

2. God's Eternal Purpose in Christ—Ephesians 1:1-10

The first lesson, which was the introduction to *God's Eternal Purpose in Christ and in the Church: A Study of Ephesians and Colossians*, identified the theme of these two epistles by stating: "The great commonality of these letters to these two churches focuses on Christ and the church as they fulfill God's eternal purpose." The first ten verses of Ephesians focus on God's eternal purpose as it was fulfilled in Christ. The rest of the verses in Ephesians 1 focus on the church as the fullness of Christ in God's eternal purpose.

Introduction—Eph 1:1-2

Eph 1:1-2

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,

To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus:

2 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

As was his custom Paul names himself an apostle, establishing the authority by which he speaks. The phrase—by the will of God—further strengthens Paul's claim to authority. Of course, this church would remember the case that he made for himself in Acts 20:17-21:

17 From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. 18 When they arrived, he said to them: "You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. 19 I served the Lord with great humility and with tears, although I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews. 20 You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. 21 I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.

Paul's prayer was that God's grace (unmerited favor) and peace (with God, with other people, and with themselves) be with them from the Father and the son, Jesus Christ.

Every Spiritual Blessing in Christ—Eph 1:3

Eph 1:3

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

The older versions have readings that are different in meaning from the NIV. For example, the American Standard Version reads verse 3: "Blessed (be) the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly (places) in Christ. " *Blessed* more aptly expresses an abiding characteristic of God, separate from anything man can do, where *praised* implies man as the actor in the passive voice. If one eliminates the *be* as it is in the Greek, an eternally blessed God emerges with power to bless all of human kind.

The NIV reading is also problematic in the phrase *blessed us in the heavenly realms*, implying the place from which the blessings are received. The original language favors the American Standard Version which reads: blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. The very strong implication of the latter is that man receives blessings from God and in Christ that are characteristic of the blessed God, Himself.

What follows in the rest of the first ten verses is an eloquent description of those spiritual blessings which emanate only from God and in Christ. In fact, there are 12 references to God

and 9 references to Christ in these 10 verses in the NIV. These spiritual blessings from heavenly places from God and in Christ deny by their very power any human origin.

He Chose Us in Him—Eph 1:4-6

4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love 5 he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will – 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

The wonder here is that God chose humankind before the creation of the world to be holy and without blemish. Although one may never fully know the workings of an all-powerful God, the scriptures themselves give insight into how God chose his children before the foundation of the world.

Rom 8:28-30 teaches that those he foreknew, he predestined; those he predestined, he called:

28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. 29 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. 30 And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

Those called according to God's purpose – those he foreknew and predestined – were those to be conformed to the likeness of his son. 2 Thess 2:13-15 says that from the beginning the chosen are the saved, called to this through the gospel:

13 But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. 14 He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. 15 So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.

Later, Eph 1:11-13 teaches that these predestined, these chosen, and these called were included in Christ when they heard the word of truth, the gospel of their salvation:

11 In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, 12 in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. 13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation.

What a wonderful blessing to be adopted as a son of God.

In Him We Have Redemption—Eph 1:7-8

7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace 8 that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding.

Just the choosing and adopting as sons required hearing and obeying the word of truth on man's part, so their redemption, the forgiveness of sins required the blood of Jesus on his part. Peter describes this most precious spiritual blessing in 1 Peter 1:18-21

18 For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. 20 He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your

sake. 21 Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

He Purposed His Will in Christ: Eph 1:9-10

9 And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, 10 to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment – to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

The mystery of God's will is that although God predetermined before the foundation of the world, he made known his will according to his good pleasure, putting that good pleasure of God into effect at the fullness of times. That God has summed up all things in heaven and earth in Christ, precludes any latter day revelations from God and any latter modifications by man through the various denominational strategies for altering the gospel.

Not only is the content set forever by the predetermined will of God, but also the time when God fulfilled his will is set at the time of Christ coming. Jesus began with this declaration in Mark 1:14-15:

14 After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 15 "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"

Gal 4:4-6 teaches that *the time had fully come*:

4 But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, 5 to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.

God fulfilled his eternal purpose in Christ when time was fulfilled.

Study Questions from the Scriptures

1. Eph 1:1-2: Who wrote the letter? To whom did he write it? What was the writer's prayer?
2. Acts 20:17-21: How did Paul live? How did Paul preach? What did Paul declare to Greeks and Jews alike?
3. Eph 1:3: What blessing has God given his people? In whom are they given?
4. Eph 1:4-6: When did God choose us? What were we chosen to be? What did God predestine?
5. Rom 8:28-30: According to whose purpose are we called? Who were those he called? Who were those he justified? Who were those he glorified?
6. 2 Thess 2:13-15: Through what are we called? In what do we share?
7. Eph 1:11-13: What must we hear to be included in Christ?
8. Eph 1:7-8: In whom do we have our redemption? Through what does it come?
9. 1 Peter 1:18-21: With what are we redeemed?
10. Eph 1:9-10: What did God make known to us? When did he make it known?
11. Mark 1:14-15: What did Jesus begin preaching?
12. Gal 4:4-5: When did God send his son? What do we receive?