

# Intro to Ephesians “A panoramic view of who we are ‘in Christ Jesus’.”

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Proposition: Because you have every spiritual blessing, because you are predestined and chosen and adopted, you are destined to live a holy and blameless life.

In most of the places that I have lived in there was a point, often a high vantage point, where I would pause or acknowledge at that point, that I was blessed, that I was home; a place where I felt the wow of God’s goodness.

In Taupo where we lived for 3.5 years, as we drove over the crest of the highway and Lake Taupo and Mt Ruapehu came into view, I would think “I am a blessed man. Awesome.”

Since we have become northerners there is a point when you come over the Brynderwyns when the Heads and the coast suddenly come into view and I feel the same way. Wow, I am a blessed man.

The book of Ephesians is a bit like that. Parts of this letter to the church at Ephesus are breath taking, motivating and inspiring as you find yourself taken up into the heavenlies to see who you and I really are ‘in Christ Jesus’.

When you spend time in this letter you begin to get a glimpse of what Jesus has given us and you find yourself wanting to serve him in some way as a natural act of worship.

**The first three chapters of this book concern doctrine** and they explain to us who we are ‘in Jesus’ and we learn what he has gained for you and for me.

The second three chapters follow a familiar Paul structure. Chapters 1-3: this is who you are now that you are a Christian. **Then chapters 4-6: because of who you are this is then how you get to live**, not must live, not have to live, but get to live.

If I were to make a broad generalization about modern churches there would appear to me to be two distinct types of church. In one type people say you ought to, you must do, you must be more committed, you need to try harder; these are your Christian obligations.

In another type of church, where I sit more comfortably, the language is not have to, but get to. Instead of doing things out of Christian obligation and responsibility we do things as acts of worship and thankfulness. The first type of church tends towards legalism: if you are not praying enough, if you are reading the wrong translation, if you are not going to church on Saturdays... then you are not being a good Christian and God won’t bless you.

The second type of church wants to live holy, wants to live worshipfully, not to earn favours with God but as a natural response to who we have become as Christians. We do what we do because we are just enjoying the Lord and the freedom and help He generously gives.

There are many who try hard to live the Christian life, to be good husbands, or good employers, and employees as is taught in this letter, and whose motivation is wrong because they have failed to notice what is in chapters 1-3. That is who we have become ‘in Christ Jesus’ because of His goodness and grace.

To understand how to live in chapters 4-6 you need to climb the mountain and see yourself from the lofty heights of chapters 1-3.

Without the view of chapters 1-3, submitting to one another, obeying your parents, serving your employer just seem like another obligation, another burden. Having been in the heights of 1-3 first, you see Paul’s practical teaching differently, and you find the power to live it out flows from heaven not your own strength.

There is a natural progression through this letter.

Firstly Paul tells us to sit a while and see who we are and whose we are, to realize what gifting and authority we really have.

Then, after sitting, how to walk by faith in some very practical areas of life.

Finally in chapter 6 he tells us how to stand firm with the armour.

**Sit, then walk then stand.** In many churches its stand firm, work hard and then maybe you will earn your rest. That is back to front and not a grace initiated life.

### **Ephesians 1 New International Version (NIV)**

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

Man, I like that. Paul knew what his calling was. He was called by God to be an apostle; an apostle, a minister of grace. And when you look back over Paul's life you must conclude that he was perfectly prepared for this role. He grew up the son of a Rabbi. He sat at the feet of Gamaliel (the head scholar of the day). He was a member of the Sanhedrin (which was the Jewish, religious Supreme Court). Paul has spent his whole life prior to being a Christian trying hard to keep all the rules from the OT. Nothing could have prepared him better to understand grace and to become the minister of grace to the early church. He knew his bible so well. He knew the absolute frustration of trying to live under legalism. It didn't work but because of his knowledge of the Law he could understand and be amazed by grace all the more.

I would like you to insert your name in that greeting for a moment.

From \_\_\_\_\_ chosen by God to be a \_\_\_\_\_ painter, a parent, a teacher, an IT specialist.

God is in the habit of taking all the experiences you go through in life and working them together for your good to become part of your calling, your purpose.

God has taken your gift mix, passions and skills and decided that you can serve Him most effectively as a lawyer, as a salesman, as a business person. God's purpose for your life is not burdensome or difficult. It's the perfect fit for your gifts and personality and where He can utilize your many experiences.

