

Ephesians 1:3

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Date: 11 November 2007

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[0 : 00] We shall return now to Ephesians chapter 1 and read some verses from verse 1. Ephesians 1 and verse 1.

Paul, and of which is Christ, by the will of God, to the saints and Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus, grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Praise be to God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him, for the creation of the world, to be holy and blameless in his sight.

In love he predestined as we adopted as sons through Jesus Christ in accordance with his pleasure and will, to the praise of his glorious grace which is freely given us in the one he loves.

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

[1 : 21] And he made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfilment, fulfilment to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

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, in order that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be for the praise of his glory.

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promise to Holy Spirit, who is an impossible guaranteeing of inheritance unto the redemption of those who are in God's possession to the praise of his glory.

And I want to focus on the words of verse 3 particularly, Praise be the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. The most remarkable thing, of course, about this epistle is that Paul assumes that those here in red will understand it.

[3 : 04] Because by any standard, it is a remarkably profound and elevated exposition of the Christian faith.

And yet it is addressed, not to scholars or theologians, or even to mature Christians, but to unlearned, young, and very immature, very ordinary believers.

And Paul assumes that young though they are, yet they love the truth. And they want to hear more and more about the glory of their salvation.

And in this readership, Paul includes not only those of maturity and so on, but also the slaves and children of the church of Ephesus.

And there was any epistle read, perhaps read very hurriedly, and yet grasped its contents. And I want this morning to take advantage of Paul's assumptions and Paul's boldness, and assume both your interest in the epistle, and your capacity also, and longing to understand it.

[4 : 37] Because in this section, perhaps above all other sections, Paul soars into the most elevated spheres of Christian teaching, upwards and upwards and upwards, and it's very hard to impose any kind of order on this flight.

We simply have the accumulation of theme after theme, and topic after topic, as Paul's mind simply takes off, lifts off into this glorious exposition.

In fact, from verse 3 to verse 14, simply one sentence. And maybe not even a sentence at all, because Paul's passion and Paul's mission works havoc with its grammar.

And this long sentence remains virtually unended in this flight of a theological eagle. Now, I just want to focus briefly this morning on two or three aspects of this introduction.

I wanted to, first of all, on the author of the epistle in verse 1, Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, by the will of God.

[6 : 15] So, this he says is Paul writing. It's worth reminding yourselves where Paul was at this time. In fact, Paul was in prison in Rome.

And from that prison, Paul wrote this epistle, and Philippians, and Colossians, and Philemon as well. And I wonder often how Paul felt during this confinement.

And how he must have thought sometimes how frustrating it all was. Because he knew that things weren't going well in some of the churches in the whole world was there.

It needed to be evangelized. And yet here he was, unable to exercise care over the churches, unable to preach, silenced and out of the action altogether.

And perhaps others too wondered at this providence. This man with his tremendous gift in the church needed so desperately why in the providence of God was this man of all men?

[7 : 34] Why was he silenced? And sometimes we ourselves wonder at God's providence. Some, 400 years ago, Sander Rutherford was imprisoned virtually in this city and forbidden to preach.

And he too lamented his silent psalms. And yet from those silent psalms came many of those glorious letters which still inspire and comfort the people of God.

And we have seen in our own lifetime too God taking home to himself by our standards prematurely those of great capacity and great usefulness and the church of our Lord and Savior.

And yet in Paul's case, God did so manifestly know what he was doing. Because from that house arrest, that confinement, came, as I said, those mighty epistles.

were it not we never have had Philippians or Colossians or Ephesians or Philemon were it not for this almost unendurable providence.

[9 : 04] And through those epistles, Paul still ministers to the ongoing church of the Lord Jesus. God does indeed work in mysterious ways.

and he tells us too that he is an apostle of Jesus Christ as sent one. An ambassador, he says elsewhere. And we have this marvelous concept just suggested or hinted at here of the dual authorship of this epistle and indeed of the whole Bible.

because always there is the human authorship but then there is also always the divine authorship. And when Paul speaks, he speaks as the apostle of Christ Jesus.

