inside of him, totally absorbed into and covered by him, can we have any *Hope* or *Life* or *Peace* or *Joy*.

Verse 4: “*According as He (God) hath chosen us in him (Christ).*”

Paul deals here, and in the next verse, with Election and Predestination. It is vital to our salvation that we understand what these are, and how they apply to us.

“*Election*” is simply “*choice*” and to elect is simply to choose; and the word is usually so translated. Our word election is from the Greek word for choose, and it’s simpler if we drop the words elect and election and stick to choose, which is plain and clear.

“*Pre-destinate*”—as in verse 5, is simply that; pre-destinate, to decide the destiny beforehand, and we have no better word for the idea and that’s the literal meaning of the original. God, *by His foreknowledge*, (and that’s the point), chooses men and predestinates them. Paul is speaking, all through this epistle, only of those who will be the final redeemed.

He keeps two things clear and we must keep them clear. First, God is no respecter of persons. He chooses men to salvation upon the basis of what He knows they will do. We are told in the Old Testament that—

“The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth to show Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him” (2 Chron. 16: 9—the prophet Hanani).

And Christ says the same—

John 4: 23—“*The Father seeketh such to worship Him,*” that is, He is hunting for them. The problem is not discrimination by God; the problem is trying to find enough individuals in the vast heap of human flesh who will give their lives totally to God without reserve. That’s whom He is seeking so hard to find.

The second point is that whether or not we are ultimately part of this choice and predestination *depends upon what we do*. It’s up to us.

Paul speaks throughout this chapter of the ideal Body, the ultimate redeemed. It may sound to some like it’s a cut-and-dried affair, arbitrarily determined by God; that is, that He predestinated before the world began, so it is immutably set, regardless of what man may or can do. But He predestinated on the basis of His foreknowledge of the course that we would choose and His predestination had no influence upon that choice. In His foreknowledge our own choice comes first and then His predestination, based upon that choice.

Some may not be able to understand this—though it should not present any problem to the reasonable mind. But whether we understand it or not, we must accept it as a fundamental divinely attested fact. (There’s nothing cut and dried). Peter warns us to—

“give diligence to make our calling and election (choice) sure.” (2 Pet. 1: 10).

and he tells us how to do so; by abounding in certain virtues; knowledge, patience, godliness, etc.; not just having them, but *abounding* in them. And Paul tells us to work out our salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2: 12).

The whole thrust of Scripture—all its instruction and exhortation and solemn warning is to the effect that it’s up to us, and it requires total effort. The Scriptures are full of such expressions as “*Let not slip*”, “*keep in mind*”, “*always abound*”, “*overcome*”, “*endure to the*

end”, “*patient continuance*”, and many more. Some say, “*it is already predestinated, then nothing I do can make a difference.*” That’s utter blind stupidity or deliberate wickedness.

Though the Redeemed have from the beginning of the world been chosen and predestinated, it is entirely on the basis of God’s foreknowledge of the total effort they will make and the total devotion they will show. None of this is to say that they earn or even merit eternal salvation. Salvation is wholly a free gift of God’s grace. But the effort and devotion *will* determine to *whom* the free grace is shown.

“*God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him*” (Acts 10: 34, 35).

If we don’t work righteousness to the limit of our ability, we shall *not* be accepted—we shall *not* receive the grace.

Verse 4: “*Hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world.*”

The “*us*” cannot be pressed to prove either Paul or his readers had guaranteed, irreversible salvation. He is speaking ideally of those who will prove faithful to the end. It is he that endureth to the end that shall be saved. And though a man may be “*in Christ*”, if he does not “*abide in him*” he is “*cast out and burned.*”

Note in passing that if to be chosen before the foundation of the world indicates pre-existence for Christ, it equally indicates pre-existence for all the redeemed, which few, if any, would claim.

Verse 4: “*That we should be holy and without blame—more correctly—without blemish* (as R.V.) *before Him in Love.*”

This is the central and key fact of the epistle—yea of the whole plan of salvation.

“*That we should be holy and without blemish.*”

Paul comes back to these central and basic fundamentals in chapter 5, speaking of the Bride of Christ, the Ecclesia—

“*That he (Christ) might sanctify and cleanse it (the ecclesia) with the washing of water by the Word. That he might present it to himself a glorious ecclesia, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish*” (vs. 26, 27).

We note that this making holy and without blemish is done “*by the Word*,” so it is clearly something that has to occur and be accomplished at the present time by diligent, prayerful, continuous study of the Word—always of course, seeking the essential help and guidance and power of God through Christ.

We must ourselves do it, but still it must be—and must be recognised as being—the work of God. Can we, in this weak, mortal flesh, achieve holiness and unblemishedness? We

not only can but we *must*. Does that mean that we must achieve permanent perfection? That is obviously impossible. The flesh could not achieve that for one day, let alone a lifetime; for it means not only not doing any wrong, but—which is much more important—doing everything right, total service, not wasting a moment of God-given time, not forgetting God for a moment.

What is required is that we follow a course that keeps us in God's sight, holy and without blemish. What then is that required course to be followed in order to achieve salvation?