Every one of us has a niche, a place where we can effectively serve the people around us. Whether you are a doctor or a plumber or a minister or a teacher, one role is not more important than the other. God has prepared you to serve Him in some way and whatever that is, is His choice and what is best for you and me. All work, all service is spiritual.

If you know that you are called to a particular role, a job for which you have been prepared for, a role you are well suited for then don't try to be like anyone else but accept your calling and be content.

Paul didn't strive to become an apostle, or knock down doors to get there, or manipulate his way into that position. He would introduce himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God.

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

**To God's holy people in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus:**

**<sup>2</sup> Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

Some of your translations will have the words to God's 'saints' or 'holy ones' who live in Ephesus. And you might say well hey, this letter isn't for me. I am not a saint or a holy one or one of his faithful followers, I am a struggler, this letter must be for someone else.

The reality is the phrase 'God's people' or 'saints' or 'holy ones' simply means those that are chosen by God and set apart. And if you are a Christian then that is who you are, you are chosen by God, you are saint \_\_\_\_\_ and you are a holy one. So no matter how much you struggle with your faith, this letter is addressed to you.

GRACE and PEACE to you, Paul begins. Have you noticed that Paul often began his letters this way and finished his letters this way. Grace and Peace, the Siamese twins always go together.

Why do they always go together?

Because you will never find peace, real peace in the depths of your heart until you know and experience grace.

Turn to the person beside you and remind them what the letters G.R.A.C.E stand for.

**God's Riches At Christ's Expense.** What Jesus has done for us allows us to receive all the riches of heaven not because of anything we have done but purely because of what Jesus has done for us.

You cannot experience peace, until you know and accept what Jesus has done for you. Grace. If you believe it and receive it you will have peace.

**<sup>2</sup> Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and ..... the Holy Spirit surely. Why has the third person of the trinity been left off this greeting that has been inspired by the Holy Spirit?

John chapter 16 tells us that when the Holy Spirit comes He will not speak of Himself. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is to point to Jesus Christ. And the ministry of Jesus is to focus on the Father.

So when the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write this letter he intentionally left his own name out.

**<sup>3</sup> 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.**

If you watch Christian TV there is something in this passage I want you to note please. In the Old Testament, in places like Deuteronomy 28, God promised Israel physical and material blessings but those things were only a precursor to the spiritual blessings of the NT. Today you will hear many preachers say, "if you do this and give that, God will bless you materially and physically and you will be wealthy."

Now I think that wealth often comes from hard work and good financial planning, but what has been called prosperity doctrine is very dangerous, it's misleading and unbiblical. The blessings spoken of in the NT are spiritual and eternal.

Well, you might say to me, yeah, but Russ I would like more of the OT physical blessings if you don't mind. But would you? When people look at celebrities and the Kardashians etc etc on TV they think wow and awesome, I would like to be that rich and famous. But would we? You see those tabloids and celebrity websites are full of bizzarities and drug abuse and perversions.

Where is Paul writing this letter from? Tell the person beside you.

In a Roman Prison. And in prison he says "Praise be to God, for we have been blessed" not pray for me because life sucks right now. Or woe is me, prison food stinks or why is God letting me go through such suffering? Whinge,

whinge, whinge. No, He says Praise God, I am a blessed man. How is he a blessed man? Because he has every spiritual blessing 'in Christ Jesus'. He doesn't say I get every spiritual blessing from Christ. He says he has it 'in Christ Jesus' now.

I realized some years ago that the things that you and I yearn for, long for, pray for are just a symptom of a deeper need for a close relationship to Jesus that is in Christ; it's as I am close to Him that I get what I really long for.

I remember a time in Taupo where I was doing a really boring job for Fletcher wood panels, a very highly paid job but a boring shift position. I prayed "God get me a more satisfying job," and He didn't, so then I used those boring times to get close to the Lord and fellowship with Him and that boring job became an awesome job, I just loved it.

I remember times when I have been so tired and under so much pressure I have prayed for peace, a respite from the crises. But then I have sat at a beach somewhere and worshipped the Lord and asked Him questions and written down what He said to me and I have found that peace and rest at a deep level in the midst of life's chaos.

I recall times when I have really struggled with this person or that person and I have prayed, "Lord sort them out, help me love so and so." Then I have spent time with the Lord and I feel His presence and I feel His love for that person and I discover what I really needed was more of Him.

