SERMON ORDER

(EPH., PT. 1)

January 14 / Week 1
The Big Picture of Ephesians

January 21 / Week 2
Chosen for Every Spiritual Blessing

January 28 / Week 3
Predestined for Adoption

February 4 / Week 4
Redemption Through His Blood

February 11 / Week 5
All Things United in Christ

February 18 / First Sunday of Lent / Week 6
Heirs in Christ

February 25 / Second Sunday of Lent / Week 7
Sealed with the Spirit

March 4 / Third Sunday of Lent / Week 8
Prayer for Open Eyes

March 11 / Fourth Sunday of Lent / Week 9
Jesus, Head All Over

March 18 / Fifth Sunday of Lent / Week 10
Dead in Sin

March 25 / Palm Sunday / Week 11
Raised with Christ

(April 1 / Easter Sunday / standalone sermon)

April 8 / Week 12
Saved by Grace for Works

April 15 / Week 13
One New Humanity

April 22 / Week 14
No Longer Strangers

April 29 / Week 15
New Identity

WEEK 1

THE BIG PICTURE OF EPHESIANS

EPHESIANS 1:1–2

1Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,
To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus:

2Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
1. Compare and contrast the salutations/greetings of other Pauline epistles (Rom., 1&2 Cor., Gal., Philippians, Col., 1&2 Thes., 1&2 Tim., Titus, and Philemon) with that of Eph. 1:1–2. Note how Paul expresses his authority, the recipient(s) he mentions, whether he says “grace and peace,” or “grace, mercy, and peace.” Does thanksgiving immediately follow the greeting? Include any other observations. Do these features tell you anything about the subsequent content of the letters (pretend you’ve never read them)? If so, what?

2. Paul identifies himself an apostle, which in the Greek, ἀπόστολος (apostolos), also means “messenger,” “envoy,” or “delegate”—“one sent” [the verb, ἀποστέλλω (apostelló)], means “to send”] or commissioned by another to represent him/her in some way. Read Matthew 10:1–15. How does Jesus describe apostleship? Then read Acts 14:4, 14 to see where the title is first used explicitly in reference to Paul. Flip back to Saul’s (Paul’s) conversion in Acts 9. Compare 9:15 with Matt. 10:5–6. How does Paul’s mission differ from that of the original twelve apostles? Without knowing anything about the city of Ephesus (Eph. 1:1), what does this tell you about the recipients of Ephesians, why Paul might be writing to them, and how his engagement with them serves to fulfill his initial calling?

3. Most Bible translations (such as ESV, NIV, NRSV, NASB) have a footnote in verse 1 indicating that some ancient authorities or earlier manuscripts lack “in Ephesus,” and instead indicate an English translation closer to “To the saints who are also faithful in Christ Jesus.” This leaves two broader camps among scholars, one of which assumes “in Ephesus” did not appear in the original letter (of which we have no existing copy) and was inserted into later copies. This would make Ephesians a general epistle to more than one church, much like 1 Peter (see 1 Pet. 1:1–2), only without designating regions. Supporting this stance are the facts that the letter does not refer to any events occurring during Paul’s time in Ephesus (see 1 Cor. 16:8 and Acts 19:1–20), and that unlike in other epistles, Paul does not include any greetings to individuals in Ephesus. The other camp suggests that “in Ephesus” did appear in Paul’s original letter but was deleted from later copies so it could be sent to churches outside Ephesus. Regardless, of which side is correct, we know that Ephesians had an early use for the edification of believers beyond Ephesus. What does this suggest for our use of this epistle today? How does Hebrews 4:12 speak to this?
4. In verse 1, Paul uses two terms, “saints” (ἁγιος/hagios) and “faithful” (πιστος/pistos) to refer to his recipients. He doesn’t use the latter term in the letter until 6:21, in reference to Tychicus, but he uses the former—which also means “set apart,” “holy,” or “sacred”—several other times throughout the letter (see 1:15, 18; 2:19; 3:8, 18; 4:12; 5:3; 6:18), which was a common designation among early Christians (see Acts 9:13; Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2, 2 Cor. 1:1). The Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Old Testament preceding the time of Christ, uses ἁγιος for the Hebrew word for “holy,” qadosh, which refers to Israel as a people set apart for the Lord (see Lev. 11:44; 19:2; 20:26). This by no means indicates moral perfection, but it does stress dedication to the service of God. We’ve now identified that Paul is writing to Gentiles, using the same terminology to refer to them as one would refer to Israel. What else can we infer about the letter in light of this?

5. Paul’s greetings in his letters for the most part follow that of secular Hellenistic epistles, with slight variation. A typical Greek letter beginning around the third century B.C. would include χαίρειν (chairein), meaning “greetings,” and then Hellenistic Jewish authors would add εἰρήνη (eiréné), meaning “peace,” carrying the essence of the Hebrew ως (shalom). So, for example, the apocryphal book 2 Maccabees, written in the second century B.C., includes in the salutation of its first letter “Greetings and true peace” (2 Macc. 1:1), making it both Greek and Hebrew. Paul strays slightly, replacing χαίρειν with χάρις (charis) to form “Grace to you and peace from God” (cf. Rom. 1:6; 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2, etc). Given that these letters were read before their recipients (see Col. 4:16), how might their Gentile hearers have been drawn into God’s story with the shalom long understood by Israel and the charis that had been extended to them as well?

FOR A DEEPER REFLECTION:

A (concise) Purpose of Ephesians by Clinton Arnold (excerpt)

In the period of time since Paul’s ministry in Ephesus, the churches of the area had engaged in extensive evangelism among the Gentiles. These new believers lacked a personal acquaintance with Paul but respected his role as apostle. Being converts from a Hellenistic religious environment (with) mystery religions, magic, astrology these people needed a positive grounding in the Pauline gospel from the apostle himself. Their fear of evil spirits and cosmic powers was also a great concern, especially the question of where Christ stands in relation to these forces. Because of their pagan past, they also needed help and admonishment in cultivating a lifestyle consistent with their salvation in Christ, a lifestyle free from drunkenness, sexual immorality, stealing and bitterness. Although there were many Jewish Christians (and former God-fearers) in the churches of the region, the flood of new Gentile converts created some significant tensions. Their lack of appreciation for the Jewish heritage of their faith prompted some serious Jew-Gentile tensions in the churches. Ephesians is therefore a genuine letter, without a specific crisis, but addressed in a pastoral way to a multiplicity of needs shared by the readership. It was written by the apostle Paul to a network of churches in Ephesus, but also intended for a broader readership among the churches of that region.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Reflect on Saul’s/Paul’s conversion, calling, and mission (see Acts 9:1–19). He’s a Jew—a Pharisee of Pharisees (Acts 23:6)—and yet he’s been called by God to “carry (his) name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15). Where might God be calling you—or where has he already called you—that’s beyond your context and comfort zone?
2. Whether or not the church in Ephesus was the only original recipient of Paul’s letter (see Study the Text #3), we can assume it ended up in the city (see Eph. 6:21 and 2 Tim. 4:12), which was an important port city on the west coast of Asia and was well-known for its temple of Artemis (see Acts 19:21–41), one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Like any western city today, Ephesus had its own culture, ethos, sources of commerce (silver), hopes and fears, etc. Unlike in other letters, Paul did not express concern with any specific problem in the church, but he did want to give them general instruction on the truths of God’s redemptive work, unity in the body of Christ among diverse people, and proper conduct. Regardless of any specific problems in your city—whether Flagstaff, Tucson, Phoenix, Peoria, Mesa, Gilbert, Tempe, Queen Creek, or Scottsdale—what are specific signs of Jesus’ work, his bringing of shalom, that you see presently? And what do you long to see in your midst?
THE GLORIOUS GOSPEL

WEEK 2

CHosen for every spiritual blessing

Ephesians 1:3-4

3Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 4even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love...
1.1 Though our English Bibles break up Eph. 1:3–14 into five to seven sentences (depending on translation), in the original Greek, it was actually one incredibly long sentence, and then verses 15–23 form another single sentence. Together, these sections are considered by many commentators to be part of the opening of the letter. In standard Hellenistic epistolary form, a health wish and/or a prayer would follow the greeting and be followed by the letter body. New Testament letters would often include a statement of thanksgiving in that section (e.g., Rom. 1:8–15). So, according to these commentators, vv. 3–23 form that statement; however, others suggest that after the greeting, Paul launches straight into the body of the letter, rather than beginning at 2:1. The latter view would indicate that Paul begins his argument in 1:3. Whichever stance one might take, anyone should slowly read through the doxological text of 3–14, which likely echoes a Jewish liturgy of blessing and includes ideas that align with those in Col. 1:2–23. We’re only covering vv. 3–4 this week but, read 3–14. Though English doesn’t do justice to the incredibly elegant poetic flow in Greek, try to capture the essence of Paul’s exultation here as he highlights Christ’s work. Jot down just ten things Paul mentions in these twelve verses that Christ has done for his bride. Before proceeding to the next question, thank him and bless not only Christ, but “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” You might notice that all three persons of the Trinity are mentioned here. Bless all three!!

1.2 If we go with the latter view of the letter’s breakdown (not that doing so is entirely necessary for our purposes) and see this section as at least the introduction to the body, we can see Paul beginning to lay out the major themes of what follows in the form of a hymn rather than something separate altogether. Those themes could be described as: 1) the significance of Christ (v. 3), extending to the end of Chapter 3, and 2) his purpose to unify all things and how Christian behavior looks when we’re unified (v. 4), which is covered in Chapters 4–6. Looking at v. 3 alone, what has the Father done for us in Christ? And what are these “spiritual blessings in the heavenly places”? How might the second sentence of the Lord’s Prayer help inform this answer (see Matt. 6:10)?

1.3 Looking to the second theme noted in v. 4, we can then ask, how are those chosen by the Father to live in light of such blessedness? We’ve already covered the fact in Week 1 that holy means “set apart.” What does that actually look like in our context? And how about blameless? The Greek here is ἀμωμός (amomos). This same word is used in 1 Pet. 1:19, referring to Christ “a lamb without blemish or spot”—the perfect sacrifice, greater than the Passover lamb, ἁμαρτία (tamim)—“without blemish” (Ex. 12:5). We also run across amomos in Heb. 9:14, where the writer says that the “blood of Christ,” much more so than that of goats or bulls, “purif(ies) our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.” So, Christ’s work, not our works, makes us blameless, and frees us up. But to do what? Work to serve God (see Eph. 2:10). But before skipping ahead, take time to dwell on what Paul’s saying here. Meditate on the fact that the one who sets us apart chose us and made us blameless. After a few minutes, then reflect on what that tangibly looks like—that is, how we are to live in light of that fact?
2.1 Next week, we’ll get into more depth on the weighty concepts mentioned in v. 5, predestination and adoption, but here, we’re already given, “he chose us before the foundation of the world” in v. 3, which, of course, is hardly free of a lot of necessary unpacking and comes with centuries of intense debate. At this point, it’s a good idea to pause and remind ourselves that we’re in the middle of a hymn. Indeed, this text is deeply theological, but it’s also doxological. Just take a moment to delight in what Christ has done, is currently doing, and has promised to do. Note here, first of all, that in the ESV and NIV, v. 4 seems to awkwardly end with the beginning of a new sentence (“In love…”). However, other translations like the NRSV, begin v. 5 with a new sentence, thereby saying “…holy and blameless before him in love.” The latter translation follows the tradition of the verse divisions installed in a later publication of the the Vulgate, the Latin Bible, in the thirteenth century. Realize, of course, that such divisions were previously nonexistent. So, what the translation teams behind the ESV and NIV are trying to capture is what they assume to be Paul’s intention. They are then suggesting that the prepositional phrase, “in love,” is not connected to human behavior, but rather to God’s choosing and predestination. The key here is that God’s act is a loving one. Let’s look back to another place in the Scriptures where we’re told God chose a people. Read Deuteronomy 7:6–11. Why does God choose? Now read Genesis 12:1–3, narrowing in on the end of v. 3. What does God do through the people he calls?