Primarily, we must have—we ourselves must provide—(always of course with God's help) three things—

1. A *goal* of perfection.
2. Total *desire* for perfection.
3. Total *effort* toward perfection.

If we do not have the goal, obviously we are hopeless. God is not going to force a blessing upon us that we do not even perceive as necessary. And if the glorious prospect that God has laid before us, and the marvellous love that He has manifested to us in calling us to the light, and offering us the blessing of His power and guidance, offering us eternity in the joy of fellowship with Him, and limitless spiritual vitality forever—if this does not create a total reciprocal devotion and desire, then we are dead indeed.

And if such a desire does not automatically translate into total absorption and dedication and effort to achieve the desire—if there isn't sufficient wisdom and intelligence to cause us to strain every nerve and sinew to make sure we do not let slip from us such great salvation—then what good would such dull apathetic creatures be to God?

The present life, at best, is less than one hundred years. But after a billion times a billion years, *eternity* hasn't even begun to begin. Who but a fool would jeopardise the one for anything in the other?

So we must come to God with the goal, the desire, and the devotion of total effort. In baptism, we are washed perfectly clean. We rise from the waters "*holy and without blemish before Him in love*" (1: 4). How do we maintain that essential perfection? He has lovingly provided a way—study, learning, meditation, self-examination, steady striving to overcome every aspect of the flesh, fixed determination to work to the limit for God in the joyful thanksgiving of grateful love, confession and repentance, prayer and supplication and, above all, constant washing out, re-purifying by faith in the all-cleansing blood of the Lamb.

We must constantly, repeatedly, keep purifying our heart before God. We must keep ourselves—by the merciful provision of cleansing—holy and without blemish before Him in love. It must be a continuous process, all day and every day.

Our strong desire for the love and fellowship of God must give us a strong desire for holiness.

There have been, and are, those who are thus holy and without blemish before Him in love. Only God knows who they are, for only He knows the hearts, and He alone can measure the labours against the abilities and the overcoming against the degree of testing.

They may be few and rare, but the number will at last be made up, after all the travail of the ages—which is for their sakes alone.

Verse 5: *“Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.”*

All mankind are, as Paul says, in a natural sense. *“His offspring.”* He is already the Father of all. But this adoption is much higher. This is for those who with all their hearts aspire to His beauty of holiness and hate in themselves any falling short of that holiness; those who seek his spiritual likeness.

Verse 6: *“Wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved.”*

The Beloved, of course, is Christ. All is in him. We must never lose sight of him as the God-appointed covering making us acceptable; but never as just ritually or imputedly. It is only as our heart and labours and desires are purified by faith and love.

Verses 7 and 8: *“In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace wherein He hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence.”*

Riches, abounded, all wisdom—These are the thoughts we must keep in mind constantly. First, we have been forgiven. Jesus taught that, *“he to whom most is forgiven will love the most”* (Luke 7: 43).

We must realise the extent of our forgiveness, and of our need for forgiveness. And we increasingly so realise this by dwelling our minds on the infinite purity and beauty of God’s holiness, and the natural ugliness of our flesh.

The natural man is quite satisfied with himself. He sees nothing wrong, no ugliness, no loathsome disease with himself. But Paul says in chapter 2, he is *“dead in trespasses and sins”* (v. 1), *“fulfilling the lusts of the flesh and the mind”* (v. 3), *“children of wrath”* (v. 3)—and chapter 4—

“Alienated through ignorance” (verse 18).

We must realise that our natural way, our natural thinking is an abomination to God. We must *learn* His way and His thinking.

After a full realisation of the depth of our forgiveness, consider Paul’s subsequent words—

“The riches of His grace, wherein He hath abounded to us in all wisdom and prudence” (Eph. 1:7-8).

This is the Almighty Creator of this infinite universe condescending to the passing vapour of the worm called man, riches, grace, abounding in all wisdom and prudence.

When anyone does us a kindness, we feel, or should feel, a sense of obligation, not a legal obligation, but an obligation of affection. This is what the Almighty God is striving to create and awake in puny man so that man will be driven to lift himself spiritually to God in love.

*“All wisdom and prudence”—that is, the understanding itself (wisdom) and the beneficial application of that understanding (prudence). Most of us, by our actions, write ourselves off as ignorant and content to stay ignorant. But the Word of God is a vast and inexhaustible treasure of knowledge, and God has offered us all wisdom to increasingly reap these treasures. He will not be pleased, He will not see His likeness growing in us, if we do not take—if we are not intensely anxious to take—full advantage of that wisdom to the limit of our time and opportunity. If our mind is on earthly things, it will forever remain earthly and *perish* as such.*

“To be carnally minded is death.” (Rom. 8: 6).

“Having made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself. That in the dispensation of the fullness of times, He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth, even in Him” (Eph. 1: 9- 10).

This is the glorious, eternal, Divine Purpose which He has, in incomprehensible condescension, revealed unto us. The essential characteristic of this final eternal result is that it be *“holy and without blemish in love.”*

Those who have chosen this—given their *whole* heart and strength and mind and desire to this, will be those who remain in those glorious and endless ages, when all who have chosen anything less will have been swept forever away.

(Taken from “Be Ye Transformed” Volume 4, pages 346-353 by Bro. G. Growcott)