

INTRODUCTION

A. The Church--Uniquely Described

One of the keys to understanding the book of Ephesians is to realize that this epistle is built on the concept of the church as the Body of Christ (see pp. xx-xx). As a human body functions in an incredible, multiple-phase operation--totally dependent upon every muscle, tissue, and nerve--the church is similarly complex. As the human body receives all its direction from the head, so the church receives direction from Jesus Christ. As the body manifests a person's soul to the world, so the church manifests Christ to the world.

B. The Church--Uniquely Delineated

1. Ephesians 1:22-23--God "hath put all things under his [Christ's] feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body."
2. Ephesians 2:15-16--Christ "abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances, to make in himself of two one new man, so making peace; and that he might reconcile both unto God in one body."
3. Ephesians 3:6--The mystery of the church is "that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel."
4. Ephesians 4:16--From Christ "the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love."
5. Ephesians 5:30--"We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones."

The head of the church, Christ, manifests His will through the Body of Christ. The church is not an organization that functions by structure alone. Rather, it is an organism that depends on the flow of life passing between its members.

C. The Church--Uniquely Designed

Paul normally discusses the church from the vantage point of its present state and operation. However, he began Ephesians by unveiling the divine plan for the church, which preceded the creation of the universe. Verses 3-14 say, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ, 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 predestinated us unto the adoption of sons by Jesus Christ himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, through which he hath made us accepted in the Beloved; in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace, in which he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good

pleasure which he hath purposed in himself; that in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth, even in him; in whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will, that we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ; in whom ye also trusted, after ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also after ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, who is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory."

Note that all that is packed in one sentence. Led by the Spirit, Paul lingered on the marvels of God's grace. That glorious passage takes us back to eternity and discusses God's eternal formation of the church. The church is not an after-thought of God. Rather, before history began, God established the church.

The Nagging Issue of Self Worth

Many are asking themselves, Am I valuable? Can I find a way to accept myself as I am? And there certainly are a plethora of opinions suggesting answers to those questions. Our society propagates self-image books and seminars that tell people they are basically good, which is what we all want to hear. Others believe that man's identity is bound up in an understanding of his heritage, so tracing one's family tree is said to be therapeutic. However, such opinions are too simplistic. They fail to take man's nature into consideration.

The problem is multiplied by Christian bookstores that sell books addressing the themes of psychology, self-image, and self-worth in a non-biblical manner. They present techniques to help people rid themselves of guilt, fear, timidity, and inadequacy. But no one will develop a true sense of self worth by playing psychological games. Some have realized that is true, so they teach that self-worth comes only from doing good deeds. They seek their value by trying to establish their own righteousness. That's their way of trying to gain acceptance with God and man. Such an emphasis is not unlike the Pharisees, who extolled external acts while ignoring internal problems (cf. Matt. 23). Although they establish a feeling of self-worth, the inner man is destroyed. Guilt, fear, anxiety, and depression are submerged because they must continue to hide from the truth about themselves.

A true sense of self-worth comes from understanding our position in Christ. We have been chosen in Christ from before the foundation of the world. Knowing that gives us a sense of our significance and value to God. We were so important to Him that He gave up His Son to die on our behalf.

God's redemptive history is His reaching down and drawing to Himself those whom He chose to save. In Ephesians 1:3-14 Paul gives us a glimpse of that plan of salvation. In verse 3 Paul begins with a benediction, praising God for all Christ has done for us. Then in verses 4-14 he discusses the aspects of God's eternal purpose for the church: the past--election (vv. 3-6a), the present--redemption (vv. 6b- 11), and the future--inheritance (vv. 12-14).

This passage can also be divided into three sections, each of which focuses on a different Person of the Trinity. Verses 3-6a center on the Father, verses 6b-12 center on the Son, and verses 13-14 center on the Holy Spirit. Paul takes us to heaven's very throne to show the greatness and the vastness of the blessings and treasures that belong to those who are in Christ Jesus.

I. THE ELEMENTS OF THE BLESSING (v. 3)

"Blessed be the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ."

A. The Blessed One--God

The Greek word translated "blessed" is eulogetos, from which we derive the English word eulogy. It means to "speak well of someone." Paul begins verse 3 by saying that God is good. In fact, Jesus says in Matthew 19 that "there is none good but one, that is God" (v. 17). And God is good whether we perceive Him to be or not.

The Bible records the goodness of God from beginning to end. Melchizedek in Genesis says, "Blessed be the Most High God" (14:20). In Revelation we read, "Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever and ever" (5:13). Whatever trial or trouble we may be facing, we are to continually bless the Lord.