2.2 Meditate on “before the foundation of the world” in v. 4. How does that phrase describe God’s intention in his choosing. What does that say about his sovereignty? Look at 1 Pet. 1:20, where this same phrase is also used. Notice how this miraculous, but incredibly costly, plan of redemption was in place before humankind ever inhabited the planet, let alone sinned. Jot down some thoughts about this God who is in control and whose plans are calculated and fixed. Include other places in the Scriptures where God has lovingly demonstrated his sovereignty. Does this give you hope, not only for your own personal salvation, but for this broken world?
FOR A DEEPER REFLECTION:

The Abundance of Blessing in Christ (excerpt)

Paul begins Ephesians with a call for God to be blessed on account of His blessing us “in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” ( Eph. 1:3). That God is blessed or should be blessed is repeated often in Scripture (Gen. 9:26; Ps. 18:46; 2 Cor. 1:3), and it means that the Lord is praised or worthy of praise, as Charles Hodge tells us in his Ephesians commentary. There are many reasons why God deserves our praise, but in Ephesians 1:3 the apostle tells us that our Father should be praised for sharing the abundance of His goodness with us — for bestowing upon us spiritual blessings.

When we read “every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,” we are tempted to think the apostle refers only to intangible, ethereal, or inner realities such as peace, joy, and so on. Such things are included in the blessings Paul mentions, but he also has tangible, physical things in mind. Spiritual blessings correspond to the age of the fuller manifestation of the Holy Spirit, that age of life the prophets foresaw us experiencing most fully in the new heaven and the new earth (Isa. 65:17–25; Jer. 31:31–40; Joel 2:28–32). Jesus inaugurated this age in His life, death, resurrection, and ascension (Acts 2:1–41). By His work, our Savior has brought the age to come into the present, allowing us to enjoy its blessings in part today, though not in their fullness. When the “heavenly places” become one with the realm we can now see at the consummation, we who are in Christ will enjoy the fullest prosperity in every sense. But as these blessings are ours now, we experience many foretastes of that future reality.

Between the birth and the return of Jesus, the age to come overlaps with the present age. To be blessed in Christ is to enjoy a foretaste of future blessings — intimacy with God, true life, and even, at times, many physical benefits. We should expect the Father to bless us, for we are His children, though He may give us blessings that we do not expect or request. But as in all things, He knows best what to give us.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What spiritual blessings are needed in your home, in your neighborhood, in your city, and beyond? What effects of the fall do you see or experience in your midst that need to be “unit(ed)…in him” (v. 10)? Where is reconciliation necessary? Be specific.

2. Continuing from the first question, how can you, through your work, with your family, with your roommates, with your RC, etc., participate in Christ’s unifying, reconciling work? Be fearlessly imaginative. Now be practical. What might it take to put some of these ideas into practice?

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(In love) 5 he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.
STUDY THE TEXT

1. The Greek word used in Eph. 1:5 for “predestined,” is προορίζω (proorizó), and has a range of meaning including “predetermine,” “foreordain,” “decide beforehand,” and “mark out beforehand.” It appears five other times in the New Testament. Look at the context in which it is used in Acts 4:28, Rom. 8:29, 30; 1 Cor. 2:7 (“decreed” in ESV), and Eph. 1:11. In each case, make note of what God has predetermined. Notice how in each instance, with the exception of the mentioning in Acts 4:28 of what occurred against Jesus, it’s something positive that had been foreordained. Do these instances merely describe a future and spiritual reality? What else do these usages communicate to you?

2. In the case in our present text, God “predestined us for adoption.” Adoption in the Greek is υἱοθεσία (huiothesia), combining the words υἱός (huios), meaning “son” or “descendent,” and τίθημι (tithémi), meaning “place,” “fix,” or “establish.” So, adoption literally means “to establish as a son (or daughter).” Which, as we can gather from our present context, carried a legal connotation in Paul’s day as well. But more than a legal declaration, as important as that is, adoption establishes a relationship, one that has no distinction from that formed with biological children. In Romans 9:4, Paul uses this same word in reference to Israel, to whom also belong “the glory, the covenant, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises.” These are the things that come with being a child of God, whether the “natural branches” (Rom. 11:21) or those “grafted in” (Rom. 11:17), Gentiles. So, in Eph. 1:5, we see that through Jesus Christ, God adopts people from all nations and ethnicities (ἔθνος (ethnos) is the Greek word used where our English Bibles often place “Gentile”, from the Latin gentilis, both of which mean “people,” “nation,” or “ethnicity”).
4. Read vv. 5–6 slowly, narrowing in on “to the praise of his glorious grace.” We see similar verbiage in vv. 12 and 14. What else does this tell us about God’s purpose? What does God ultimately desire from the covenant community he’s called to himself? Further, as we’re still in this long doxological sentence, how does this help us better see what a proper posture toward God looks like?

3. Continuing in v. 5, we see that God performed his act of predestination “according to the purpose of his will.” The NRSV and KJV translate the Greek as “according to the good pleasure of his will.” Included within the range of meaning of εὐδοκίαν (eudokia) is also “kind intention.” As we covered at the beginning of v. 5, God predestined us “in love,” and here we see he also does so out of his kindness and goodness. Reflect on these and other attributes of God. Where in the Old Testament might you see examples of God working out his will according to his love, goodness, and kindness?

FOR A DEEPER REFLECTION:

Adopted by the Living God (excerpt)²

The following is from an interview with Robert Peterson, professor of systematic theology at Covenant Theological Seminary, by Gavin Ortlund.

What does the doctrine of adoption mean, and where is it most prominently taught in the Bible?

It means that the true and living God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, by grace has made believers members of his family with all the rights and responsibilities that go with that status. Paul teaches it in many places in, but especially in Romans 8:14-17, 23, 29 and Galatians 3:25-4:7. I agree with John Murray and Sinclair Ferguson that John also teaches it in John 1:12 and 1 John 3:1.

Do the persons of the Trinity play different roles in the doctrine of adoption?

Yes indeed. The Father is the divine lover who predestined us for adoption and sent his Son to rescue us (1 John 3:1; Eph. 1:5; Gal. 4:4). The Son of God is our redeemer who loved us and redeemed us from the law’s threat of punishment by becoming a curse for us (Gal. 4:5; 3:13). “The Spirit of his [the Father’s] Son” (Gal. 4:6), “the Spirit of adoption” (Rom. 8:15) enabled us to cry out to God as Father for salvation (Rom. 8:15) and assures us within that we are God’s children (Rom. 8:16).

The Trinity loves us dearly and planned our adoption, accomplished the work of redemption necessary to adopt us, and applied adoption to us as God’s sons and daughters. This is an important aspect of the triune God’s work of redemption and should occupy a larger place in our worship, whether public, family, or private.

What kinds of people might find special comfort, assurance, or joy in the doctrine of adoption? And how so?

Men and women who did not have good relationships with their fathers. As a speaker for a men’s conference, I was amazed at the effect of simple messages on adoption on men of many ages. In small groups after the sermons men shared openly how distant their fathers were when the men were growing up. Men wept as the Spirit applied the healing balm of adoption to their heads and hearts. I was moved to be God’s instrument as his Spirit began to fill holes in the hearts of adult men with the tender, biblical message of adoption. I saw similar results in couples’ conferences with both women and men finding help in the doctrine of adoption as laid out in God’s Word.

For those involved in pastoral counseling, when might the doctrine of adoption be of particular value?

There are many answers to this question. One is for people who lack hope. Adoption breeds hope because it not only pertains to eternity (Eph. 1:5), the past (Rom. 8:15), and the present (1 John 3:2, 3), but also the future (1 John 3:2). In the Bible, closely related to the doctrine of adoption is the notion of inheritance: we are God’s children and therefore his heirs (Gal. 3:29; 4:7). God’s true children suffer with him now and will be glorified with him when he returns (Rom. 8:17).

What exactly is our inheritance? Based on the entire biblical story, my answer is: we will inherit the Trinity and the new heavens and new earth (Rom. 8:17; 1 Cor. 3:21-23).

In your own life or in others close to you, where have you seen the doctrine of adoption be of practical value?

I once spoke at a conference whose theme was adoption. When the three speakers talked informally we discovered to our surprise that each of us has unwittingly been drawn to adoption because of a lack in our own relationships with our fathers. God used the biblical teaching on sonship to minister to us and through us to others. In union with Christ, the unique Son of God, I find acceptance by the Father, a new family in heaven and on earth, incentive to live for God, and bright hope for tomorrow. The doctrine of adoption is as warm as the Bible gets. I can hardly think of anything more comforting, more nourishing, more uplifting than the glorious truth that when we trust in Christ, we are made into the sons and daughters of the Creator God.

How would you share the gospel with someone using the doctrine of adoption?

The Bible actually does that very thing. In the first place, our need for salvation is portrayed in the Bible as having to do with our status as slaves to Satan and sin (1 John 3:10; Gal. 4:3, 7). Christ the redeemer gave himself for us slaves and lawbreakers because he loved us. He took the curse (the punishment) of the law that by rights should have fallen on us, not him (Gal. 3:13). Through Christ’s work, we have gone from being slaves to sons (Gal. 4:7).

Parallel to justification, adoption is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone (John 1:12; Gal. 3:26). We trust Christ as redeemer in order to be included in God’s family. The results are incredible, including assurance (Rom. 8:16) and paternal discipline (Heb. 12:5-11). By God’s grace, the teaching on adoption enables us to do what it difficult for some of us—to believe that God truly loves us (1 John 4:16).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Flipping ahead to Eph. 2:12 and 19, we read that Gentiles were once “strangers to the covenants of promise” and “strangers and aliens” who have then become “fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.” This concept of adoption that we read of in 1:5 makes us children of God and citizens of his kingdom. Who are the strangers and aliens in your midst today who need to know the love of God and be brought into his household?

2. God's name is praised with or without people. Rocks will cry out if we're silent (see Luke 19:40). But he chose to not only create, but also redeem a people to join the heavenly chorus, praising him. What does a life of praise look like? What in your life might not be living into a life of praise? Where do you see lack of praise in your community? Rather, where are we not lifting up God’s name?
In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace,
1. We all love the word “redemption”—it’s the name of our church, after all. But what does it mean? The Greek word used in Eph. 1:7 is ἀπολύτρωσις (apolutrósis), which means “release effected by payment of ransom” or “deliverance.” These concepts may mean very little in our context. The Septuagint (see Week 1, Study the Text #4) uses this word to translate the Hebrew פדָּא (padah), meaning “redeem,” “rescue,” or “ransom” in Ex. 21:8. In this context, daughters from poor families could be “sold” to a rich man as his wife. In other patriarchal societies in the ancient Near East, a woman no longer desired by her husband could be exploited and sold to foreigners. But this piece of Mosaic legislation protected such women, allowing them to be redeemed by a fellow Hebrew serving as the substitute, keeping them within the covenant community. More broadly, we can consider how God redeemed all Israel from slavery in Egypt. In Romans 6:20, Paul writes that we were once slaves to sin. But Jesus becomes our substitute, paying the ransom and redeeming us. A price had to be paid. Redemption, then, is more than paying a debt; it’s liberating one from bondage, bringing them into the fold, into the family of God. Jot down any thoughts surrounding this concept of redemption that might help you better understand v. 7.

