

The Gateway to Ephesians

Ephesians 1:1-14

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[Paul] was on a trip, and on this trip he was going to be persecuting people. It seemed that he was on this road that would subsequently become somewhat famous. He was going to encounter some people of this group called “Real Christianity.” The only problem is that when he was on this road to persecute these people from “Real Christianity,” he met the CEO of “Real Christianity.” The CEO said, “Saul, why are you fighting against me? I want you to join me. In fact, I want you to head up a new branch for me called ‘IMG.’ ‘IMG’ stands for the fact that we want to Integrate in a Missionary way the Gentiles.” Well, you know the story. Saul became Paul, and the great mystery that we’re going to talk about today is how God is going to bring the Gentiles by grace through faith to the same saving knowledge of those He had chosen in years gone by.

Take your Bible if you would and turn to Ephesians chapter one. What a great start to the day. I know that Doug said that we’re a little bit down, and I suppose we are compared to what we have been. But, hey, this is a bigger crowd than we used to have. Amen? Even on a holiday day. I want to share with you how pumped we are about our new Sunday School class we started this morning. We had about 16 people in the new class, and Pam and I are meeting with a group of folks who have heretofore not really been in Sunday School, or as we are going to be calling it “Bible Fellowships.” So if you’ll join us, and if you are not currently in a Bible Fellowship or Sunday School class, we would love to have you at 9:15 next week.

Now, we are doing something kind of unusual. We are doing something that I don’t know that anyone else is doing. I’m not saying on the face of the world, but I’m saying that I don’t know of another church that in Sunday School is having everyone from children through adults doing our Sunday School curriculum, “Explore the Bible,” which is in Ephesians this year. And then I’m going to be preaching verse by verse through Ephesians. I sat in a Sunday School class today, and I thought, “Wow, they are taking all my good stuff.” I don’t have anything for the sermon.

We are going to get so deep into Ephesians that we are going to understand the nuances of what God was trying to say in what some would call a “circular letter.” Have you ever heard that term? A circular letter would have been a letter, one of 13 that Paul is going to write to these churches in Asia Minor. A circular letter may not have been even specific to a church. A circular letter might have had an open end in which they would have passed on from one church to the other.

Now, Ephesians had a lot going for it, and a lot kind of going against it as well. I’m sure many of you have been there. Pam and I have traveled a little bit and perhaps Ephesus is one of the most memorable places we’ve ever been. Now get the picture. You have right over here the Aegean Sea, and it is not green. It is blue. It’s not like Destin. It is not the Emerald Coast. It is this color of blue like I’ve never really seen before. Back in the day, the church had some things going against them. There was Nero. He was the Roman leader at that time, and he was blaming the Christians for the great fire that almost destroyed Rome. So that would be one strike against the

Christians at that time. But then there was also some paganism that was going on. The thing that you love about Ephesus is the marble. I mean, everything ... the streets ... may I say the toilets ... everything was made of marble. Marble at Ephesus is like rock is here. So, everything was made of marble. There were like 127 pillars made in this Temple of Diana in which they had all kind pagan worship going on. So the Christians at the church at Ephesus had been started probably by Aquila and Priscilla. Somewhere this letter would have been written later. Paul had really been in prison during this time. I think of what the apostle Paul did. He was incarcerated. He was in jail, and he made that jail cell his office where he would pen these letters to the church at Colosse and to the Phillipians at Phillipi. He is writing this letter (maybe it's a circular letter) but specifically to the church at Ephesus. So we are going to see today what is really some of the most hotly and highly debated passages of Scripture anywhere. I was talking to Jim earlier whose son is a pastor. These young guys, they want to get all about one side of what we're going to talk today about God chose us, and He did. Amen? But we will also discover today that we cannot and should not and will not divorce human responsibility from God's sovereignty. You see it is both and, and the scripture teaches both.

So, by now you have your Bible, and we are going to let our fingers do the walking through the pages of life today, and we are just going to kind of walk through Ephesians in a verse-by-verse manner. Now a fellow by the name of Sir Francis Bacon said this, "Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested." This book, the book of Ephesians, is going to really set our sails as a church. Now, I have asked you to purchase, Sunday School teachers, the John MacArthur commentary. John MacArthur said in his commentary that it wasn't until he preached through the book of Ephesians did his church really take off. Well, we all know God's going to do a great work in the life of Surrey Hills. Amen? That is right, and so we just think that being all together [is important]. We're going to share with you 20+ messages through this book, and we will end somewhere about November 28th. We will probably be very thankful that we're out of Ephesians by then. But I think you are going to have your socks blessed off as we study through this book.

