

EPHESIANS

(Study 1) Ephesians 1:1-14: Week beginning 14th January 2008

Introduction (1:1-2)

Notice three things:

v1: The author: Paul's designation of himself as *an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God* is there to stress that what we are about to read bears God's authority.

v1: The recipients: *saints* means 'separated ones' and is equated here with *the faithful in Christ Jesus*. In the NT any Christian is a 'saint' - the idea of particular "saints" does not come from the Bible. Since the letter is addressed to Christians, the benefits that Paul is about to explain are only for Christians; but they are all for all Christians.

v2: *Grace and peace to you*: a customary greeting, but also reminding us that Paul's purpose in writing is to bring good things to his readers.

* Put verses 1-2 into your own words.

Every spiritual blessing (1:3-14)

D'you remember the wardrobe in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*? In goes Lucy; but to her amazement, the inside of the wardrobe is the way to a whole new world. Just so, when a person becomes a Christian, it could look to outsiders no more than a new enthusiasm they've picked up. But in this passage Paul reveals that something much bigger is going on. They have come into something amazing, and even the simple process of becoming a Christian turns out to be part of a mighty plan of God which stretches from prehistory to the furthest future...

Note that the overwhelming emphasis in this section is the fact that God is in the driving seat. Again and again Paul stresses that what God has done is at His initiative (*in accordance with his pleasure and will... to the praise of his glorious grace... who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will*, etc). Paul is very keen for us to get this message!

This divine initiative includes the fact that God has *chosen* us (v4) and *predestined* us (verses 5 and 11). God chose us, long before we chose Him! The word *chosen* carries its usual English sense; it is not the same as foreknowledge. *Predestined* means that God arranged and brought it to pass that we should be *in Christ*. It helpful to remember that:

1. This is what the Bible teaches. John Stott comments: "The doctrine of election is a divine revelation, not a human speculation. It was not invented by Augustine of Hippo or Calvin of Geneva. On the contrary, it is without question a biblical doctrine, and no biblical Christian can ignore it."¹
2. This squares with Christian experience: looking back on your own conversion, were there not things outside your own control that led to this point, so that you say, "God had His hand on me?"
3. These doctrines do not eliminate human responsibility. The Bible teaches this, too. They seem to us a contradiction, but the Bible teaches both. No-one will be in heaven other than by God's sheer grace and mercy; no-one will be in hell but by their own fault. A very helpful (and short) book on this issue is J I Packer's *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (IVP).
4. This teaching should humble us and make us grateful and assured (for we are in His hands, not He in ours), rather than giving us headaches.
5. In the end, the problem is not ours, but God's! It is not for us to try to solve all these things, for that would be to make God in our own image. Instead, it is for us just to accept God as He is: for He has said of Himself, *I am who I am*², not "I am whom you want me to be"!

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¹ Stott, BST on Ephesians, p37.

² Exodus 3:14

3. Paul says God *has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ.*

(what do we understand by a *blessing*? Can you think of an equivalent but more normal word?)

(That was the headline. Now in the verses which follow, Paul goes on to tell us what those blessings are...)

4. What has God done for us?

- Why did He do it?

- Why d'you think Paul want his readers to know this?

5-6. What does Paul say in this verse God has done for them?

7-8. *In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins*

- what does that mean, in ordinary language?

9-10 What has God made known to us?

11. Why do you think Paul repeats what he's said in v5?

13. When did these people actually come upon the great benefits God had for them for themselves?

13, 14. What's the Holy Spirit's role?

Looking back over this section, what would you say are the main themes?

NB Three weeks until ETERNITY