2. In the same verse, we read that the price of this redemption was Christ’s blood. Compare this verse with Col. 1:14, which was likely written by Paul at an earlier time. Why might Paul be emphasizing the cost in same formula used in Ephesians 1:7 (you may notice that Paul eventually gets there in Col. 1:20)?

3. The Greek word for “we have” is ἔχομεν (echomen), and the verbal aspect is present or continuous, suggesting an action still in progress, rather than the aorist (think “past”), which suggests a completed action. Why might Paul have chosen to say “we have” rather than “we received”? What does this say about salvation?
For A Deeper Reflection:
The Fourth Sermon on the First Chapter—Ephesians 1:7–10
by John Calvin (excerpt)⁴

(In Ephesians 1:7) St. Paul uses two words to express how we are reconciled to God. First, he sets down the ransom or redemption, which amounts to the same thing, and afterwards he sets down the forgiveness of sins. How then does it come about that God’s wrath is pacified, that we are made at one with him, and that he even accepts and acknowledges us as his children It is by the pardoning of our sins, says St. Paul. And furthermore, because pardon necessitates redemption he yokes the two together.

The truth is that, in respect of us, God blotted out our sins of his own free goodness and shows himself altogether bountiful, and does not look for any payment for it at our hands. And, in fact, what man is able to make satisfaction for the least fault that he has committed? If every one of us, therefore, should employ his whole life in making satisfaction for any one fault alone, and by that means seek to win favour at God’s hand, it is certain that such a thing far surpasses all our abilities. And therefore God must necessarily receive us to mercy without looking for any recompence or satisfaction at our hands. But, for all this, the atonement, which is freely bestowed in respect of us, cost the Son of God very dear. [I Pet. 1:19] For he found no other payment than the shedding of his own blood, so that he made himself our surety both in body and soul, and answered for us before God’s judgment to win absolution for us. Our Lord Jesus Christ (I say) entered into the work, both body and soul. For it would not have been enough for him to have suffered so cruel and ignominious a death in the sight of men, but it was necessary for him also to bear such horrible anguish in himself, as if God had become his judge, for he gave himself up in the manner common to holy Scripture. In short, let us learn to find all our righteousness in God’s free goodness, and further, that our Lord Jesus Christ had to step in between us and God. For the sacrifice of his death serves to purchase an everlasting atonement for us, so that we must always flee to it for refuge.

It is true that the whole life of our Lord Jesus Christ has become our ransom, for the obedience which he yielded in this world to God his Father was to make amends for Adam’s offence and for all the iniquities for which we are in debt. But St. Paul speaks here expressly of his blood, because we are obliged to resort to his death and passion as to the sacrifice which has power to blot out all our sins. And for that reason, God has set forth in types under the law that men could not be reconciled to him except by that means.

Now it is true that Jesus Christ not only shed his blood, even in his death, but also experienced the fears and terrors which ought to have rested upon us. But St. Paul here under one particular comprehends the whole, in the manner common to holy Scripture. In short, let us learn to find all our righteousness in God’s showing of himself merciful towards us of his own free goodness, and let us not presume to put before him any virtue of our own to put him in our debt, but let it be sufficient for us that he receives us freely into his love without any worthiness on our part, but only because the remembrance of our sins is buried out of his sight. And again, let us understand that the same cannot be done but by the death and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that is where we must wholly rest.

For wherein lies the love that God bears us I have told you already that he must be willing to cast his eye upon our Lord Jesus Christ and not look at us at all. But yet it is further declared that we are not acceptable to God until he has released us from our debts and adopted us, in spite of the fact that we are worthy of death before him. Thus you see that the knowledge of our salvation (as it is said in the song of Zacharias) is that God is merciful to us and forgives us our sins by reason of which we are his enemies [Luke 1:77].

Let us also bear in mind, however, that the full remission of our sins through God’s free goodness, is not given without the ransom that was paid by our Lord Jesus Christ, not in gold or silver (as St. Peter says in his first epistle, 1:18), but it was necessary that he who was the spotless Lamb should give himself for that purpose. Wherefore, whenever we intend to seek God’s favour and mercy, let us fasten the whole of our minds on the death and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, that we may there find the means by which to appease God’s wrath. And, furthermore, seeing that our sins are done away by such payment and satisfaction, let us understand that we cannot bring anything of our own by which to be reconciled to God. ...

...For there is, so to speak, an inseparable bond between these two things, namely, that God puts our sins out of his remembrance and drowns them in the depths of the sea, and, moreover, receives the payment that was offered him in the person of his only Son. Therefore we cannot obtain the one without the other. If, then, we wish to find God propitious, let us realize that we are his enemies till he has pardoned all our debts of his own free goodness, and, further, that our Lord Jesus Christ had to step in between him and us. For the sacrifice of his death serves to purchase an everlasting atonement for us, so that we must always flee to it for refuge.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. We read in v. 7 of “the riches of (God’s) grace” with respect to the forgiveness of our trespasses or sins. How does this richness help you think of the depth of God’s grace? With respect to the blood spilled to procure our redemption, how are we to understand the sufficiency of Christ’s work? Does it have any limits? Think of other places in the Scriptures that describe this ocean of grace (Rom. 8:38–39 probably comes to mind). How does meditating on this fact contribute to the life of praise we should desire to live?

2. How might these weighty theological concepts of choseness, predestination, adoption, and redemption relate to one another? Think back on how God chose, predestined, adopted, and redeemed Israel in the Old Testament. How might we then understand that while salvation includes nothing less than a “personal relationship with Jesus,” it’s so much more? What does belonging to a collective people, a family, a community mean, and what should it look like in light of what Christ has done for us?

SERMON NOTES:
WEEK 5
ALL THINGS UNITED IN CHRIST
EPHESIANS 1:8–10

\[\text{8} \text{which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight, making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ} \text{9}\text{as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.}\]
1.1 Consider the phrase “mystery of (God’s) will” in Eph. 1:9. In classical Greek, μυστήριον (mustērion) implied that religious secrets were not to be communicated to ordinary mortals. The Aramaic, זָר (raz) used in Dan. 2:18–19, where God revealed to Daniel Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, carries this same essence. This idea of God revealing his secret plan of salvation, his raz, appears in Essene (a sect of Second Temple Judaism) interpretations of prophetic texts, where it was understood that God would reveal his mysteries to select agents. In 1 Cor. 2:6–7; 4:1, Paul states that “the rulers of this age” do not possess such wisdom, but the apostles do. And in Col. 1:26–27, he writes that the mystery, once “hidden for ages and generations” is “now revealed to (the) saints”—all believers. What benefit do Christians, whether Jewish or Gentile, have over people of the covenant community preceding Christ?

1.2 This language further highlights God’s eternal intention and sovereignty. His work in Christ was not a “plan B”—it just wasn’t previously revealed. Even though Christ was whispered throughout the Old Testament, such as in the “Servant Songs” recorded in Isaiah or in Is. 9:6, which we studied over Advent, Israel could not have fathomed the depth of these mysteries which have now been revealed. Place yourself in the sandals of a Hebrew, say, before the eighth century B.C. At this time, the concept of a bodily resurrection, that we know of, hadn’t been explicitly developed in their teaching (Is. 26:19; Job 25–26; and Dan. 12:2 were written later). The kingdom of Israel had been divided, neighbors from Assyria and eventually Babylon were threatening and besieging either the Northern Kingdom of Israel or the Southern Kingdom of Judah, or both, leaving citizens wondering about political stability, their livelihood, their freedom. They were losing hope. And soon, they would lose their access to God via the temple and the prophets. Compare and contrast the hope you have today, in light of the mysteries of God having been revealed, with that of our eighth century B.C. friends. When our bodies are failing, when government scandals are abounding, when nuclear annihilation is threatening, how much greater peace must we have, knowing what’s been revealed?

2.1 In v. 10, “fullness of time” specifies that the plan, which is part of the mystery made known to us, will reach a fulfillment at some point. Flip to Gal. 4:4–5, where Paul employs similar language. He uses the verb ἐλθεν (ēlthen), which is in the aorist aspect, suggesting a completed event, reflected in English as “had come.” This fulfillment refers to Christ’s incarnation, the redemption of those under the law, and our adoption. And yet, in Rom. 11:25, he also uses this language in reference to the full number of Gentiles being saved, something the preposition ἕχρι (achri), that is “until,” makes evident that Paul sees this fulfillment as occurring at least after his time. From here, we can deduce that there are different stages of the fulfillment of God’s plan of salvation. How can we make sense of the language in Eph. 1:10? What is the fulfillment, and is it something we are still anticipating?
The plan here is to “unite all things in (Christ).” The verb Paul uses is ἀνακεφαλαιόω (anakephalaioó), which is generally translated as “sum up,” or “gather up.” Its only other occurrence is in Rom. 13:9, where Paul refers to the commandments as being “summed up” by loving one’s neighbor. Whether Paul is referring to the Ten Commandments or all 613 commandments mentioned throughout the Torah doesn’t matter for our purposes, as the point here is that many things can be summed, gathered, or united into one. Here, we see cosmic reconciliation—all things, whether in heaven or on earth. Paul will develop this motif further in his letter, but for now, he doesn’t provide the how. As for the when, we can only assume it has yet to occur. Take some time to think of the way things were supposed to be in God’s original created order, before the fall. After the course of history changed in Eden, where do we see division beginning to unfold? Write down some examples from the Old Testament that come to mind. How might these things be united in Christ?

FOR A DEEPER REFLECTION:

God’s Plan: To Bring Unity to All Things Under Christ

by Mark D. Roberts (excerpt)

In Ephesians 1:10, we finally learn the content of God’s “mystery,” his big plan for the cosmos: “to bring to unity all things in heaven and on earth under Christ” (NIV). Other translations speak of God “bringing everything together” (NLT) or working “to unite all things” (ESV) or “to gather up all things” (NRSV).

The Greek verb that is translated in these various ways is a rare one (anakephalaioo). In the New Testament, this verb appears only here and in Romans 13:9. The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery,” “You shall not murder,” “You shall not steal,” “You shall not covet,” and whatever other command there may be, are summed up (anakephalaioutai) in this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” This usage in Romans reflects the ordinary sense of the verb: “to sum up, to recapitulate.” It can be used for the process of adding up numbers or summarizing an argument. This verb is based on the word kephalion, which means a sum or a summary. It is related, though not directly, to the Greek word kephale, which means “head.”

So then, what does it mean that God is summing up all things under Christ? English translations rightly convey the unifying sense of this verse. In Christ, God is tying together all of history. Moreover, through Christ, God is bringing together all things, uniting them according to his eternal purpose.Implicitly, apart from Christ, all things are disunited and dysfunctional. Through Christ, all things will be brought back into the unity God intended for them from the beginning.