B. The Blessor--God

Ephesians 1:3 says that God "hath blessed." James says that "every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (1:17). Romans 8:28 says, "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose." God is the source of every good thing. Genesis 1:31 tells us that after the creation, "God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good."

C. The Blessed Ones--Believers

Ephesians 1:3 says that God "hath blessed us" (emphasis added). Galatians 3:9 tells us who has been blessed: "They who are of faith are blessed." Those who have been chosen by God are blessed. When we bless God, we speak well of Him. When He blesses us, He does good to us. Our blessing is our praise to Him. His blessing is His deeds to us.

D. The Blessings--Everything Spiritual

Paul then tells us that we have been blessed "with all spiritual blessings." The Greek word translated "spiritual" (pneumatikos) in the New Testament always refers to the work of the Holy Spirit. All God's blessings are dispensed to us through the agency of the Holy Spirit.

1. Our unnecessary requests

In Romans 8:26 Paul writes, "We know not what we should pray for as we ought." We constantly ask God for things He has already given us. We are ignorant of our resources.

a) Love--"The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts" (Rom. 5:5).

b) Peace--Christ said to the disciples, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27).

c) Joy--The Lord said, "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full" (John 15:11).

d) Strength--Paul proclaimed, "I can do all things through Christ, who strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13).

God has given us all spiritual blessings, yet we need to ask for wisdom in understanding how to use those resources (James 1:5).

2. Our unlimited resources

We receive all spiritual blessings when we accepted Christ as our Savior. Second Peter says that "His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness" (1:3). There are no missing ingredients.

In Philippians 1:19 Paul refers to "the supply of the Spirit."

Every available spiritual blessing was dispensed to us by the Spirit. The issue for the believer is to use what he has, not to wait for some second work of grace.

E. The Location of Blessing--The Heavenly Places

1. The place of our citizenship

"In heavenly places" (v. 3) encompasses the entire supernatural realm of God, His complete domain, the full extent of His divine operation. While it includes heaven, it's not limited to that. Ephesians 6:12 says, "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against ... spiritual wickedness in high places [lit. 'the heavenlies']"--something we do here on earth.

Nevertheless, Christians are not so much citizens of the earth as they are citizens of heaven. Philippians 3:20 says plainly, "Our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." Because we are citizens of heaven, we are able to understand spiritual matters. First Corinthians 2:14 tells us that "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God ... because they are spiritually discerned." Rather,

unbelievers are "children of this world" (Luke 16:8, KJV). From Colossians we learn that believers have been "translated ... into the kingdom of [God's] dear Son" (1:13). Colossians 3:1-2 says, "Seek those things which are above.... Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth."

Christians have a dual citizenship. No matter where I travel, I remain an American citizen. So whether I am in Egypt, Europe, Latin America, Central America, or Africa, I remain a citizen with all the corresponding rights and privileges. Similarly, we are citizens of heaven even though we live in a foreign land.

2. The pull of our citizenship

Our Father, home, Savior, friends, and loved ones are in heaven. Yet there is so much that we long for in heaven, we must continue our sojourn on earth. We're trapped in a tension between the earthly and the heavenly realms (Phil. 1:20-23).

3. The perspective of our citizenship

In 2 Corinthians 6 we see Paul's perspective on his heavenly citizenship. He saw himself "as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things" (v. 10). Earlier Paul said, "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed" (4:8-9). There is an inherent tension of being in two worlds. We may have nothing in this world, but in the heavenlies we're so rich it's uncountable.

4. The practicality of our citizenship

In Galatians 5 Paul says, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control" (vv. 22-23). All our spiritual riches can be appropriated by walking in the power of the Holy Spirit.

F. The Blessing's Agent--Christ

When we became Christians we were placed into a marvelous union with Christ. First Corinthians 6:17 says, "The one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with him" (NASB). Romans 8:16-17 says, "We are the children of God; and if children, then heirs- -heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ." When we came to know Jesus Christ, we became joint heirs with Him; and God dispensed to us all the riches that the Spirit could transmit. Because we are one with Jesus Christ, His righteousness is imputed to us and His inheritance is ours.

Because we are in Christ His position is our position, His privilege is our privilege, His possessions are our possessions, and His practice our practice. We are significant not because of who we are, but because of who we are in Christ. As Paul said, "By the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Cor. 15:10).

II. THE ETERNAL FORMATION OF THE BODY (vv. 4-14)

A. In the Past--Election (vv. 4-6a)

"According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that should be holy and without blame before him, in love having predestinated us unto the adoption of sons by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace."

