

Ephesians 1:1-7

Colonized by the Greek city of Athens,
Ephesus had inherited its rich
culture.

And being built on the western coast of Asia
Minor, (present day Turkey), it was
strategically located between two
continents, and had incorporated the
culture, scientific advantages, and
crossed sin of both East and West.

Over the years, it had experienced a long
and sometimes tumultuous history, and
had eventually been incorporated into
the Roman Empire.

And with a population of 350,000, it was
their second largest city, next to
Rome.

Also, because of its large and commodious harbour, it had developed into an important commercial center.

However, even in Paul's day, it had become hard to navigate, due to the influx of silt, and would eventually become useless.

The temple of Artemis, renamed the Temple of Diana by the Romans, had taken 250 years to build, and was considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

Ephesus could also boast the largest amphitheater in Asia, with a seating capacity of 25,000.

Its entertainment covered the full spectrum of human desire, ranging from drama and music, to bloody conquests featuring gladiators and wild animals.

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During his second missionary journey, Paul visited the city on his way to Jerusalem, and left Priscilla and Aquilla there.

During that time, they encountered a Jew, by the name Apollos, holding forth in the synagogue.

He was an eloquent speaker, and well versed in the Scriptures, but completely unaware of the coming of the Holy Spirit, knowing only the baptism of John.

Observing this lack, they took him aside

"and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly."

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On Paul's third missionary journey, he returned to Ephesus, and remained there for two or three years.

So mightily did the Word of God prevail,
that **"Many of them also which used
curious arts brought their books
together, and burned them before all
men: and they counted the price of
them, and found it fifty thousand
pieces of silver."** Acts 19:19.

And this awakening wasn't confined to
Ephesus either.

As the Word of God spread and increased, 14
key churches were established in the
surrounding area.

About 30 years later, six of these churches,
and the assembly in Ephesus, would be
evaluated by the Lord Jesus Christ,
and the results recorded in the
opening chapters of the book of
Revelation.

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Paul wrote this epistle during his two-year confinement in Rome, waiting to be heard by Caesar.

Many of us would have lamented such a turn of events, considering ourselves prisoners of circumstance, but not Paul.

In Ephesians chapter 3, he refers to himself as **"the prisoner of Jesus Christ"**, not the prisoner of Rome, and in the chapter before us, he introduces himself as one sent **"by the will of God"**.

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So then, let's begin this marvelous epistle.

Eph. 1:1-2 **"Paul, an apostle** (or one sent) **of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus:**
2: Grace be to you, and peace, from

**God our Father, and from the Lord
Jesus Christ."**

Paul never had any doubts concerning his
place in life.

He had been sent **"by the will of God"**, and
was an ambassador of Jesus Christ.

Shortly after his conversion on the road to
Damascus, the Lord had pronounced him
**"--- a chosen vessel unto me, to bear
my name before the Gentiles, and
kings, and the children of Israel:"**

It would be a lifelong calling, and it would
involve stoning, shipwreck, and
imprisonment, but Paul never wavered.

Phil 4:11-13 **"I have learned, in whatsoever
state I am, therewith to be content.
12: I know both how to be abased, and
I know how to abound: every where and
in all things I am instructed both to
be full and to be hungry, both to**

abound and to suffer need.

**13: I can do all things through
Christ which strengtheneth me."**

Yes, Paul was "**content**" with his lot.

He was "**an apostle of Jesus Christ by the
will of God**", and that's all that
mattered.

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As you will notice, this epistle is
addressed "**--- to the saints which
are at Ephesus, and to the faithful
in Christ Jesus:**"

However, some of the older manuscripts do
not include the word Ephesus, simply
addressing it "**to the faithful in
Christ Jesus:**"

So there's a distinct possibility that this
epistle was more circular in nature,
intended for the 14 assemblies in the

area, and, of course, the Christians in Ephesus.

And its content seems to bear this out.

If Paul's purpose had been to simply contact the Christians in Ephesus amongst whom he had lived for nearly 3 years, one would expect some personal greetings.

However, unlike many of his others epistles, there were none.

Also, it didn't address problems specific to any one assembly, but concerned itself with the entire bride of Christ.

And as a result, this epistle is filled with doctrine, and contains certain mysteries found nowhere else in Scripture.