Though the theology in this verse can stretch or even boggle our minds, we all have experienced the disconnection and brokenness that is assumed here. We know what it’s like to live in a divided world, one that is filled with violence and injustice. We experience such disunity in our own families, workplaces, communities, and churches...and even in our own souls. Something in us yearns for healing, for connection, for unity. We fervently desire the unity of all things that God is forging through Christ.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Where do you see evidence of division today, whether in your family, neighborhood, place of work, city, or beyond? Can Christ’s work of reconciliation bring unity to these areas today, even if not fully?

2. What happens when we try to foster unity where it is not “in Christ”? What historical events come to mind where people have attempted unity apart from Christ? Have you ever tried to reconcile with someone or promote reconciliation among others without considering how the power of Christ’s work and his character might be involved? What does it mean for things to be united “in him” anyway?

SERMON NOTES:
11In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, 12so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.
1.1 In this section, Paul continues to highlight the benefits received by those chosen by God. Here, he mentions an inheritance. The verb Paul uses, κληρόω (kléroó), means “to cast lots,” “to choose by lot,” or “to allot,” and it is found nowhere else in the New Testament. It could be translated literally as “in him, we have been lot-cast.” This makes very little sense in our modern western context, but basically, the practice of cleromancy, or casting lots, comes from an ancient understanding that random acts (like rolling dice today), could reveal the will of a deity. It was also the means by which Yahweh told Moses to use to divide the land among the tribes of Israel (Num. 26:55). The Septuagint uses kléroó to translate the Hebrew חֲנַח (nachalah) in Num. 26:53, meaning “possession,” “property,” “portion,” or “inheritance.” How does this background help us make sense of what Paul refers to in Eph. 1:11 as “inheritance”?

1.2 While the twelve tribes received their portion of the land that would become the kingdom of Israel by lot, how does Paul tell us that we receive our portion of the kingdom of God?

1.3 Is there any language in these verses that helps us understand when God may have apportioned his kingdom? What might a verse like Ps. 145:13 tell us about the permanence of this kingdom over against the temporary one that bordered the Mediterranean? And is this kingdom restricted to a certain people group?

2. Look at the language “all things” in v. 11 and compare it with Paul’s usage in v. 10. In both cases, he uses πᾶς (pas), meaning “all,” “the whole,” or “every kind of.” What does this tell you about how God, in Christ, works and unites things? And what else can that tell us about our inheritance?
Do you have any idea what it means when Christians are said to possess an eternal inheritance? Look with me at how this is expressed in Hebrews 9:15-17.

Let me explain what I think he is saying to us.

Securely locked away in a safe-deposit box at one of the banks here in Oklahoma City is the last will and testament of Sam and Ann Storms. It was carefully written up by a competent lawyer and bears all the marks of a fully legal and binding document. It describes in typical lawyer’s language what is to be done with our meager possessions once we are dead. As you would expect, our two daughters are the legal heirs to whatever may remain in our estate when we are gone. But this document draws no special attention as long as Ann and I are alive. It is of no benefit to our children so long as breath remains in our lungs. Until such time as we die, it is only ink on paper.

But when our time to depart this life has arrived, that document instantly comes into play. It speaks definitively to the disposition of all our earthly possessions. The right of ownership to our estate passes to our heirs. There is no such thing as an “inheritance” in any meaningful sense of that term until we die. Then, and only then, may our children lay rightful claim to what then will be legally theirs.

All of us are familiar with this scenario. What I’ve just described is or at least ought to be true in your case as well. In other words, if you don’t have a will, get one! But the important thing for you to understand today is that if you are a child of God by faith in Jesus Christ, you are an heir of all God owns! You stand to inherit the universe!

There are a couple of important things to remember about this will. First, there isn’t anything our daughters can do to dictate who gets what. That is a decision entirely up to the one makes the will. Jesus Christ has written up his will and he alone determines who gets what. Second, the will doesn’t count for much until the person who made it dies. As I said, our daughters don’t inherit anything until Ann and I die. Likewise, the heirs of Jesus Christ don’t inherit anything until Jesus dies.

We know of course that God can’t die. That is why he became a human being in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. God’s desire was to bequeath all he owns to his spiritual children (that’s you if your faith is in Jesus). And the only way this could happen was if he died, as he did in the death of his Son through the human nature that he took to himself in the incarnation. The death that had to occur for the heirs to come into their possession has occurred. No other death is needed. That is why we read biblical texts like these…(see Rom. 8:16–17, 1 Cor. 3:21–23, Eph. 1:11-14).

Some of you may also be wondering: Who is the “executor” of God’s last will and testament? After all, the person who dies never executes his own will. Well, in this case he does! Jesus rose from the dead and was exalted to the Father’s right hand in heaven. He is there to “execute” the will to make absolutely certain that the children of God receive everything that was bequeathed to them.
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Total ownership, without a loan, is something few experience. Many of us have mortgages and auto loans, or we rent. Even if we remain in the same home for thirty years and pay it off, our property can still be seized if we fail to pay property taxes or HOA dues. But as we often sing, “Jesus paid it all.” He not only paid the debt for our sin, but he gives us an inheritance, purchased 100% by him. Imagine if a wealthy relative (not a Nigerian prince) left you in his/her will, which specifies that you inherit their home, and let’s assume it’s a really nice one, which is paid in full, and that the estate will cover all taxes and dues as long as you live. You are free to enjoy and steward that home as you see fit. Be honest...how would you use that home (oh, and you can’t sell it)?

2. In Gen. 12:1–3, we read that God blessed Abraham to make him a blessing. He promised him quite the inheritance, which was to bless “all the families of the earth.” How might we see the inheritance we’ve been given in Christ to bless others, rather than simply hoarding the blessing to ourselves?
THE GLORIOUS GOSPEL

WEEK 7
SEALED WITH THE SPIRIT
EPHESIANS 1:13–14

13 In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.
1. Look the verb “heard” in v. 13. The English translation here does little justice to the Greek word ἀκούω (akouó, from which we get “acoustic”), which in this case, is better translated as “find out” or “learn,” not only meaning that soundwaves enter the ear canal, but that the hearer actually understands. We can grasp this further by reading Jesus’ Parable of the Sower and his explanation in Matt. 13:1–9; 18–23. Read these passages, and note the different “hearers” (Matthew uses akouó for “hears” and suniēmi for “understands”). What are we to make of the one who actually understands the “word of the kingdom”? Can the seeds along the path, on the rocky ground, among the thorns, and in the good soil all be considered among those who “believed in him” and “were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit”?

2. The Greek word for “seal” is σφραγίζω (sphragizó). Used in this context, it can be understood a couple different ways. One of which is also found in Eph. 4:30, where believers are sealed, as in “protected” or “preserved,” by the Holy Spirit “for the day of redemption.” The second sense used in John 6:27 refers to “seal” as an authentication of an item or document. Both cases are true, but the sense used later by Paul probably works better here. So, what might that say about what the Holy Spirit does for believers in 1:13?

3. This sense of “seal” is connected to “guarantee” in v. 14. The Greek word here is ἀρραβών (arrabōn), which is best understood as a “deposit,” or “earnest money” used in a transaction. This isn’t just a promise of something to come, which “pledge” might indicate. Rather, it indicates that one has already received part of what has been promised in order to secure future fulfillment. How does the Holy Spirit as a down payment, if you will, help us better understand that we are preserved until we receive our inheritance?
FOR A DEEPER REFLECTION:

Sealed by the Spirit to the Day of Redemption

by John Piper (excerpt)

What Does “Sealed” Mean?

There are two great words here that aim to help us feel secure in God’s love and power: the word “sealed,” and the word “guarantee.” Let’s see if we can unseal this word “sealed” and look inside. What does it mean that believers have been sealed by the Holy Spirit (v. 13)? The word is used at least three different ways in the New Testament.

• In Matthew 27:66, the tomb of Jesus was secured by sealing it and putting guards around it. In Revelation 21:3, God throws Satan into a pit and seals it over so he can’t escape. So one meaning is locking something up, closing it in.

• Another is found in Romans 4:11 where Abraham’s circumcision is called the sign and seal of the righteousness he had by faith. And in 1 Corinthians 9:2 Paul says that his converts are the seal of his apostleship. So a second meaning of sealing is giving a sign of authenticity.

• A third meaning is found in Revelation 7:3 where the seal of God is put on the forehead of God’s servants to protect them from the wrath coming upon the world.

So what did Paul mean in Ephesians 1:13 when he said that believers are sealed with the Holy Spirit? No matter which of these meanings you use the basic truth is the same.

• If the Spirit seals shut, the point must be that he seals in faith and seals out unbelief and apostasy.

• If the Spirit seals us as a sign of authenticity, then he is that sign and it is the Spirit’s work in our life which is God’s trademark. Our eternal sonship is real and authentic if we have the Spirit. He is the sign of divine reality in our lives.

• Or if the Spirit marks us with God’s seal, he protects us from evil forces which won’t dare to enter a person bearing the mark of God’s own possession.

However you come at this message contained in this word “sealed,” it is a message of safety and security in God’s love and power. God sends the Holy Spirit as a preserving seal to lock in our faith, as an authenticating seal to validate our sonship, and as a protecting seal to keep out destructive forces. The point is that God wants us to feel secure and safe in his love and power.

What Does “Guarantee” Mean?

The other word Paul uses to drive this home is the word “guarantee” in verse 14. “You were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit which is the guarantee of our inheritance.” Noël and I ran out of gas at the intersection of 66th and Penn on Thursday. I ran up the street to Al’s service station and got a can with two dollars’ worth of gas and said I would be right back and buy 15 dollars’ worth. But I had to leave my driver’s license. Why? Because it was a guarantee I would come back and finish my business. They knew that driver’s license was valuable enough to me to give them a sense of security that I would come back with their can and pay for my gas.

God’s Message to Every Believer

So then, what is God saying to us when he gives us his Holy Spirit and calls him a guarantee or a down-payment? He is saying, “My great desire for those who believe in me is that you feel secure in my love. I have chosen you before the foundation of the world. I have predestined you to be my children forever. I have redeemed you by the blood of my Son. And I have put my Spirit in you as a seal and a guarantee. Therefore, you will receive the inheritance and praise the glory of my grace forever and ever. And I tell you this here in Ephesians chapter 1 because I want you to feel secure in my love and my power. I don’t promise you an easy life. In fact, through many tribulations you must enter the kingdom (Acts 14:22). I don’t promise always to speak in soft tones of approval, but to warn you in love whenever you begin to seek security in anything but me.”

“Let me say it again: I have chosen you,” says the Lord. “I have predestined you; I have redeemed you; I have sealed you by my Spirit. Your inheritance is sure, because I am passionately committed to magnify the glory of my grace in your salvation.”

When peace like a river attendeth your way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll,
Whatever your lot—I have taught you to say,
It is well, it is well, with your soul.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Some of us may have lost earnest money when backing out of a real estate transaction, or maybe we know someone who has. This might lead us to think that the metaphor of “guarantee” suggests something that is not all that permanent. Of course, that’s the case with figurative language. It never provides a perfect representation of the actual thing being described. But just as Jesus is a far greater sacrifice than a bull or goat, the Holy Spirit is vastly superior to a few thousand dollars as a guarantee. What sort of comfort does this give you? When we live in a world where it’s commonplace for one to not uphold their end of the bargain, how can we rest in what God has guaranteed us?