You might well pray, "Lord put bread on my table," and Jesus may answer you, "Son, daughter, I am the bread of life that you are really craving for."

When you know who you are and whose you are and you hear His voice, anywhere, and any place, can be a place to celebrate and praise.

Maybe Paul could have said; Praise be to God, I am locked away with him, I know who I am and what my purpose in life is, I have spiritual gifts but His proximity is where my joy comes from.

If you want life, if you want purpose, if you want joy, if you want to hear His voice, turn off the TV. Close that laptop. Put your phone on silent and spend time with Him. It's in Him that you will really find what your heart is really longing for.

James 4 simply says draw near to Him and He will draw near to you.

He has blessed us! Vs 4 says He has also chosen us:

**<sup>4</sup> For He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight.**

The religious person says you must try harder, you must be better, shame on you for your struggles. Toughen up. Get a grip on your life.

The Christian on the other hand says that because I am 'in Christ Jesus' that is that Jesus and I are tight, I am spending time with Him, I am listening to Him. Because I am in Christ, His nature is becoming my nature and I am destined therefore, chosen therefore to be blameless and holy.

I can be holy because He is holy. If I am "In Christ" walking with Him, being satisfied by Him, therefore it's a natural consequence of that relationship that I will become like Him, blameless and holy.

When did He choose you and me to be one of His family and eventually blameless and holy? Before the creation of the world.

**D L Moody once said, "I am glad that He chose me before I was born because I don't think He would have chosen me after I had lived."**

God has chosen you before the foundations of the world to be Holy and Blameless.

**In love <sup>5</sup> he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will**

He chose you, He destined you to be holy and blameless, He predestined you to be adopted and go to heaven.

Well, does that mean that God predestines people to go to hell?

Absolutely not.

Nothing in scripture suggests that God ever predestined anyone for a Christ-less eternity in hell.

**Rev 3: <sup>5</sup>The one who is victorious will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life, but will acknowledge that name before my Father and His angels.**

The implication of this verse is that everyone's names were once written in the Book of Life. If those people choose to show no interest in Jesus, choose not to seek His forgiveness or find out what He has done for them; if they choose their own religion and to do their own thing; if they effectively walk over Christ's dead body, then God will not stop them going to hell. Their names will be blotted out, removed from the Book of Life at the Great white throne of judgement for unbelievers/ Christ rejecters.

Does He want that? Heavens, no. It's His will that one perishes but that all inherit eternal life, but He is not going to force Himself on anyone, that would be rape. If a person insists on rejecting Jesus and showing no interest and salvation, they can walk over His dead body and be separated in that place prepared for Satan and his demons for eternity.

If you want to try to get your head around predestination and freedom of choice I find Romans 8:28-30 most helpful.

**Romans 8:28-30 New International Version (NIV)**

**<sup>28</sup> 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. <sup>29</sup> For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. <sup>30</sup> And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.**

To be justified means to be made holy, just as if you never sinned. To be glorified means that they will make it to heaven one day. Keeping that in mind, what is God saying through Paul here?

Paul is inspired to write that before the world began, God saw you and me and loved us, and He knew that some of us, when we heard of His love and His sacrifice, would come to Him and believe. Everyone has the chance to be saved, but He chose us, He began to work in our hearts to seek after Him, because He foreknew that we would respond to the gospel. He knows in advance who will have a soft and teachable heart, therefore He chooses us and calls us and in our relationship with Jesus transforms us into a holy people who one day will inherit eternal life with Him in heaven.

What the bible teaches is basically, we all have free choice. Heaven and hell are realities. Christ came and died to rescue you from the judgement and separation that you deserved. Some of humanity will say they just don't care,

they just aren't interested in Jesus and God will not force them into accepting forgiveness and eternal life. However, God knows who will respond to the gospel and those He foreknew He chose, those He chose He called (because without God's help no one really seeks God), those He called He made holy and blameless in their relationship with Jesus. And those He had destined to be holy and blameless will one day also be taken to be with Him in heaven for eternity.

You are chosen, predestined, adopted, you are going to be holy and blameless, in fact when you see Him the bible tells us you will be like Him.

It's from the mountain top of grace that you and I get to live a life of freedom and holiness and service in gratitude in worship to Him. And we can only do it because we climbed the mountain and saw who and whose we really are first.