What we want you to see is that the first three chapters of the book really talk about our position in Christ. The last three chapters, on the other hand, talk about our practice in Christ. The first three chapters talk about what we believe. The last three chapters talk about how we are to behave.

Ephesians chapter 1. I want to begin by reading verse 18 because this, church, is my prayer for you. Ephesians chapter 1:18, "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened so you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the glorious riches of His inheritance among the saints." Church, that is my prayer for you. I heard it in one Sunday School class as I was walking around today. This may well be the longest run-on sentence in ancient literature. From verse 3 through verse 14 is nothing but one sentence. I have told you before, it was later when they translated to the Latin, the Vulgate. It was a guy by the name of Jerome that started putting chapters and verses together. So get this picture, all of you grammarians. This is one long run-on sentence.

We have, I believe, an outline in your bulletin today. Follow along as we'll just have two observations today. We will look at the Biblical background to Ephesians and then the believer's blessings in Ephesians.

Notice in verse 1, "Paul," you don't have to wait until the end of the book to see who wrote it, "an apostle." Let's just start right there. You know, really, historically there are only 14 of these guys. If anyone claims to be an apostle today, you can pretty well write them off as being a false teacher. Paul was an apostle because he met the criterion of having seen the Lord Jesus Christ. So he is an apostle of Jesus Christ. Notice who he is writing to, the saints ... the saints who were there at Ephesus. Really, you are going to see in a local sense to the saints, but as you keep reading it, there is the larger sense as he says, "To the saints and believers in Christ Jesus at Ephesus. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." So that is the address. Grace, our unmerited favor of God's riches at Christ's expense. But on the other hand, mercy or peace is the product of

grace. Listen to this beautiful passage in 3 John 1:2, “I pray that in all things thou mayest prosper and be in good health even as your soul prospers.” So there we see the background. We see the author, Paul. We see the audience, the saints. There are really only two kinds of people in the word. There are ‘saints’ and there are ‘aint’s.’ You are either in or you are out. You are not a little bit dead. You are either dead or alive. I’m not sure if this is a good one, but you are not somewhat with child. You either are or you are not. You are either saved or you are lost. And so, really some people think of saints as martyrs who have died in the faith and then they make these icons. But really if you are a Christian, you are a saint. Now I know it is hard to think of Darrell over here as a saint, but I want to just tell you in Jesus Christ positionally he is a saint. Amen? Now, that happens to be what I’ve called today “The Biblical Background.”

I want to take just a second, and I know we don’t write these like we used to and I don’t want to throw you. Does anybody have a checkbook today? I know a lot of times we just use debit cards, but seriously I need this. Does anyone have a checkbook? Now, this is a checkbook, and it is very interesting. As you read all of these authors that want to write about Ephesians, the whole book of Ephesians has everything to do with blessings. Charles Spurgeon wrote this book about the “Checkbook.’ When we read through Ephesians, it is just like writing a check. When we read about these blessings, we are going to talk about 10 blessings straight from the checkbook of Almighty God that are ours as a believer. You want to have your Bible open. We are just going to go kind of verse by verse through here, and then you have your outline and write down what God’s spirit places on your heart.

The first thing I want to talk about as we get into the blessings of the believer is that word “blessing.” Notice in verse 3 here it stays this, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has,” there it is again “blessed us.” That word comes from a word that we would use to use the word “eulogy.” It means “to say something good about someone else.” This blessing means to speak well. NIV uses “to praise.” It means “to benefit, to prosper, to give contentment.” And notice what it says, “in the heavenlies.” “Who hath blessed us with every spiritual blessing,” there is that word “blessed” three times in one verse, “in the heavenlies.” So here is the ticket. It is not something temporal. It is not something material. But the blessings we have have very little to do with this. Here is the great word. It does not matter what your bank account is. What God is saying is that He wants us to have our spiritual bank account where it needs to be.

Ten blessings of the believer in this passage. The first is found in [verses] 3-6 that we are blessed with every blessing. Let’s read it. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Jesus Christ.” I’ll just stop right there to say this. We have been given and have been granted the blessing, the favor of God Almighty. And we have so much, so much to be thankful for. Amen? I mean, certainly, all of us have some things that we wish were different than they are. The great news today is wherever you are in Christ ... if you have more month at the end of the money ... if the family situation is not where it is ... you can rest assured that the blessings of God, the favor of God is going to see you through. And so, the real question that we are going to tackle today, “Did God choose us, or did we choose God.” The real question is that we cannot take any credit for the blessings that God has given us and for the wise choice that we have made in the Father.

Now look in verse 4. We are chosen. Notice what the Bible says, “For He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight.” Isn’t it cool that you were chosen not as an afterthought. You were not chosen that somewhere down the line God said you are in or out. God chose you before the foundation of the world. I love what Charles Spurgeon had to say about this. He said this, “God must have chosen me before the foundation of the world, or else He would not have done so afterward.” I think we can all kind of resonate with Spurgeon in that regard.