2. Continuing with the legal language, we understand here that God wrote up his will “before the foundation of the world” and pledged the most perfect guarantee. There’s nothing we can do to be written into the will, and there’s nothing we can do to be erased from it. How then might we live in the light of this great news? How can we be signposts that point to the fulfillment of this promise—the consummation of God’s kingdom—to those in our midst?
For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, 15I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, 16that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, 17having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 18and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might...
1.1 Paul’s really, really long sentence running from vv. 3–14 has now ended, and we’re now in the midst of another long, though slightly shorter, sentence going from vv. 15–23. Here, he transitions from his doxological expression of Christ’s significance and his unifying work to his deliverance of sinners through Christ. We’re also picking up the pace here, covering more than half of this section in one week. Note first of all Paul’s language in v. 15, “I have heard of your faith…,” as Paul begins to express his thanksgiving. This suggests that Paul did not witness this faith firsthand, even though we know from Acts 20:31 that Paul spent roughly three years in Ephesus. This leaves some commentators to assume that Paul did not, in fact, initially write this letter to the Ephesians (see Week 1, Study the Text #3). If that is indeed the case, though there are also good arguments against that view, what might this say about Paul’s apostleship? If this letter was circulated to several cities where Paul may have heard of their faith, should we assume he was held in high esteem, worthy to have his letter read aloud to several audiences? Does this demonstrate a level of unity among these churches, especially since in this letter anyway, no specific issues are being addressed? Or if we take the other view, that Paul indeed wrote this letter to the Ephesians and perhaps didn’t have direct familiarity with many of its members due to a lapse in time since he had last visited, what might that still suggest, given the joy he has for them and that he keeps them in his prayers?

1.2 Compare Paul’s prayer report in 1:15–16 with that of Col. 1:3–4 and Philemon 4–5. It appears that it was not uncommon for Paul to hear of the faith of the saints. This may shed a little more light on the prior question(s). What is evident here regardless is that a solid reputation for Christian faith follows evangelistic efforts. Paul has every reason to give thanks and rejoice for not only his work, but for that of his fellow saints. In Acts 19:1, you may have picked up on the fact that Paul wasn’t the first to bring the gospel to Ephesus. Now turn to 1 Thes. 1:6–7. What does this suggest about the relationship between churches and the effect of the evangelistic work done by them?

2. Examine the phrase “eyes of your hearts” in v. 18. The Greek here is τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν τῆς καρδίας (tōn ophthalmōn tēs kardias). The cognates here shouldn’t be too hard to pick up on, as if often the case with medical terminology: ophthalmology and cardiology. However, we probably wouldn’t usually think of hearts having eyes (unless you’re old enough to be familiar with late 90s praise choruses). But we are familiar with eye, sight, or looking being used metaphorically, and we certainly understand various ways heart can be used metaphorically as well. Look at Jesus’ use of these words in Matt. 13:14–17, where he quotes Is. 6:9-10. It’s probably safe to assume he’s concerned with more than a person’s physiology here, as important as that is. How does this understanding connect to knowing “the mystery of his will” (1:9), hearing “the word of truth” (1:13), and believing “in him” (v. 13)?

3. Look at the words “power” and “might” in v. 19. Power is used for the Greek word δύναμις (dunamis), and might is used for τοῦ κράτους τῆς ἰσχύος αὐτοῦ (tou kratous tēs ischuos autou), translated literally as “the power of his might,” or “his mighty power,” as used in the KJV. These powerful words are rightly attributed to our powerful God. In what ways might Paul be indicating that God exercises his power (skipping ahead to 1:20–23 and then to 2:1–2 may help answer this)?
God has laid up spiritual blessings for us in his Son the Lord Jesus; but requires us to draw them out and fetch them in by prayer. Even the best Christians need to be prayed for: and while we hear of the welfare of Christian friends, we should pray for them. Even true believers greatly want heavenly wisdom. Are not the best of us unwilling to come under God’s yoke, though there is no other way to find rest for the soul? Do we not for a little pleasure often part with our peace? And if we dispute less, and prayed more with and for each other, we should daily see more and more what is the hope of our calling, and the riches of the Divine glory in this inheritance. It is desirable to feel the mighty power of Divine grace, beginning and carrying on the work of faith in our souls. But it is difficult to bring a soul to believe fully in Christ, and to venture its all, and the hope of eternal life, upon his righteousness. Nothing less than Almighty power will work this in us. Here is signified that it is Christ the Saviour, who supplies all the necessities of those who trust in him, and gives them all blessings in the richest abundance. And by being partakers of Christ himself, we come to be filled with the fulness of grace and glory in him. How then do those forget themselves who seek for righteousness out of him! This teaches us to come to Christ. And did we know what we are called to, and what we might find in him, surely we should come and be suitors to him. When feeling our weakness and the power of our enemies, we most perceive the greatness of that mighty power which effects the conversion of the believer, and is engaged to perfect his salvation. Surely this will constrain us by love to live to our Redeemer’s glory.

Commentary on Ephesians 1:15
by Matthew Henry (excerpt)

1. When you think about the universal Church, beyond Redemption and beyond our cities here in Arizona, what gives you reason for thanksgiving? Who are some living examples of saints with good reputations? Is there a difference between reputation and publicity?

2. Are the eyes of your heart open to see the reasons for which we have hope? Name a few tangible examples of how you see God's power and might in your midst.

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WEEK 9

JESUS, HEAD OVER ALL

EPHESIANS 1:20–23

...20 that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. 22 And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.
1. It is widely accepted by scholars that these four verses, 1:20–23, are the development of a creedal formula (the NRSV begins a new sentence with v. 20, reflecting a separation from vv. 15–19). Nonetheless, this section serves to show the result of God’s power. Though we might typically think of the cross or the resurrection as the focus of God’s saving power, which they certainly are, here, Paul sees it as Christ’s ascension. Take a look at Mark 16:19. One may wonder why Ascension Thursday plays little to no role in many Evangelical and Protestant churches, while our limited liturgical calendars no doubt feature Good Friday and Easter. While Jesus demonstrated plenty of power over the course of his earthly ministry, how is the scope of his power different “in the heavenly places”?

2. What might Paul be referring to by “rule,” “authority,” “power,” “dominion,” and “every name that is named” in v. 21? Are these hostile powers over which the Son of Man (i.e., Christ) has victory (see Dan. 7:13–14, 23–25)? Or are they angelic (see Heb. 1:3–4)? The immediate text doesn’t give us explicit clues, so perhaps we can simply conclude that he’s over both, which is true. However, reading ahead to 2:2, which we’ll focus on more next week, helps us determine Paul’s aim here in Ephesians.

3. Examine the physiological imagery in vv. 22–23. Compare these verses with 1 Cor. 12:12–27. Make note of the body parts mentioned. What is lacking that you see present in Ephesians? Now look at Rom. 12:4–5 and make the same comparison. And finally, do the same with Col. 1:18. Ephesians receives a later date by scholars, so we can probably conclude that Paul developed this body motif further to include Christ as head, something already developed in Colossians (also written later than 1 Cor. and Rom.), and also Christ’s feet (unlike the “foot” in 1 Cor. 12:15). What does this say about the church (be cautious in making any theocratic assumptions, a topic for another study, though referencing Rom. 13:1–7 and 1 Pet. 2:13–14 should shed some light on that for now)?
FOR A DEEPER REFLECTION:

10 Things You Should Know About the Lordship of Christ

by Vern S. Poythress*

1. Christ is Lord over all because he is God.

The Father is God; the Son is God; and the Holy Spirit is God. God rules over all things by his providential control (Ps. 103:19). Therefore it is also true that each person in the Godhead rules over all. Christ rules over all. This rule is comprehensive not only in its extent (over all of space, all of time, and all areas of human activity), but in its details—over each sparrow, each hair of the head, and each atom.

2. Christ is Lord over all because in his human nature he has accomplished perfect obedience, has won salvation for us, and has been given universal dominion as a reward.

As a result of his resurrection and ascension, Christ has been enthroned at the right hand of God the Father, with universal dominion. …Christ is one person, and his rule over all things is a single unified rule. But he does so in two respects: because he is God, and also because he has achieved the final victory over sin and death through his resurrection and ascension. He is God and man in one person, on the throne of the universe.

3. Christ claims authority over both believers and unbelievers.

The difference is that believers acknowledge and submit to his rule, with joy for the salvation they have received in him (Matt. 28:18).

4. We are to obey Christ in all things.

However, our obedience does not earn our salvation or contribute to becoming a saved person. We are justified by God’s grace as a gift (Rom. 3:24). It is all God’s doing (Eph. 2:8). It is Christ’s perfect obedience, not our obedience, that has obtained for us forgiveness of our sins and all the benefits of salvation.

We are saved by being united to him through the Holy Spirit and by trusting in him alone for our salvation. Genuine obedience is the offering that we give in gratitude to God, because we have already been saved. Because we are saved, we are empowered by the Spirit of Christ, and we bring forth the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23).

5. We are to serve Christ all the time, in all of life, with all of our heart.

We serve for several complementary reasons:

Christ is enthroned and deserves our obedience.

Christ is altogether lovely and completely worthy of all our service.

It is God’s command for us to serve him.

We were created and designed and destined for this service.

We will find the deepest satisfaction and joy in life only in this service.

The Holy Spirit empowers us for this service.

In serving Christ we are serving the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit together, since the distinct persons indwell each other.

6. The means of grace guide us and equip us to grow in serving Christ.

We should not suppose that our service is built on merely human effort. God in Christ provides the means of grace to guide, equip, and strengthen us. These means include Bible reading, Bible study, preaching, the sacraments (baptism and the Lord’s supper), prayer, and fellowship with other saints in the church, the body of Christ. These means become effective through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in us.

In addition, we can receive subordinate resources from the theological reflections and examples of previous generations of Christians. The leaders of the Reformation, and particular figures like John Calvin and Abraham Kuyper, have thought carefully and deeply about what it means to serve Christ in all of life.

7. Serving Christ makes a pronounced difference in every area of life.

Christian believers differ radically from unbelievers in the inclination of their hearts. This radical difference gets expressed in differences all along the line in every area of life. We have motivations that differ from unbelievers. We look at the law and the world differently, because we acknowledge that law comes from God and the world is providentially governed by God. We look at ourselves differently, because we know that we are made in God’s image and we belong to him. We have different purposes from unbelievers. We serve God and his kingdom, while they serve other goals, which are like counterfeit gods.

The differences in starting point result in differences even in areas that many people consider to be “religiously neutral,” like science and mathematics. Politics, work, social relations, social institutions, finance, and art need Christian reflection, as well as areas like church, marriage, parenting, and homemaking that have more commonly received attention.

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8. Because of Christ’s lordship over the world, we can sometimes learn from and cooperate with unbelievers in short-term projects.

We can do this because God, in common grace, keeps them from consistently working out the rebellious inclination of their hearts.

9. Christ gives distinctive authority and responsibilities to people in various spheres of life.

Authority comes from God; it is not merely a human invention. All human authority is limited because it is delegated by God through his Son. The responsibilities of officers of civil government, parents, church leaders (pastors and elders), business leaders (owners and managers), teachers, artists, farmers, and so on, are limited by God, and these responsibilities depend on what kind of authority belongs to each. Christians must study the Bible and consider its ethical implications for our responsibilities in each area.

10. Through Christ, God establishes a pronounced distinction between the church and other institutions on earth.

The true church is the body of Christ, made holy by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. It is manifested on earth in particular local gatherings of the body of Christ, and it is also enthroned with Christ in heaven (Eph. 2:6). By God’s own appointment, it is distinct from other institutions by being holy and by being uniquely empowered by the Holy Spirit to accomplish God’s will for its role in discipling and nourishing believers. Believers treat church members differently from the world.