In short, it is a virtual Mount Everest,
reaching spiritual heights never
before attained.

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As we begin this marvellous book, we are
immediately confronted with God's
sovereign will as it pertains to the
bride of Christ.

V3 **"Blessed be the God and Father of our
Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed
us with all spiritual blessings in
heavenly places (or the heavenlies)
in Christ:"**

Now, apart from the fact that this epistle
was written to Christians, how do we
know the **"us"**, found in this verse,
refers to the bride of Christ?

I think the words **"in Christ"** gives the
answer.

For you see, only born again believers enjoy that privileged position.

In fact, if God didn't see us **"in Christ"**, we would still be ruined sinners.

So then, V3 is talking about the church, and God has endowed it **"with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:"**

And we're not talking about earthly blessings, which hold such a prominent place in today's so-called prosperity gospel.

No, we're talking about **"spiritual blessings in heavenly places"**.

And their location shouldn't be much of a surprise, either.

After all, they're found **"in Christ"**, and God has raised Him **"from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places---**". Eph. 1:20.

And how many spiritual blessings are to be found **"in Christ"**, 50%, 75%, maybe even 80%?

No, **"all"** of our spiritual blessings are found **"in Christ"**.

So there's no need to go looking for supplements --- **"ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power:"** Col. 2:10

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So then, now that we are aware of the nature and extent of these blessings, what exactly are they?

Well, the first one is found in Eph 1:4

"According as he hath chosen us in him (that is in Christ) before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:"

Here, Paul introduces the concept of election --- **"he hath chosen us in him"**.

And in the very next verse, he will be talking about predestination.

Both concepts have troubled mankind down through the ages, and have even caused divisions in the church.

However, the concepts themselves are not the problem.

It's man's understanding, and more specifically, the theories he has developed to explain them that produce the problem.

So let's take our time, and examine the scriptures very carefully.

And above all, let's be open to the Holy Spirit's guidance.

V4 **"According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world,**

**that we should be holy and without
blame before him in love:"**

Having established the fact that V3 is talking about the church, it is only reasonable to assume that V4 also refers to the church.

And if that is the case, then God has chosen the bride of Christ "**before the foundation of the world---**".

Now, historically speaking, the book of Acts records the birth of the church as being on the day of Pentecost.

However, according to V4, it existed in the mind of God "**before the foundation of the world**".

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At this point, I would like to go back to the book of Genesis where we can examine the creation of the first woman.

You might think I'm drifting off the subject, but actually, this has everything to do with the subject.

In Gen.2:7 we discover that "--- **the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground**".

But that wasn't true of Eve.

No, Eve was unique.

And I mean, aside from the fact that she was a woman, Eve was unique.

You see, Adam's body was formed from dead material, namely "**the dust of the ground**", but Eve was created from a living member of Adam's body.

So in a manner of speaking, there was a period of time when Eve was in Adam.

Are you starting to get the picture?

And chronologically speaking, the Holy Spirit records Eve's creation in a rather unusual way.

In Gen. 1:27-28, we see God blessing this couple --- **"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.**

28: And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth."

Yes, in chapter 1, **"God blessed them"** and told them to **"Be fruitful, and multiply"**, but as far as scriptural is concerned, there is no record of Eve's creation until Gen. 2:22.

By this time, God had put Adam into the Garden.

He had been given the job of naming the animals over which he had been put in charge, and it was only then that it had become apparent that something, or rather someone, was missing.

And it was only then that the Lord God **"took one of his ribs"** and made Eve.

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So why wasn't Eve created at the same time as Adam?

After all, all of the animals and birds had been created in pairs.

And why was she blessed in Chapter one when the account of her creation wasn't mentioned until Chapter two?

I think you have already guessed the answer. Yes, the bride of Adam is a type of the bride of Christ.

Eve had existed in Adam before her actual creation, and that's exactly what we

have in Eph. 1:4, --- **"he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:"**

And this is only the first blessing that we find in this chapter.

As we read on, we will discover a regular treasure trove of spiritual blessings.

They should be enough to warm any believer's heart, and set his mind at rest concerning his eternal security.

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However, before we consider V5, we should take a moment to examine the other side of the coin.

What about the unbeliever?