Well, during this time in history, Roman law would give an adopted child the same rights and privileges of a naturally-born child. And so when he is going to use these metaphors like adoption and like slavery, well they really got what he was talking about at that time. Look in verse 5. He predestined us to adoption. "He predestined us to be adopted through Jesus Christ for Him according to His favor and will." We are predestined and adopted. Now, let's get something very clear. We are saved by regeneration. We come to Christ when we receive Jesus Christ and in turn we turn from our sins. It is by grace through faith plus nothing. Now that is regeneration. But notice what he says. Adoption is a reference of our standing that God gave us. The term adopted refers to what God does for His great people. So let's go ahead, and let's get it out in the open today. There is a great debate today. We are doing this because this is the passage we are in, but pastors are spending inordinate amounts of time trying to discover ... did God choose you or did you choose God? As a matter of fact, I had a teenager come up to me and said, "Are you a Calvinist?" And I said, "Do you know what a Calvinist is?" I mean I can't give you an answer in one easy sentence. Of course, historically Baptists have had a lot in agreement with John Calvin. But I want to be abundantly clear. Surrey Hills Baptist Church is only going to stand for One Name, and that Name is Jesus Christ. Amen? We will not be identified with any reformer. We will not be identified solely with anyone other than the Name and the Person of Jesus Christ by which we are saved. So we have One Name and we have One Book. We are not going to be singularly identified with any new wave of theology or an old wave that has come back around. The truth of the matter is, we are adopted.

Now, election and free will are both taught in the Scripture. Therefore, both must be true. It is not either or. If you have to have everything in a little box to have all of your answers figured out, God bless you, but it just does not work that way. So here it is ... the word predestination means "to mark off in advance." Election is how that we view salvation looked from God's point of view. Free will or choice has to do with salvation from the human point of view. Both are taught. Both are true. Now, you've heard about the little boy who was asked if he had found Jesus, and he said, "Well, I didn't know he was lost." The truth of the matter is, we don't find Jesus. God calls us. You say, "Wait a minute, Preacher. One day I chose to step out of that pew and walk down that aisle and pray to receive Christ." Well, God bless you, but who gave you that desire to do that? God did through the Holy Spirit. He quickened and convicted you. Therefore, it is all of God, and the whole teaching today has to do with the fact that the whole salvation process is about God's grace and mercy and not about our choice. If we start trying to take any credit for salvation, we have messed up, and we are not giving God all of the glory that He deserves. You can't separate the two sides of salvation, so I'm going to use an old school illustration. Some of you will identify with this very well. It is kind of like the old train track. A train cannot go on one rail, but it needs two rails. Both rails are what are going to get us to our destination. There is the rail of God's sovereignty, and there is the rail of human responsibility, and together those two rails get us to our destination. The old school illustration ... I heard this in Sunday School today; it is good. You look up into the door from God's perspective and it says, "Before the foundation of the world I chose you." And you go through the door, and you look back up and it says, "Whosoever will may come." They are both and. Church, I'm telling you, do not allow anyone to hone in and to get you off the track that we have a responsibility to tell men and women and boys and girls about the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ and not to get detracted or distracted by some nuance of theology. They are both taught. They are both right.

Well, notice what the Bible says in versus 6 and 7. Not only are we predestined and adopted, but we are redeemed. Look in verse 6, "to the praise of His glorious grace that He favored us with in the Beloved." We are redeemed. Redeemed is the idea of purchasing and setting free. In the Old Testament ... and these people would have got that. You will see this if you want to write it down, scholars, Leviticus 25:47-52. There was this price that was paid for slaves. By the way, in Rome there would have been tons of slaves, so that would have really resonated with this whole teaching. This ransom was paid, and God paid our ransom and set us free. Now not

paid, the Bible says, with silver and gold but with the precious blood of the Lamb. D.L. Moody has said this about the subject that we're talking about here. He said this, "The whosoever wills are the elect, and the whosoever won't are the nonelect." If we spend a disproportionate amount of time trying to figure out who is in and who is out, then we are missing what God has called us to be about. Six million slaves in Rome during this time sold like furniture. They got this picture.