He speaks as the ambassador of the Lord Jesus. And you know today that even in old diplomatic service, that the ambassador speaks on behalf of his government, on behalf of government, and speaks with their authority, expresses their view, states their position.

And sometimes does so in terms of precise words spelt out by the foreign office which says, just issue this statement.

[10 : 32] But sometimes the ambassador has to express the position and the point of view in his own words or in her own words.

And yet those words also carry the authority of sending government. There are occasions in the Bible when God does dictate the message to the writer.

But for the most part what we have is this kind of concurrence of this running together of the divine authorship and the human authorship.

So that when Paul writes this epistle, he himself has to think out every thought, has to choose every single word, wrestle with his own expressions, and yet through that action of the apostle, God himself is also writing and God is speaking to us.

And so we have this marvelous Bible which is so fully human and which betrays all the pains and labors of human composition and yet is also the word of God.

[11 : 49] It's the word of man and it's the word of God because it's the word of God's ambassador, this man, the apostle Paul. And he says to us too that he's an apostle by the will of God, reminding us that he himself didn't choose or apply for this particular position, but God in his sovereign grace found him.

And the New Testament, that is a consistent pattern that God seeks out disciples and God calls to his own servants.

And that's still the case and it's not confined to ministers and missionaries. Every one of us has a vocation before God.

That is one of the great concepts of the Reformation in Luther and Calvin that not only monks and nuns and friars and preachers have vocations, but every believer has a vocation.

Every life is under this rubric by the will of God. And of course there is a challenge to be put that sometimes we are not compliant with that will.

[13:16] It is possible for us to defy and suppress the will of God. And I want to perhaps suggest to you at a time when there are so few offering to pray in a speech or to the gospel in our own church or in any other church in Scotland in the present time.

Why is it? never have there been more young people of higher education, young people of great personal ability, managerial, organizational, communication.

why is it then that never have there been so few who are hearing, responding to, God's line with the call of God.

Remember Isaiah's words in Isaiah 6 where God says, whom shall I send and who will go for us? And the prophet says, here am I, send me. We had one college students some years ago.

[14:52] He used always to quote that response of Isaiah and paraphrases in this memorable way. Isaiah saying, Lord, will I do?

And I want all of us today to hear that same challenge. whom shall I send? And perhaps all of you responding, Lord, will I do?

It may be that sometimes God will say no. But I want to know, are you available, ready to go where God wants us to go?

An apostle by the will of God. And then the recipients specified just immediately afterwards to the saints in Ephesus were faithful in Christ Jesus.

Those words seem, in a way, innocent enough. But see, for the same to us. First of all, they were saints. And it wasn't a promise that one day they would become saints.

[16:23] But now, right in the present, they are saints. And that's true of every single Christian. For the most part, the New Testament speaks of saints and sanctification, sanctification, not in terms of some future possibility, or some ongoing process or progression, but as an event which has taken place once for all in the life of every single disciple, what we call definitive sanctification.

salvation. In the moment of our conversions and new birth, we were consecrated to God, and we are not our own.

And I'm sure that at the top of our minds, all of us know that. But do we know it in practice that we do not belong to ourselves like the vessels in the temple of the Old Testament, we have been set apart from a profane to a holy use, from a common to a holy use.

Each one of us belongs to God. And in that same moment of consecration, of being set apart, of being separated to God, in that same moment, we were transformed in the core of our being, and renewed in every faculty of heart and mind, by the grace of God, we are consecrated and transformed creatures.

It's not a hope, it's not even a process, it's not a progress, it is a fact about every single Christian. And then they are called the faithful.

[18:35] And that word has a certain ambiguity, because it can mean simply believers in the Lord Jesus, but it also means that they were faithful, that is, they were reliable in human relationships, and also in the relationships with the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

So they are saints, and they are faithful believers. And then again, there's something that we need so urgently.