This distinctiveness is quite compatible with the church being a source of encouragement and empowerment for Christians to serve God all the time in all of life, beyond the bounds of the church’s distinctive responsibility as an institution.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. In what ways can we practically think of Christ’s exaltation? While we long for him to return in the same body in which he was raised (Act 1:11), what comforts can we take in King Jesus’ reign from above?

2. What rule, authority, power, dominion, or even name, whether in the spiritual realm or with physical power here on earth, brings you concern (avoid political debate here if you’re in a group discussion)? How does it help to know that these forces are under Christ’s feet?
WEEK 10
DEAD IN SIN
EPHESIANS 2:1–3

1And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—2among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.
1. Though we're finally to a new chapter, we can still consider Eph. 2:1–10 as part of the section that begins in 1:15, which covers God's deliverance of sinners, especially considering the fact that Paul is still writing about powers, which he began doing in 1:19; however, some commentators would consider 2:1 the beginning of the body of the letter, following the opening section of thanksgiving and prayer. In either event, our title this week “Dead in Sin,” is apropos. Here, Paul continues with his affinity for long sentences, as 2:1–7 is a single sentence in the original Greek. If we split the sentence after v. 3, which we're doing in our series, you can see the transition in Paul's argument from our state of death to that of life. Read over vv. 1–3 a few times, and jot down some notes about this state of death. Pay attention to the verbs "walked," "lived," and "were (by nature children of wrath)." What do the tenses tell you about that state (rest assured that they're all either aorist or in the case of "were," imperfect," but all in this context suggest the past).

2. Read Rom. 5:12–21; 1 Cor. 15:21–22, 56; and Col. 2:12–13. How do these passages help illumine our understanding of “dead” in Eph. 2:1? Each of these verses uses νεκρός (nekros) for “dead,” with the exception of Rom. 5:12–21 and 1 Cor. 15:56, which use θάνατος (thanatos) for “death.” Both can refer to either physical or spiritual death, depending on context. From these passages, how do we understand the origin of death? And does this death refer to both states?

3. In v. 2, the word translated as “course” is ἀιών (aiōn), which is translated as “age” in 1:21 and 2:7 in the ESV, NRSV, and NIV, among others. The word is a temporal one used with a spatial one, κόσμος (kosmos), that is “world” in 2:2. This reflects the meaning used in 2 Cor. 4:4, where ESV and NRSV translate aiōn as “world,” while NIV uses “age” to refer to the “god of the aiōn” who has blinded unbelievers—in either case, the reign is temporary. This understanding is preferred to that of some commentators, who bring the gnostic understanding of aiōn into the text, where aiōn is a spiritual being and can refer to the “hostile” “God of the Old Testament,” who is somehow distinct from the God of the NT, which has no place in Paul’s writings. Using “course,” arguably doesn’t draw the distinction enough. Having said that, the remainder of v. 2 makes it clear that an evil figure, whom we can assume is Satan, possess the power to work in “those who are disobedient” (NRSV). Revisit the narrative of the fall in Gen. 3. How does this help us understand our previous state of death, or as “children of wrath” in v. 3?
FOR A DEEPER REFLECTION:

The Consequences of the Fall
by Bob Robinson

After the creative events recorded in Genesis 1 and 2, Genesis 3 records what theologians call “the Fall.”

“The essence of man’s first sin was his disobedience to the only divine command he had received: not to eat of the tree of knowledge. The consequences of his actions are both physical—toil, pain, and death—and spiritual—alienation from God.” (Gordon J. Wenham, Word Biblical Commentary Volume 1, Genesis 1-15)

The consequences of Adam and Eve’s sin goes beyond them to all of humanity, we inherit a sinful nature. The first transgression of man resulted in the total depravity of human nature. Berkhof states,

The contagion of his sin at once spread through the entire man, leaving no part of his nature untouched, but vitiating every power and faculty of body and soul. This utter corruption of man is clearly taught in Scripture, Gen. 6:5; Ps. 14:3, Rom. 7:18. Total depravity here does not mean that human nature was at once as thoroughly depraved as it could possibly become. In the will this depravity manifested itself as spiritual inability. (Louis Berkhof, Systematic Theology)

Every human inherits this corruption; we are all tainted with iniquity from the time we are created.

David says,

“Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.” (Psalm 51:5)

The apostle Paul states,

“For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature” (Romans 7:18) and “to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted.” (Titus 1:15)

As Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn wrote,

“If only there were evil people somewhere, insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being.” (The Gulag Archipelago)

The Fall and the Image of God

Theologians insist that the image of God in humanity has not been annihilated because of sin. Wayne Grudem wrote,

After the fall, we are still in God’s image – we are still like God and we still represent God – but the image of God in us is distorted; we are less fully like God than we were before the entrance of sin. (Grudem, Systematic Theology)

The image of God gives humanity the “cultural mandate.” But how does the Fall affect humanity’s ability to accomplish this mandate?

Sin corrupts or pollutes the imago Dei, but humans are still capable of doing those things we are mandated to do – to “be fruitful,” “increase in number,” “fill the earth,” “subdue it,” and to “rule” over the rest of creation.

• Humans still procreate and create communities in order relate to fellow humans, but they cannot relate to God at all or to other people very well without the grace of Christ.

• Humans still rule over the non-human creation, but they do so with selfish intent, often exploiting the goodness of God’s creation.

• Humans still work, but their work is marked by “painful toil,” “thorns and thistles,” and “the sweat of the brow” (see Genesis 3:17-19).

The initiation of various vocations is seen in Genesis 4; these were accomplished post-Fall. We can also empirically see the growth of society – of cultural goods, art, education, political structures, economies, etc.

But the Fall is also empirically evident, in the wide-scale corruption of the good work people do at every level, from CEOs who make poor decisions down to the gossip that undermines flourishing in the office.

How have you seen the consequences of the Fall in your work? In your family? In your relationships? In the news of the day?
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Paul says we were “children of wrath” “by nature” \( \varphiυσις \) (phusis), can also be understood as “inherent nature,” “origin,” or “birth,” so as to not be confused with God’s original creation before the fall. We aren’t automatically excluded by being born into a Christian family or in America—Paul says we were in that state, “like everyone else” (NRSV). We were dead. How is this teaching of hopelessness contrary to the rustic individualism and the “pull yourself up by your bootstraps” ethic often spun in our modern, and to some extent in our postmodern, western context?

2. It’s easy to point the finger at others as we look around this broken world and assign blame. But what does Eph. 2:1–3 have to say about our complicity? How much does this show our need for a savior?
RECONCILED WITH GOD 
& OTHERS

WEEK 11
RAISED WITH CHRIST
EPHESIANS 2:4–7

4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.
STUDY THE TEXT

1. As noted last week, this section begins in the middle of another long Pauline sentence, which stretches from 2:1–7. So, back up and read all seven verses. Look at “were dead,” in v. 1, and contrast it with “made us alive” in v. 5. Do the same with “lived in the passions” in v. 3 with “raised up with him” in v. 6. And finally, contrast “following the prince of the power of the air” in v. 2 with “seated us with him” in v. 6. These pairs show the reversal of our state in the event of salvation. Compare these verses with Rom. 6:1–14, making note of that same reversal.

2. Hanging in the middle of these contrasting verses is a beautiful contraction, δέ (de), which can mean “and” and is less emphatic than ἀλλά (alla), but is translated wonderfully by ESV, NRSV, and NIV as “but.” “You were dead…But God…made us alive together with Christ.” Here, God, out of his rich mercy and great love, demonstrates his graciousness to those completely crippled by sin. We just looked at Rom. 6:1–14, where we see that we died with Christ in baptism, so that we could be raised to “walk in newness of life.” With Christ, we died to death, so we could be made alive. Here, we should also look at συζωοποιέω (suzōopoieō), formed from σύν (sun) + ζώον (zóon) + ποιέω (poieó), literally “make alive with.” The only other place this verb is found is in Col. 2:13, which captures the same essence. It, too, along with ζωοποιέω (ζώopoieō), which has more of a New Testament presence, can refer to either physical or spiritual life, depending on context.

3. Look at “raised us up with him” and “seated us with him” in v. 6. The former we can easily make sense of. See Col. 2:12 and Col. 3:1. We can understand this usage as referring to our new life in Christ, both spiritually right now, and bodily in the future. But what about being seated “in the heavenly places”? Refer back to 1:20. Could this refer to participating in Christ’s exaltation? Since we’re presently on earth, that must refer to a future situation, right? Let’s see. “Seated us” in 2:6 is translated from συνεκάθισεν (sunekathisen), which is in the aorist aspect, thus referring to a former, completed event. This could then express a removal of at least some of the temporal gap between “already” and “not yet,” suggesting that believers are now possessing at least some measure of Christ’s glory and authority right now.
FOR A **DEEPER REFLECTION:**

From Death to Life: Union with Christ (excerpt)\(^\text{11}\)

There is so much that could be said about the believer’s union to God in Christ, but for now I’ll confine myself to commenting briefly on the elements on which our text touches. They are three: union with Christ unto spiritual life, union with Christ unto resurrection and union with Christ unto glorification. These three categories derive from the three Greek words that Paul uses in verse 5-6. Each of these words uses a prefix to mark the idea of “union” or “together with.” The phrases that English translations use to gloss these three words seem to preserve Paul’s intentions: “made us alive together with Him,” “raised us up with Him,” and “seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” Paul is emphatic that our radical shift from spiritual death to spiritual life happens only together with Christ, that is to say, only because of our union to the Son.

Because of God’s great and sovereign love, He makes us spiritually alive together with the incarnate God-man. I ought to mention that this implies that Christ first endured the fullness of spiritual—and literal—death on our behalf (Rom.3:25).

Having made us alive, God raises us up together with Christ as well. Paul here seems to be envisioning the believer as united to Christ in His own resurrection, such that just as He was raised physically, so too we have been “raised” spiritually (however, our current state of spiritual resurrection anticipates our future physical resurrection, 1 Corinthians 15:20-23). This is a progression from merely being “made (spiritually) alive” because being “raised” implies entrance into a new kind of life, a spiritual life that is lived in the risen and reigning Christ. This will become more clear in Paul’s final “together with” statement.

Finally, having made us alive and raised us up with Christ, the sovereign love of God has seated us with Christ in the heavenly realms. Right this moment the risen Jesus Christ is seated on the throne of the universe, ruling over all things until the time appointed by the Father for His return (Matthew 28:18, 1 Corinthians 15:25, Revelation 1:45). And, according to Ephesians 2:6, those who trust in Him are seated with Him, and are in Him even now. That is an awesome thing to consider, and it becomes even more staggering when we look at verse 7.

In verse 7 Paul explains the purpose of our salvation. God’s sovereign love unites us to Christ so that “in the coming ages He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” In other words, the goal of God’s love is to unite a people to Christ so that He might eternally and exponentially communicate the fullness of His grace to them. God made known to His people for their joy and His glory through union with Christ.....this is the goal of God’s great love and the hope held out to all those who are trusting in the crucified and risen Son.

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**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. Last week, we focused on sin and death. This week, we’re focusing on the life we have together in Christ. Make note of Paul’s use of plural first person pronouns in 2:4–7 (i.e., “we” and “us”). How then might we think about our new life in Christ? Is it something we experience as “a personal relationship with Jesus”? Or is there even something more?