Well, notice in 7b we are redeemed, but we are also forgiven. In Him we have redemption through His blood and the forgiveness of our trespasses according to the riches of His glory. Do you see how many times he is talking about riches? About what we have? About our spiritual checkbook in Jesus Christ? We are forgiven. The word forgiven means "to be carried away." They got the picture of the day of atonement when the Jews had a high priest. They would bring in a couple of goats for sacrifice. One, they would go ahead and slit the throat, and they would take that blood, and they would sprinkle it for the atonement of sin. The priest would then confess the sin of Israel. They would take the other goat (important!) they would take the other goat out into the woods and far, far away from the sacrificing, and that was called the "scapegoat." The Bible gives us a picture of that in Psalm 103:12 when it says, "as far as the East is from the West." What happened is Jesus took our sins, like that scapegoat for us, and on the cross He paid for our penalty of sin by giving His life.

Notice in 7b and 8, we are also lavished with grace, in verse 8, "that He lavished on us all wisdom and understanding." Grace--unmerited favor. Mercy is which we do not get what we deserve. So grace is described to us as a lavish gift. We've had some birthdays in our family this month, about four. I just think sometimes that we just need to lavish those we love. We really do. We need to go over and above. God gave us the very best. Hallelujah! Then He took our sins and took them far, far away.

Well ... 8 through 10. Notice the last part of 8, what it says, "with all wisdom and understanding. He made known to us," circle this word, "the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure that He planned in Him for the administration of the days of fulfillment--to bring everything together in the Messiah, both in the heaven and things on the earth in Him." Now what is this "mystery of God?" Have you ever wondered--did it seem fair? Did it seem right? Did it seem just in context that God chose the children of Israel, and He did not choose other people? It is kind of mysterious thing. Now remember I told you that Jesus met Saul on that Damascus road and said, "I want you to be my ambassador to the Gentiles, and I want you to bring them in." The mystery is now solved. The blood of Jesus Christ is not just for the select, chosen people, but it is also for the Gentiles. In context of what we are saying, God does choose, but the Bible says, "Whosoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." I believe God's desire is that all would be saved and come to a knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the mystery. It has been clear. This mystery means something that was once covered up is now revealed, and now we see that the gospel is for everyone.

Now notice in verse 10 we have this eternal inheritance. I'll begin in the middle, "... to bring everything together in the Messiah, both things in heaven and things on the earth." Verse 11, "In Him, we were also made His inheritance." There is that word, "predestined according to the purpose of the One who works out everything in the agreement with the decision of His will." What is the purpose of being predestined? That we would glorify God. That is the chief end of all men is to glorify God, and so we are provided an eternal inheritance. The word 'inheritance' means 'a lot or a portion assigned.' That has to do with salvation, certainly now but also in the sweet bye and bye as well.

Well ... the peace, the brotherhood, all the wealth is ours. God has a spiritual checkbook for us. And then, believe it or not, we have gotten through 10 of these. We have done it very rapidly. Notice in verse 13, "In Him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation--in Him when you believed--were" here it is, circle this, "sealed with the promised Holy Spirit." There are many different things in the ancient world.

They used cylinders and they used signets and they used rings to use for sealing, but I remember very well the first time that I ever received a letter like this. When I was in junior high, I had a girlfriend by the name of Anita Tribble. Anita Tribble one time wrote me a letter, and it was sweet. On the back of it she had this red glob. It kind of looked like Play-Doh. And then she had sealed this 'A' in it for Anita Tribble. So the idea is if anyone had opened up that letter, it would have broken the seal, and everyone would have known what Anita Tribble was trying to tell her boyfriend. The fact is, look, it is the same principle of the seal of the stone on the tomb. God's Holy Spirit has become our earnest, our seal, our guarantee, a foretaste of glory divine. Now think about it. Have you ever gotten any Holy Ghost pimples? You're singing along and then you just--it's like someone pours cold water. Anyone every done that? Well, what happens is that is just a foretaste of the glory that we are going to have when we enter into the presence of Jesus Christ and lay our crowns at His feet. We are going to serve Him, and we are going to worship Him, and we are going to bless Him because He is worthy of worship and He is worthy of praise. Hallelujah to His Name and thank God for the guarantee. It is a deposit. Verse 14, it is "the down payment." The Spirit is our guarantee.

Now, I don't know if you know Regis Philbin? He's had a lot of shows. But the one that most interested me was "Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?" I'm like ... deal me in. I don't think there is anything not spiritual about wanting to be a millionaire. How much more could you invest in the Cooperative Program? I mean it would just be a great thing. I mean my tithes would go up. Surrey Hills ... we could actually get a pulpit that would not be too big for little old me. I mean there are just a lot of things that we could do if we had a million dollars. But spiritually speaking, we are rich in the Lord Jesus Christ because we have been blessed. And it all comes down to the fact that He has chosen you. You cannot deny that. You cannot deny election. You cannot deny predestination. And because He has chosen us, it is our responsibility to live a life to the praise and the honor and the glory of Jesus Christ. Let's stand for prayer.