You see, V4, and similar portions of Scripture, have generated some rather unusual conclusions about God's

character in the minds of some very sincere believers.

Their reasoning goes something like this:

Since Christians were chosen "**before the foundation of the world**", then the unbeliever must have been similarly chosen.

And if you continue along this line of thinking, you end up with a Creator who has pre-programmed all mankind, like so many puppets, with a fixed eternal destiny.

They have no free will, they have no opportunity either to choose or reject God's offer of salvation.

And if they did, it would fly in the face of God's sovereignty over His creation.

Let me hasten to say, I don't believe that for a moment.

God has not created a vast multitude of people for the sole purpose of punishing them in hell.

I may not be able to explain the interaction between man's free will and God's sovereign will, but I am convinced that such a theory presents a false picture of God.

For instance, 2 Peter 3:9 tells us, God is **"longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."**

If He has pre-programmed certain individuals to be lost, then He is willing, even instrumental in their damnation.

And not only that, but His Son made this appeal, during His earthly ministry --
- **"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."** Math 11:28

Now, if many of the individuals to whom He was speaking could not possibly come, and He was aware of that fact, then His invitation would have been false.

No, God's sovereignty does not preclude man's free will.

In fact, it was God's idea.

For a discussion of God's commitment to man's free will, please see lesson 13, pages 17 to 21, of my studies in Romans.

In a word, God give Adam a free choice, even though He knew that choice would necessitate the death of His own dear Son.

And while we're talking about man's free will, here are a few verses, found in a single book, that verify its existence.

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever (not a select few) believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

John 3:36 "He that believeth on the Son (that's an act of the will, isn't it?) hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son (another active the will) shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."

John 5:24 "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life."

And although they will not be included in this lesson, there are just as many

verses that give testimony to the sovereign will of God.

So, how do we reconcile the two?

Well, it's difficult, maybe impossible to completely understand their interaction.

Because man possesses a finite mind, he cannot always understand God's ways.

In fact, Isaiah 55:8-9, makes that clear ---

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD.

9: For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."

But we can be sure of this:

God is righteous in all His ways.

Abraham knew that, and he incorporated it

into his argument concerning Sodom and

Gomorrah --- **"Shall not the Judge of
all the earth do right?"**

And of course, the answer is yes.

**"The LORD is righteous in all his ways, and
holy in all his works."** Psa. 145:17

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So then, getting back to Eph. 1:4, how can
we say believers have been given a
free choice when the church was chosen
"before the foundation of the world"?

This is how John Phillips, a Bible
commentator I have great respect for,
explains it.

And I quote:

"There is a mystery here that centers in the
fact that we are finite and God is
infinite.

We are creatures of time; and God inhabits
eternity.

We express our mode of being in three tenses
of time --- I was, I am, I will be.

God expresses His mode of being in the
eternal present --- I am, I am, I am.

Thus Jesus did not say, "Before Abraham was,
I was" (which in itself would have
been an astonishing statement
expressing a longevity of life His
enemies would have found bewildering).

Jesus said, "**Before Abraham was, I am**" (John
8:58).

He was claiming eternity of being and
coexistence with the Father, and His
enemies considered His statement
blasphemous.

We are hindered in experience and
understanding by the limited nature of
our being.

As finite creatures we live in the here and now and can deal with only one thing at a time.

Life is presented to us, so to speak, in tiny little packages.

We live it moment by moment.

The future lies before us, but we cannot experience it until it touches us in the fleeting moment of the present before it recedes instantly into the past.

We can anticipate the future and recall the past, but we live in the flickering moment we call the present.

In God's mind, however, the past, present, and future are swallowed up in the all-embracing present.

Thus when we read that we were chosen in Him **"before the foundation of the world,"** we must realize that the Holy Spirit

has stated the issue from our perspective.

Since God lives in the present tense, there is to Him no time difference between the moment He chose me and the moment I chose Him.

The perception of time difference is ours alone.

From the standpoint of God's eternal present tense, both facts are simultaneous."

End of quote.

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So then, for the rest of this lesson, we will concern ourselves with the sovereignty of God as it pertains to the bride of Christ.