2. Why did God give us this life? See v. 4 and reflect on that as a group.

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RECONCILED
WITH GOD & OTHERS

WEEK 12
SAVED BY GRACE FOR WORKS
EPHESIANS 2:8–10

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,
9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.
1. If Eph. 2:4 gives us the why as to how God saves us (his mercy and love), v. 8 gives us the how. What terminology does Paul employ here to give us the answer?

2. You likely pointed out a very important term, grace, which is χάρις (charis) in Greek, something already mentioned, albeit parenthetically, in v. 5. Charis can also be translated as “kindness,” “favor,” or “gift.” The word δῶρον (dōron) is used for “gift,” in v. 8, but it further emphasizes the point. Do we find evidence of God’s kindness and favor in the Old Testament? What examples come to mind?

3. You probably also wrote down “faith,” which in the Greek is πίστις (pistis), which can also be translated as “belief,” “trust,” “assurance,” or “confidence.” How might this idea connect to knowing the “mystery of his will” (1:9), believing “in him” upon hearing (1:13), the “spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him” (1:17), and knowing “what is the hope” (1:18)?

4. Many Christians have memorized Eph. 2:8–9 or have it displayed on bumper stickers, t-shirts, or posters, but perhaps overlook the verse that follows. We love the idea of a free gift from God that is not the result of works. And indeed we should. How could we ever earn what only Christ could pay for? But we also mustn’t gloss over our purpose. Read v. 10 and reflect on why God created us as his ποίημα (poiēma), his “workmanship.”
FOR A DEEPER REFLECTION:

Good Works and the Christian Life

by John Tweeddale

Good works aren’t bad. They are good. As Christians, we should want to do them. Just because we are not saved according to our works doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t be concerned about pursuing a life of joyful obedience to God’s Word. Jesus emphatically states, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15). Obedience, however frail and feeble, is evidence of our love for Christ. Far from undermining the gospel of grace, good works are the perfect complement to the gospel.

Saved Not by Good Works

To be clear, good works are bad when they are seen as the basis of salvation. A person is not saved by works but by God’s grace through faith in Christ. The Apostle Paul explains (see Eph. 2:8-10)…

Works are not meritorious. Salvation is “not your own doing” and “not a result of works.” Even the faith through which we receive salvation is a gracious gift from God. As fallen creatures, our best efforts are laced with sin. To borrow from Francis Schaeffer, how many finite buckets of good works would it take to fill the infinite gulf that exists between God and us because of our sin? Good works provide no basis for boasting because they are utterly worthless to save. The only foundation for salvation is Christ. We are saved by His works, not ours.

Saved for Good Works

Good works are not bad when they are seen as the goal of salvation, not its ground. While good works aren’t meritorious of salvation, they are a necessary component of Christian faith. As James states, “faith apart from works is dead” (James 2:26). Paul makes this same point when he contends that we are not saved by good works but that we are saved for good works.

Every word in Ephesians 2:10 is important for explaining the dynamic of good works in the Christian life. We learn that good works are the result, not the cause, of our being new creations, and they testify to the fact that we have been redeemed so that our lives might reflect the craftsmanship and character of God. Good works are also the result of our being united to Christ. Apart from Him, we can do nothing that pleases God. But in Christ, we are created to perform God-honoring acts of obedience. In Christ, we can be confident that God accepts our weak and wobbly efforts. Paul further states that good works are the result of God’s pattern for the Christian life. We need not wonder what God requires of us. He has told us in His Word. Good works are deeds done in conformity to God’s Word.

A Faith That Is Never Alone

Good works are good because they spring not from a lifeless faith but a “true and lively faith” (WCF 16.2). We are justified by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone; however, the faith that saves is never alone but is accompanied by spiritual life and loving obedience. Christ is the ground of our salvation, faith is the instrument of our salvation, and works are the fruit of our salvation. Whenever the gospel takes root in our lives, it always produces Spirit-wrought fruit (Gal. 5:16-26). The Spirit enables us to walk in a manner worthy of our calling to pursue Christlike lives (Eph. 4:1-7).

The value of walking the pathway of obedience is manifold. The Westminster Confession of Faith states that there are at least six benefits of good works. First, good works manifest our gratitude to God for the gift of His Son (Col. 2:6). Second, good works bolster assurance of faith (1 John 2:1-6). Third, good works are a means of encouraging other Christians toward greater acts of Christ-centered love (Heb. 10:24). Fourth, goods works are concrete avenues for adorning the doctrine of God our Savior in life and ministry (Titus 2:7-10). Fifth, good works silence critics who devalue the goodness of biblical Christianity (1 Peter 2:12, 15). Sixth, good works glorify God by displaying His work of love in our lives (John 15:8-11).

What is our response to the gospel? An old hymn puts it nicely: “Trust and obey, for there’s no other way, to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. In what ways do we try to earn our own salvation? And we shouldn’t only assume this is “a Catholic thing.” What things do we as evangelicals—what things have you done to try to earn God’s favor? We probably especially do this after we sin “big time” or repeatedly, or when we “backslide.”

2. Since we are created for good works, how can we practically determine the difference between working toward our salvation and working because of our salvation?
Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—
Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God...
1. With Eph. 2:11, we come to another major section of Paul's letter, which extends through 3:19. This section covers our unity as members of Christ's church. In 2:11, Paul immediately points out sources of disunity by referring to his recipients as “Gentiles,” while he is a Jewish Christian,” and drawing attention to the physical distinction of circumcision. Jews would use slang to refer to Gentiles as ἀκροβυστία (akrobustia), literally “foreskin.” One can imagine the disunity in the Church as Jews and Gentiles are brought together. Though part of the occasion to which Paul writes the Romans and Galatians is that Gentiles should “become Jewish” by being circumcised, there is no reference to such a conflict in Ephesians, and scholars assume that conflict would have faded away by the time of Paul’s writing here. So, this mentioning here seems to be more of a recap than anything else. More than a physical mark, circumcision was the sign and seal of the covenant (see Gen. 17:1–14), to which Gentiles were strangers (Eph. 2:12). After eighteen hundred or so years of this practice, perhaps one can understand the learning curve required by Jewish Christians, which seems to have recovered quickly, especially after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., when the “circumcision party” (Gal. 2:12) had lost their base of operation.

2. In v. 13, Paul again masterfully uses de as “but,” to highlight his transitioning from the way things were to the way things are. “At one time” (v. 11) Gentiles were “separated,” “alienated,” and “strangers” (v. 12). But in Christ (v. 13), they have been brought near by his blood. Throughout the remainder of this section we’re covering (through v. 19), Paul continues this volley between former status and present status. Jot down these contrasts and reflect on the reality of the peace and unity Christ has brought to his people.

3. Nothing brings disunity like a wall dividing people. Paul uses the language of a dividing wall in a figurative sense in v. 14, though he probably also had in mind a literal wall in the temple in Jerusalem that separated Gentiles from the inner parts only accessible to Jews. Christ broke down this wall figurately, though it was literally broken down by the Romans in 70 A.D., something Christ predicted, as recorded in Matt. 24:1–2. But Christ didn’t only bring these people together as two distinct groups; he made them one (v. 15), as members of God’s household (v. 19). The word Paul uses expressing one is εἷς (heis), which is used in the same sense in Rom. 12:4. Read Rom. 12:3–8. How might we make a distinction between oneness and sameness?
How the Gospel Ends Racial Hostility

by Afshin Ziafat

Yesterday evening I drove down to Dallas Love Field to pick up my mother from the airport. As I drove back to Frisco, we talked in disbelief about the egregious and senseless taking of lives that we have seen in our country in the past 48 hours. The heartbreaking scenes in Louisiana and Minnesota that were captured on video for all to see on social media were horrific and saddening. I noticed that traffic was being stopped heading into downtown Dallas but at the time, I had no idea why. At last count, at least eleven Dallas Police officers were shot and five of them tragically killed during a protest against the recent shootings in our land.

As an Iranian-American who has experienced the depths of racial tension in America, this situation rests heavy on my heart. The fact that this is happening so close to home makes the emotions all the more profound: dismay, anger, fear, distrust.

The cycle of hate, violence, bigotry, and prejudice has always been the thread that runs throughout our human history. Mankind, left to its own devices, will always tend towards hostility against one another. This is part of our sinful human nature that stretches back to the Garden of Eden. Genesis 3 tells us how and when sin entered our human existence, resulting in a broken relationship with God and broken relationships between humans. This is why right after the Fall, we see in Genesis 4 a man killing his own brother in anger. This is also why today, when we hear of more hatred and killing, we can feel almost numb to it. The horror seems to never end. From San Bernardino to Paris, Belgium to Istanbul, Orlando and Baton Rouge to Minnesota and Dallas—hate and prejudice always perpetuates a cycle of anger, hostility and violence.

Jesus came to end this. In Ephesians 2, one of the most important passages for times like these, Paul lays out the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ. All mankind is dead in sin, separated from God, and deserving of eternal punishment. But God, being rich in mercy and love, has made a way for us to be forgiven by grace through faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ. Jesus died to pay for our sins though we didn’t deserve it and he rose again to secure for us life after death. Through faith in Christ, we can have peace with God. But what does this peace with God do? (see Ephesians 2:13-19)

Through his sacrificial death, Jesus has destroyed the dividing wall of hostility. Most importantly, this means that the wall of hostility between God and man has been broken down. God’s wrath is satisfied and the veil which separates us from God has been torn in two. But this passage goes beyond that and shows the implications of the gospel in our relationships with one another. In context, this passage is referring to Jew and Gentile—two groups of people who have a long history of hostility towards one another. Through Christ, we are not only brought near to God but to one another. The two groups who used to kill each other are now fellow citizens and family members. The two are made one in Christ. Christ kills the hostility between people through the cross.

The gospel reminds us that even when we deserved the wrath of God, through Christ’s death and resurrection, we received the love of God. It is impossible to be truly captured by the love of Christ and respond with hate to those who have wronged you. It is unjust to receive unmerited grace and demand others to earn your mercy.

The gospel compels me to identify with the outcast and marginalized in my own society, to care for and champion the mistreated and underprivileged. The gospel reminds me that my Savior was unjustly murdered on a cross; it opens my mouth to speak out against injustice in our land. And the gospel reminds me that Jesus died to redeem a people for God from every tribe, tongue and nation. That’s good news because that means you and I are both included! How could we, as fellow heirs of Christ, look down on one another because of skin color?

So we can boycott, protest, and lobby for new laws. These are not necessarily bad things and there is a time and place for them. Ultimately, however, Jesus is the one who breaks down the walls between us. He is our peace by killing the hostility, starting with the hostility in my own heart. As the love of Christ penetrates a heart, the wall of hostility comes crashing down. Jesus is the only one who can break the cycle of hate.

I urge my fellow Christians to turn to the gospel and let the love of Christ control your actions and words. Take time to pray and think about what you are posting on social media. Ask yourself, “Are my words even subtly contributing to the cycle of hostility? Or are they lifting up the gospel and commending the love of Christ to people?” We need to mourn the senseless loss of life of any human being who is made in the image of God. We need to pray for our nation and ask God to move in the hearts of our people. As a church we need to a picture of racial reconciliation and unity born out of the love of Christ. And as followers of Christ, we need to be those who promote peace and not hostility ultimately by pointing people to Jesus, our Prince of Peace!

