



Join the Wednesday Night Crew for a study of:

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Begins Wednesday, January 5th with Pastor Orleen and Pastor Robin and Michelle Ingram At the FLC, 6:30PM, in the auditorium.

- January 5th, 12th(gone), 19th (gone), 26th
- February 2nd, 9th(gone), 16th, 23rd
- March 2nd, 9th, 16th, 23rd, 30th
- April 6th, 13th, 20th, 27th

Week1: Welcome to Ephesus – Understanding the History

Week 2: Understanding the Culture of the Time: Individual Self/Collective Self

- WHO they were,
- WHOSE they were and how each Ephesian fit in with the whole of their group,
- WHERE they were,
- And the context, WHEN they were—in the timeline of history,
- Then WHERE were they headed,
- And to WHOM were they trying to reach,
- Once there, WHAT WERE THEY SUPPOSED TO DO?

Week 3: Understanding JC Headship of the Church. His goals for the Church. How/When/Why of being a member of a church.

The Goal of Ephesians:

Ephesians 4:1 Unity in the Body of Christ

4 I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

WHAT PROBLEMS WOULD EXIST FOR THESE TO BE THE ANSWERS?

REDEMPTION 1:7 (Salvation, Restoration)

DIVINE INTENTION for the human race 1:3-14 (God's plan for us)

GRACE 1:2 (God's favor that we never can earn)

PREDESTINATION 1:4-5 [The Tree DNA in the seed and...]

RECONCILIATION 2:1-21

UNION WITH CHRIST 2:1-21

Week 4: Understanding His Genesis

Workmanship: Craftsmanship. Artistry. Craft. Art. Artisanhip. Work. Handiwork. Skill. Technique. Expertise. Execution. Working ability.

Opus: Composition. Work. Work of Art. Oeuvre. Piece. Creation. Legacy.

The fulfillment of a precreation ideal

Creation: Design. Formation. Forming. Modeling. Making. Construction Constructing. Fabrication. Building. Origination. Invention. Conception. Birthing. Genesis. Begetting.



(Pr Robin already covered this in Week 2. Reminder:)

- Mindset before inhaling Ephesians 2

Ephesians 1:5-6, 11-12 NKJV

⁵ *having **predestined** us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, ⁶ to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.*

¹¹ *In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being **predestined** according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, ¹² that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.*

1:3–14

The opening section of Ephesians (1:3–2:10), which describes the new life God has given us in Christ, divides itself naturally into two halves:

- First: Praise

Paul blesses God that he has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing (1:3–14).

- Second: Prayer

Paul asks that God will open our eyes to grasp the fullness of this blessing (1:15–2:10).

FIRST: *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as HE chose us in HIM before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before HIM..HE destined us in love to be HIS sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of HIS will, to the praise of HIS glorious grace which HE freely bestowed on us in the Beloved...in HIM we have redemption through HIS blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of HIS grace which HE lavished upon us...for HE has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of HIS will, according to his purpose which HE set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in HIM, things in heaven and things on earth...in HIM, according to the purpose of HIM who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of HIS will, we who first hoped in Christ have been destined and appointed to live for the praise of HIS glory...in HIM you also, who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and have believed in HIS, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, which is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of HIS glory.*

In the original Greek these twelve verses constitute a single complex sentence.

Continuous Cascade

Outburst of adoration

Magnificent gateway

A kaleidoscope

Descending snowball

The overture of an opera

Again...WHO is Paul writing to???? This amazing church at Ephesus! Who he can say this to...



WHO would this type of opening, of accelerated worship, be written to?

WHAT are they like?

Leadership in Ephesus:

Priscilla and Aquila:

Acts 18:1-26; Romans 16:3; 1 Corinthians 16:19; 2 Timothy 4:19

- Met in Corinth as they were already believers.
- Worked together (tent makers)

Acts 18:1-4 Whose name is list first? (Aquila)

After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth. ² And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them.

³ So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers. ⁴ And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks.