Let's return once again to Eph. 1:4 ---

"According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world,

**that we should be holy and without
blame before him in love:"**

Although it is not apparent in our English translation, the Greek word that is used here, and translated "**chosen**", gives the sense of chosen once and for all.

No, we're not saved today and lost tomorrow according to our fickle performance. Our eternal security is as sure as God's sovereign will.

And He has "**chosen us**" (that would be election, wouldn't it?) --- "**that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:"**

Now, considering the fact that God started with ruined sinners, that's quite remarkable.

But it's not magic.

No, our salvation satisfies all the
righteous demands of the law.

The only reason why we are **"holy and without blame"** is because Jesus became **"sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."** 2 Cor. 5:21

In a word, because of Jesus, God has been able to accomplish our positional righteousness.

But that's not the end of the story.

Actually, it's only the beginning.

Having procured our positional righteousness, our Heavenly Father is determined to establish our practical righteousness.

And the only way that can be accomplished is by making us like Christ.

And let me hasten to say that during this
age of Grace, the results will be
varied, depending on our obedience.
But someday, the sovereign will of God will
be completely accomplished.

As we sit down to the wedding supper of the
Lamb, **"we shall be like him; for we
shall see him as he is."** 1 John 3:2

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And now we come to our second blessing in
Christ.

V5 **"Having predestinated us unto the
adoption of children by Jesus Christ
to himself, according to the good
pleasure of his will, ---"**

Here we see God's sovereign will in action,
once again.

Yes, our **"adoption"** is definitely **"according
to the good pleasure of his will"**.

And you will never find the concept of
predestination used in reference to
the lost.

God does not predestine certain individuals
to Hell and others to Heaven.

No, the concept of predestination is
reserved for those who are already in
God's family.

V5 **"Having predestinated us unto the
adoption of children --"**

In some translations, the word **"children"**
has been changed to sons, and I think
that is the thought here.

A child is simply a member of a family.

We have become members of God's family by
means of our new birth, even though
for the time being, we might be babes
in Christ.

However, the term son designates maturity.

So you might say; God has **predestinated** us
to spiritual maturity.

And you will also notice the term
"adoption".

Normally, we would associate adoption with a
child who has lost his parents, but I
think there is a different meaning
here.

In Roman society, a wealthy citizen could
adopt a young man who already had
parents.

He might be the son of a poor man who was
willing to let them go, or even a
slave who might have parents back in
his home country.

Nevertheless, once the adoption had been
completed, the young man would possess
all the rights and privileges of a
natural born son, including an
inheritance.

That's the blessed position every born again believer enjoys in Jesus Christ, and V5 tells us, it is **"according to the good pleasure of his will"**.

And not only that, but V6 tells us, it is to **"-- the praise of the glory of his grace"**.

Yes, throughout eternity, the Church, by its very existence, will proclaim **"the glory of his grace"**.

And there's more!

Let me quote V6 in its entirety --- **"To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved."**

Now, our acceptance in the sight of a righteous God is absolutely essential. However, as far as sinful man is concerned, it is absolutely impossible.

We have failed the test --- **"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God"**. Rom. 3:23

However, what was impossible for man, God has already accomplished.

He has **"made us accepted in the beloved."**

During Jesus' baptism, God's voice thundered from heaven --- **"Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."**

Again, on the Mount of transfiguration, we hear His words --- **"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him."**

And we have been **"accepted in the beloved."**

Yes, when God looks at us, He sees His beloved Son, and is **"well pleased"**.

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The third blessing we have received in Jesus is redemption.

Eph. 1:7 **"In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace".**

Redemption means to buy back, and our redemption has been obtained at an unthinkable cost.

Not an unthinkable financial cost, for 1 Peter 4:18-19 says **"--- ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers;
19: But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:"**

You see, the **"wages of sin is death"**.

And because of that, our redemption required the very life blood of our Redeemer. Certainly, before His death He endured the heartbreak of rejection and betrayal.

But in His death, He faced the horror of being made "**sin for us**", and the resulting wrath of a righteous God. Yes, our salvation was obtained at an unthinkable cost.

2 Cor.8:9 "**For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.**"

And as Eph. 1:7 tells us, His redemption procured "**the forgiveness of sins**".

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Well, we've run out of time, and "still there's more to follow".

I hope you can join me next time, as we continue to explore our "**spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:**"