Paul spoke in that part of that that he read of finishing the race. He looked back from his last imprisonment when he wrote 2 Timothy.

He wrote from his condemned cell, and he said these words to us, I have finished the fight, finished the race, I have kept the faith.

That's what's meant here. Not simply to be, as we say, converted, and to make a good beginning, but they were faithful in Christ Jesus.

[19:58] And in order, it's a kind of awesome, terrifying backdrop to that. Remember, we have another epistle written to this church in Ephesus, in Revelation 2.

And in that epistle, the risen Lord says to that church, to the apostle John, he says, you have lost your first love, you have lost the love of your first days, where is it, the love that you had.

And so he said, they are saints, and they are faithful, enduring, ongoing, persevering, loyal, steadfast, believers, showing all the signs of spiritual stamina.

And they're in Christ Jesus. That's a moralist piece of a spiritual geography. In fact, in many ways, that's the key phrase of this whole section known to verse 14, it occurs, I think, some in Adam

times, in Christ, where are they?

They are in Christ. That's their residence. That's their abode. That's where they live. They live in Christ as members of his body.

[21 : 28] That's where they live. And we have decided this other great, and it may seem an amazing phrase later on in verse 3, in the heavenly realms.

Because if you are in Christ, and Christ lives at the right hand of God, then where are you? You too are with him in the heavenly realms.

Where do you live? I live in Christ. Where's that? It's in the heavenly realms. And where's that? It's at the right hand of God. That's where lives are rooted. That's where we are registered as citizens in heaven itself.

Our lives are hid with Christ in God. I can look out and see here this morning dozens of ordinary looking people.

[22 : 35] And yet you're not ordinary. you are saints, you are faithful believers, you are in Christ, you are in the heavenly realms.

Not that one day you will be, although that is true in a preeminent sense, but it's a present reality, like you're able to draw on the resources of heaven in your own daily lives.

And then we have this other phrase here, the saints in Ephesus. And I want to pause over it for a moment.

Because this phrase doesn't occur in many of the ancient witness to the New Testament text. It's not in our oldest papyrus, it's not in our great courtesies, Vaticanus and Sinaiticus, and so editors tend to omit it from the text at this point, or as Emily does, to insert a note.

And that spread a huge amount of debate and discussion. And one possibility is, of course, that this was a circular letter addressed to all the churches on this part of Asia, Mara, Turkey, around Ephesus' land, places like Colossae, Laodicea, and so on.

[24 : 15] And that this was left blank for insertion of a particular church's name. thing. Now, there is a great deal of plausibility in this because this epistle of Ephesians is very much lacking in personal detail.

Although Paul spent a huge amount of time in Ephesus, he doesn't mention disciples in Ephesus as he does at Philippi, and Colossae, and Rome, and so on.

And so it's possible that it was a general universal or Catholic epistle meant for the church of old ages, and very non-specific as to its actual addressees.

And because more than any other epistle, this church really is so unearthed, it is so heavenly, it is so universal, it deals in those great and mighty universal concepts that we have particularly from verse 3 down to verse 14.

So, what's the benefit of that is this? That it's for you, not just for those Ephesian believers, but for you, for us, for the church of all ages.

[25 : 39] But of course, we can't be universal without also being particularised. And there's an attraction in the church of Ephesus.

Many of you old witnesses do in fact insert the words in Ephesus in the text at this point. But what I'm so reluctant to lose is this mass polarisation between being in Christ and being an Ephesus. Because both things are true of us. Where do you live? I live in Christ slash Aberdeen. And I belong in both, and I live in both, and I have responsibilities and connections in both directions. I live in my Christ life. I live in the heavenlies in Aberdeen. How can you do that? Well, I don't have a choice.

I live in the heavenlies in Aberdeen. It must be very hard. I don't know what it is. But it's the only option open to me. I live in Christ in Aberdeen.