Acts 18:18-19 (20-21) Whose name is list first? (Priscilla)

*¹⁸ So Paul still remained a good while. Then he took leave of the brethren and sailed for Syria, and **Priscilla and Aquila** were with him. He had his hair cut off at Cenchrea, for he had taken a vow. ¹⁹ And he came to Ephesus, **and left them there**; but he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. ²⁰ When they asked him to stay a longer time with them, he did not consent, ²¹ but took leave of them, saying, "I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem; but I will return again to you, God willing." And he sailed from Ephesus.*

- Led the house church in Ephesus

(1 Cor. 16:19 *The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.*)

- Allowing a woman to lead!

Romans 16:3 ³ *Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus,*

"in contrast to the chauvinistic Rabbinical opinion expressed in the Jerusalem Talmud that it would be better for the words of Torah to be burned, than that they should be entrusted to a woman." Stott, J. R. W. (1996). [*Guard the truth: the message of 1 Timothy & Titus*](#) (pp. 59–88). InterVarsity Press.

In his day, Paul would have been thrilled to have more skilled *men and women* who could teach the truth! A few women did serve as part of his apostolic team, such as **Phoebe** (Rom. 16:1), **Priscilla** (v. 3, NKJV), and **Junia** (v. 7, NKJV). But in the early church period most women were uneducated. We will discover that Paul's desire for women to "receive instruction" in 1 Timothy 2:11 was actually a liberating message to first-century women—because they lived at a time when Jewish rabbis and Greek philosophers taught that women were not worthy of learning anything. "10 Lies The Church Tells Women" J.L. Grady



- Ministered together:

Acts 18:24-26

²⁴ Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. ²⁵ This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John. ²⁶ So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.

They did not confront him publicly on just preaching John the Baptists ministry, they invited him into fellowship and taught him.

Priscilla's relationship with her husband. As a Jewish wife Priscilla would have been expected to be subject to her husband. Aquila would have been the one who studied God's Law and who sat with the other men in the synagogue. Priscilla would have been expected to know the laws governing a kosher kitchen, but in all other matters she would have been expected to defer to her husband. In mentioning the couple, if both were mentioned at all, normal mode of speech would have identified Aquila "and his wife."

But here in the New Testament not only is Priscilla identified by name, she is frequently mentioned first:

- Acts 18:2: "Aquila ... with his wife Priscilla"
- Acts 18:18: "Priscilla and Aquila"
- Acts 18:26: "Aquila and Priscilla"
- Rom. 16:3: "Priscilla and Aquila"
- 1 Cor. 16:19: "Aquila and Priscilla"
- 2 Tim. 4:19: "Prisca and Aquila"

It is interesting to compare this with the way Luke states the names of the missionary team of Paul and Barnabas. When the team sets out, Luke referred to Barnabas and Paul (Acts 13:2). But almost immediately Luke began to refer to Paul first and Barnabas second. Paul became the recognized leader of the team. The easy exchange of the names of Priscilla and Aquila makes it clear that Priscilla was a full partner with her husband in ministry. She did not dominate him, but neither did he dominate her.

Aquila and Priscilla's marriage as portrayed here adds insight to the changed status of women in Christianity. Without "lowering" the man, the new faith exalted the woman, making them partners in ministry as well as in life.

Richards, S. P., & Richards, L. (1999). [*Every woman in the Bible*](#) (pp. 244–247). T. Nelson Publishers.

- Committed to Paul and moved with him and went and ministered where he asked them to.

WHAT TYPE OF ATMOSPHERE/INFLUENCE DID THEIR LEADERSHIP BRING?



Leadership in Ephesus:

Timothy

Name means: Honored by God

Protégé of Paul's: (Believe Timothy was in his early 20's)

- **2 Timothy 1:2**

To Timothy, a beloved son:

- **2 Timothy 2:6-7**

⁶ Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. ⁷ For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

- Timothy is named with Paul in the salutation of four New Testament letters (Philippians, 1, 2 Thessalonians, and Philemon),

- Traveled with Paul on his 2nd missionary journey

Paul enlisted Timothy as a companion on his second missionary journey.