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. (Matt. 5:9)

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FOR A DEEPER REFLECTION:

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Despite the reality of what the unifying work of Christ has done for the Church, we clearly have always experienced division. In your own church context (don’t point the finger at other churches), where do you see disunity, division, separation, alienation, and walls? How might the reality of what Christ has done be introduced into those situations, breaking down hostility in the midst of his body?

2. As we noted from Rom. 12:3–8, oneness is not the same thing as sameness. How then are we to find the proper balance in the church between unity and diversity? Is this something you see already within your congregation? If so, how can it be done better? If not, where are our blind spots?
So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.
1. Last week, we covered how Christ broke down “the dividing wall of hostility” and how the wall of the temple—and the temple itself—was destroyed in 70 A.D., as predicted by Jesus (Matt. 24:1–2). In Eph. 2:20–22, Paul describes the construction of a new temple. What does he mean here? See 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19–20 as well.

2. Continuing with the temple motif, notice what’s included in the construction. There is one foundation consisting of not only the apostles in the New Testament but also the prophets in the OT. How does the idea of Gentiles also seeing the prophets of Israel as their foundation continue Paul’s description of the unity the Church ought to have?

3. Combing these ideas of the construction of the temple and unity, we ought to highlight a common misconception in our contemporary Christian verbiage. When we make reference to our bodies “being the temple,” we often do so by thinking of distinct, individual bodies, and we usually throw the phrase around in reference to personal moral behavior. While that’s well and good, we need to realize that Paul’s language by no means refers to individual bodies, which should be quite evident in our English translations of Eph. 2:21–2. But this perhaps isn’t quite as clear in the verses in 1 Cor., mentioned in #1. In both 1 Cor. 3:16 and 6:19–20, the “you” [ἐστε (este)] and “your” [ὑμῶν (humón)] are plural, something not captured in English, unless we say “y’all” or “y’alls,” like our Southern friends who might understand language better than we do in the Southwest.
FOR A DEEPER REFLECTION:

We are Stones

by Brett McCracken⁴

One of the ways western individualism informs how we think about church is that we conceive of “fit” in terms of how a church fits us. Does its worship style, architecture, preaching, values and demographic makeup fit well with our personality and preferences? This approach puts the burden on the church to adapt or perform to our liking if it wants to keep us around. But what if we have it backwards? What if the biblical approach is actually that we should fit ourselves into the life and mission of the local church, adapting ourselves to the family and filling gaps where needed, even if that means we are the ones who have to change? We shouldn’t look for a church that will change to fit us. We should look for one where we will be changed to better represent Christ.

I love the New Testament passages that describe the church in terms of stones. Peter says Christians are “like living stones” who are “being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood” (1 Peter 2:5), with Christ as the cornerstone (2:6-7). Paul says similar things in Ephesians 2:19-22.

The biblical image of the people of God is that we are stones being built together into a dwelling place. A dwelling place requires not one big stone but many pieces of stone, interlocked and fortified together. It’s not that the stones must lose their individuality or their unique textures or shapes; the image is not one of identical bricks or pre-fab concrete blocks. It’s just that only together do individual stones achieve the structural purpose of becoming the household of God. Each of us has unique gifts, but none of us is gifted in everything. Together our unique shapes compliment each other and create a more structurally sound “building.”

Sadly our individualistic culture seems more drawn to the “rolling stone gathers no moss” metaphor. Our heroes are the chameleonic artists and celebrities who refuse to be pinned down in style or genre or identity. We love the restless wanderers like Jack Kerouac and rogue subverters of convention like Jackson Pollock. We aren’t so compelled by the notion that our “individuality” should be a selfless thing worked out in and for a larger community. Yet that is the biblical ideal.

A Christianity that focuses too much on the individual journey and the “how is this growing me?” question easily becomes “sourly narcissistic” and “crowds out openness to the Spirit himself,” argues Gordon Fee. This is one of the reasons why committing to life in community, however uncomfortable it may be, is essential. Individualistic faith shrinks our experience of God and saps the full power of the Spirit in our midst. We thrive most when we live out faith in the presence of the family of God—in all their weirdness and wonderful diversity.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Eph. 2:22 refers to us as building materials. Understanding that we, individual members of Christ’s church, are being built together into a temple—God’s dwelling place—how should we live together in order to properly be his home?

2. Though this temple we’re referring to, unlike the one in Jerusalem destroyed in 70 A.D., cannot be destroyed, given its foundation and cornerstone, are we adding something ugly to God’s home, like nasty curtains, a poor paint color, shag carpet, that needs to be updated and refined? While we’ve established that unity and diversity are not mutually exclusive, how do we maintain the balance and harmony that doesn’t make God’s piece of real estate an eyesore to the neighborhood, if you will?

1 For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles—
2 assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace that was given to me for you,
3 how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly.
4 When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ,
5 which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.
6 This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.
1. Eph. 3:1 is the first place in this letter where Paul mentions his imprisonment (which he does again in 4:1 and 6:20). He also wrote Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon while in bondage. But we can't be certain of where he was imprisoned as he penned Ephesians, especially as being in bondage became a common occurrence for him (2 Cor. 11:23). Once again, in v. 2, he indicates that he hadn't necessarily met his audience, or at least some of its members, despite his three-year stint there (Acts 20:31).

2. Again, Paul refers to the “mystery” made known to believers (see 1:9). As he did throughout Chapter 2, in 3:4, he draws a contrast between the state of affairs in the past with how things are now. Here, it’s that the mystery was not made known to prior generations. In Week 5, Study the Text #1.1, we noted Col. 1:26–27, where Paul writes that the mystery, once “hidden for ages and generations” is “now revealed to (the) saints.” In both passages, he explains that the mystery includes that Gentiles share in the gospel. Note here that in Eph. 1:5, Paul does refer to this mystery also being revealed to the prophets. Where might we see evidence of this revelation in the Old Testament? Is. 49:6 serves as one great example, which echoes Gen. 12:1–3. Can you think of others?

**FOR A DEEPER REFLECTION:**

**Is Unity in a Diverse Church Even Possible?**

by J.D. Greear

Many people in our day love the concept of a multi-cultural society, but achieving it has proven quite difficult.

The Apostle Paul had the same challenge in the churches that he planted. Racial strife was a real issue, because for the first two thousand years God worked in human history, all of God’s people had been Jews. Then Jesus showed up with his new “whosoever will” program, and a bunch of Gentiles believed, too. So then, in these new churches, Gentiles were sitting next to Jews, and Gentiles had their own customs and fashions, music preferences, and political viewpoints. And so, it was a mess.

Two thousand years later, the church is still a mess.

I read an article not long ago in The Atlantic about a study done on people who chose to live in multi-cultural neighborhoods. The study found that even people who live in progressive, multicultural neighborhoods end up hanging out only with people in the neighborhood who are just like them.

Just like we tend to stick with what we know in our neighborhoods, many people who love the idea of a multi-cultural church are fine with it until you start doing things that are culturally uncomfortable to them. Then, they want to go back to what’s easier. Their ideal is a multi-colored church, but the church culture is still predominantly white. So everyone sings traditional white-people music and sits silently during the sermon.

And, based on their Facebook feeds, many people are all about racial reconciliation but don’t really do anything about it. They are what one of our pastors calls “slactivists,” which means they champion things on Facebook that they don’t live out in real life.

Paul said that the mystery that is now revealed to the church through the Holy Spirit is that “the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.” Paul preached to the Gentiles “to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 3:6, 9-10 ESV).

One of the best ways we can demonstrate the wisdom and power of God is being known for our unity-in-diversity, when we move beyond virtue signaling and slactivism and into gospel community.

This kind of unity is fun to talk about, but it takes commitment, and it is hard. Here are a few reasons why.

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六项障碍，阻碍教会的统一

1. 邪恶者

邪恶者讨厌这种统一，特别是在教会中，因为它彰显了上帝最荣耀的一面。在其核心，这是一场精神上的争斗，我们必须时刻警醒，邪恶者正在我们身上工作，试图破坏圣灵正在做的事情。

2. 骄傲

种族、政治和教育特征往往成为我们身份的核心部分；它们让我们与他人区分开来，让我们觉得自己重要。我们为它们感到自豪，并且我们抵制任何可能威胁到我们这种区分的事情。

当然，这些事情本身并没有错。但是，当骄傲存在时，就不会有统一。或者，正如tim Green，我们非洲裔美国牧师在峰会上说的，我们有皮肤问题，因为我们有罪的问题。

3. 偏好

Bryan Lorrits说过，我们知道多元文化主义是早期教会的一个问题，因为保罗的书信中有很多关于食物的话题。在同质化的教会中，食物不是问题，你只吃你的犹太餐，就开心了。但是，当外邦人来参加自助餐时，他们开始带来不同的、不熟悉的食物：谁带来的松鼠布丁？无论圣经中谈论食物的地方，我们都可以换成音乐。

为了实现统一，你必须有时愿意在别人不按你的方式做事时感到不舒服。你必须关心文化多元性，而不仅仅是颜色的多样性。

4. 懒惰

这太容易了。当你试图改变现状时，你常常被误解，你会受伤。当我谈论这些话题时，我经常接到反馈——有些人说我讲得太多，有些人说我不够。

但是，耶稣的荣耀和伟大的使命的成功是值得的。

5. 缺乏同理心

詹姆斯告诉我们，我们应该先听，后说，慢生气。这个经文在教会中多元一体的地方特别适用。

是的，总有时间，有地方让你说话。但是我们需要寻求理解，而不是被理解。

6. 不能原谅

关于原谅，有一个谎言，许多人相信，这让它们落入了邪恶者的手中：我不能原谅你，直到你明白你的错误。

但是，当你的原谅取决于对方理解你的痛苦时，你只是在用一个可能永远达不到的标准来束缚自己。

那不是原谅。原谅就是给与，即使对方不配。

耶稣在教会中成就了统一

这六个令人望而生畏的障碍阻止我们在教会中实现多元文化主义。难怪我们的社会也做不到！

但是，法律无法做到的，新生命在福音中成就了它。
1. In the Study the Text section this week, we highlighted Is. 49:6, where the prophet mentions that Israel would be “a light for the nations.” Now, “the nations,” that is Gentiles—any of us who are not ethnically Jewish—have been joined to our believing Jewish brothers and sisters in this mission of continuing to be a light. While our present context may not consist of a great deal of strife between Jew and non-Jews (though such friction has sadly not died down), what might be dimming that light in our churches today?

2. Place yourself in the sandals of a member of the church in Ephesus. Let’s say you’re a Jewish convert as you hear Paul’s letter read aloud. Presumably, there is no longer obvious friction between you and your Gentile brothers and sisters next to you. But as you listen to his words, that they are “fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel,” you remember your people’s history. You remember the Greeks who conquered your promised land in the fourth century B.C., which followed prior conquests by the Assyrians, Babylonians, and Persians, and that land is currently occupied by Romans—all of whom are “Gentiles.” How might this recollection of the past affect your present desire for unity? Do we have any similar modern examples? Are there any people groups within your church context who can’t be perfectly unified because of past or present conflict? Perhaps the division isn’t over ethnicity, but maybe it’s over politics. What if we modified Eph. 3:6 to say, “This mystery is that Republicans and Democrats are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise of Christ Jesus through the gospel”? Think of other examples in your group and modify v. 6 in the same way. And then pray for true unity.
Works Consulted


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