1. The method: sovereign selection (v. 4a)

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

In verse 3 Paul blesses God because he was so overwhelmed that God had chosen him before the foundation of the world. God selected those who would be in the body of Christ before the world began.

a) Its concept

(1) The paradox

I believe in the doctrine of election because it is taught in the Bible. Scripture teaches that God chooses people to be saved before they're born and He places their names in the book of life. That doesn't mean he violates man's will. The mystery of salvation is that while God elects men, they are at the same time responsible for their decisions. Jesus said, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37). He also said, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (11:28).

The paradox of divine election and human decision can be reconciled only in the mind of God. It's not our responsibility to resolve it. We must allow God to be sovereign.

(2) The purpose

In Ephesians 1:4 the Greek word translated "chosen" (eklego) is in the aorist tense and middle voice, indicating God's totally independent choice. Because the verb is reflexive it signifies that God not only chose by Himself but for Himself. Verse 6 tells us the purpose of that: election is "to the praise of the glory of his grace." Verse 12 says, "We should be to the praise of his glory." And verse 14 ends with the phrase "unto the praise of his glory." Ephesians 3:10 tells us that God established the church to display His wisdom to the angels.

(3) The period

In Ephesians 1:4 Paul tells we were chosen "before the foundation of the world."

(a) Revelation 13:8--"All that dwell upon the earth shall worship [the Beast], whose names are not written in the book of life ... from the foundation of the world."

(b) Revelation 17:8--"They that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world."

(4) The participants

(a) Israel--God didn't set His love upon Israel because they were the most righteous of all nations. Rather, He chose them because of the counsel of His own will. In Isaiah 45:4 God speaks of them as "Israel mine elect."

(b) Angels--First Timothy 5:21 refers to "the elect angels."

(c) Jesus Christ--First Peter 2:6 says, "Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious."

(d) The apostles--Jesus said to the apostles, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you" (John 15:16). Christ referred to Paul as "a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles" (Acts 9:15).

(e) The church--Consistent with His nature, God chose the church before the foundation of the world.

(5) The plan

(a) 2 Timothy 1:9--God "hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works." Our election had nothing to do with what we did or didn't do, nor with what God anticipated we would or would not do. We were chosen according to His own purpose and grace. Our physical and spiritual births were according to the divine plan of God.

(b) 2 Timothy 2:10--Paul said, "I endure all things for the elect's sake, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory." Paul directed his ministry to reach those whom God had chosen.

(c) 2 Thessalonians 2:13--Paul wrote, "We are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation." We were chosen before the foundation of the world.

(d) Acts 13:48--"When the Gentiles heard [the gospel], they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord; and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed."

CONCLUSION

God formed His Body, which includes you if you're a Christian. Our worth comes from knowing that we are the object of God's choice. And because God has given us all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies, we have unlimited divine resources available to us. Be sure to use them to make your life fulfilling, to minister with the greatest amount of power, and build the church that Jesus purchased with His precious blood. Since you are a child of the King you are valuable to Him. As such, live so you might glorify Him.

Focusing on the Facts

1. Why does the body metaphor so aptly suit the church?
2. When did God decide who would be in the body of Christ?
3. What is the biblical basis for self-worth?
4. What does "blessed" mean in Ephesians 1:3?
5. What does it mean that God has blessed us with all spiritual blessings?
6. Why do Christians make unnecessary requests of God (Rom. 8:26)?
7. Where are our blessings located (Eph. 1:3)?
8. How does the believer's dual citizenship affect him?
9. How would you describe Paul's outlook on life (2 Cor. 4:8-9; 6:10)?
10. How are spiritual resources appropriated (Gal. 5:22-23)?
11. Why is sovereign election and human choice considered a paradox? How is that paradox ultimately resolved?
12. Why did God choose us (1:4)?
13. When did election take place?

Pondering the Principles

1. What is it that gives you your sense of self-worth or value? Read through the first chapter of Ephesians and write down all that you are and all that you've been given as a Christian. Next, take

some time to meditate on your list. Thank God for considering you valuable enough to bestow such riches upon you.

2. We are to bless God because He is good. What specific characteristics of God's goodness do the following verses teach: Psalm 145:8-9, 14-20; Matthew 5:45; John 3:16; Ephesians 2:4, 8-9; Titus 3:5; Hebrews 6:7; James 5:11; and 1 John 4:10?

3. Why do many Christians have such a difficult time believing both in God's sovereignty and man's responsibility? What does the Bible teach about them? Compare John 6:37^a, 44, 65; Acts 13:48; and 2 Thessalonians 2:13; with John 6:35, 37^b, 40, 47, and Revelation 22:17.