[26 : 56] I live in the heavenlies in Aberdeen. Whatever I am, whatever I'm doing, if I'm offshore, whatever I am, I am in Christ, I am in the heavenlies, and I am still the Christ himself dwelling in this world with all its challenges, all its temptations, all its pains, all its ugliness, and not forgetting all its beauty, and all its super abundance of divine gifts.

So that's who they are. They are saints, they are faithful believers, they live in Christ Jesus, and they live in Aberdeen, Ephesus, that's the kind of folk they are.

And then there is this great doxology, praise thee to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. So we have, we have the writer, we have the recipients, and we have the doxology, praise me, blessed be God.

And there's a remarkable thing about this designation of God that I want to pause over just for a moment. The way that he names God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is God's prerogative to give himself a name. Only God can name God. Because the name is more than a denotation, the name is also a description.

[28 : 41] It tells us not only who God is, but what like God is. in the Old Testament God called himself Elohim and that name had great significance.

In that same Old Testament God called himself Jehovah or Yahweh or the Lord and that too had great significance because it pointed to the inexhaustible being of the God symbolized in the burning bush that burned and burned and burned and wasn't consumed.

And we have this marvelous picture of the inexhaustible being of holy love which is what God is. There is no entropy in God that God simply keeps on being. Well these Old Testament names and many others have very specific significance.

And so does this name, the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. But I shall say that only this. It's a man is of a monumental and yet very simple too.

[30 : 02] If you ask God who are you, he says, I am Jesus' Father. And it's very proud to give that answer.

Just as we might sometimes say, who are you, I am so-and-so's father, I am so-and-so's mother. And we are proud and quite happy to be identified by that relationship.

And here is God taking pride in this devotion. Who are you? I am Jesus' Father. and I am happy to be known by that name.

I am proud to be known by that name. That I am the God who was served by Jesus. And I am the God who was revealed in my son Jesus.

And I go back with you to the story of Moses. And Moses saying to God, Lord, show me your glory. And God says, I can't show you my face, but I will show you my back.

[31 : 23] And that's all that Moses sees. But here we are in the New Testament, and we're saying to God, Lord, show us your glory. And he shows us his face, the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Jesus as the image of God, and the likeness of God, and the form of God, and the glory of God. In God there is no un-Christ likeness at all.

Jesus as her definition of God. And I go back to what I go back so often to that great story in John 13, where Christ washes his disciples feet.

This act which is much less godlike and divine, that is the face of God. I see the servant on the cross of Calvary, bearing shame and scoffing rude.

Is that the bearing of God, the obscurity of God, and the hiding of God? No, it is the face of the God who loved this world and gave himself for it.

[32 : 47] Lord, who are you? I am Jesus' father, and I'm happy to be known by that name. It is indeed, I'm sure he would say, of all my names, that is my favorite name, to be known as Jesus' father.

And what has he done for us? He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms in Christ.

And he goes on in what remains in the chapter to give us this tremendous exposition. I will tell you again, you know, there were young Christians some were slaves, and some were mere children. They were probably all of them illiterate. They weren't used to abstract conceptual reasoning. And yet, does Paul hold back?

Up and up he goes, and he says, come and I show you, let's go right up and take this great aerial view of God's redemption and of all those spiritual blessings.

[34 : 10] And I'll itemize them for you because we can't go through them in detail. I may come back to one or two of them. God has chosen us and God has adopted us.

And up further, up higher the ego goes and looks down and says, and God has redeemed us. And higher still than he says, and God has led us into a secret to sum up everything in Christ.

Christ. And God, he says, he has guaranteed it all to us in his Holy Spirit. So, there he is, up and up and up he goes.

He's right into this, to the whole church in one way, to this particular church in another sense, to such ordinary, ordinary people.

I'm showing them all those mighty concepts. And I'm going to close this now, but praise be to God, to the praise of the glory of his grace.

[35 : 33] He wanted to bring them right up to that point of doxology. And that's where I want to leave you, able to sing in a moment, from the very depths of your hearts.

His name forever shall endure, lost like the sun it shall. May God put that melody into our hearts. all time to attire to joy to speak