- Was Guided by Paul/Trained

- **1 Tim 4:12-16**

Now the Spirit ^[E] expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, ² speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, ³ forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. ⁴ For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; ⁵ for it is ^[E] sanctified by the word of God and prayer.

A Good Servant of Jesus Christ

⁶ If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed. ⁷ But reject profane and old wives' fables, and exercise yourself toward godliness. ⁸ For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come. ⁹ This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance. ¹⁰ For to this end ^[E] we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe. ¹¹ These things command and teach.

Take Heed to Your Ministry

¹² Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity. ¹³ Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. ¹⁴ Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership. ¹⁵ Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all. ¹⁶ Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.

- Represented Paul

three times mentioned sending Timothy to churches as his representative:

Philippians 2:19



But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I also may be encouraged when I know your state

1 Thess. 3:2

and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith,

2 Thess. 1:1

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy,

To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

Was ½ Jewish and ½ Greek

Luke noted that Timothy was the son of a Jewish woman and a Greek father. According to Jewish custom that traces Jewishness through the mother rather than the father, this meant that Timothy was a Jew.

Richards, L. (1999). [*Every man in the Bible*](#) (pp. 213–215). T. Nelson.

Grew up and trained by his godly mother and grandmother and became a believer at a young age:

2 Timothy 1:3-7

³ I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience, as my forefathers did, as without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day, ⁴ greatly desiring to see you, being mindful of your tears, that I may be filled with joy, ⁵ when I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also.

One of the itinerant ministers that Paul directed:

- **2 Timothy 4:19**

Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus.

- **1 Timothy 1:3**

As I urged you when I went into Macedonia—remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine,

WHAT TYPE OF ATMOSPHERE/INFLUENCE DID HIS LEADERSHIP BRING?



Paul, knowing the Ephesus church was HEALTHY, IN GOOD HANDS, ETC, chose to write this:

Ephesians 1:3-14 Redemption in Christ (READ NLT?)

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, ⁴ just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, ⁵ having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, ⁶ to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He ^[a] made us accepted in the Beloved.

⁷ In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace ⁸ which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and ^[b] prudence, ⁹ having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, ¹⁰ that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, ^[c] both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him. ¹¹ In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, ¹² that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

¹³ In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.

Ephesians 1:3-14 Spiritual Blessings

³ All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ. ⁴ Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. ⁵ God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure. ⁶ So we praise God for the glorious grace he has poured out on us who belong to his dear Son. ⁷ He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins. ⁸ He has showered his kindness on us, along with all wisdom and understanding.

⁹ God has now revealed to us his mysterious will regarding Christ—which is to fulfill his own good plan. ¹⁰ And this is the plan: At the right time he will bring everything together under the authority of Christ—everything in heaven and on earth. ¹¹ Furthermore, because we are united with Christ, we have received an inheritance from God, for he chose us in advance, and he makes everything work out according to his plan.

¹² God’s purpose was that we Jews who were the first to trust in Christ would bring praise and glory to God. ¹³ And now you Gentiles have also heard the truth, the Good News that God saves you. And when you believed in Christ, he identified you as his own by giving you the Holy Spirit, whom he promised long ago. ¹⁴ The Spirit is God’s guarantee that he will give us the inheritance he promised and that he has purchased us to be his own people. He did this so we would praise and glorify him.
NLT

In the original Greek these twelve verses constitute a single complex sentence.

- He did not write this to the Corinthian church.
- There was something “specific” and “special” about Ephesus.
- How did their leaders influence and produce/contribute to this?



SO...Paul combining his training as a Pharisee and his religious education, he reached way back before: **Genesis 1:1 -2**

In the beginning when God created (when God began to create) the heavens and the earth, ² the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God (while the Spirit of God, while a mighty wind) swept over the face of the waters.

“Into a past eternity in which only God himself existed in the perfection of his being. In that pre-creation eternity God did something. He formed a purpose in his mind. This purpose concerned both *Christ* (his only begotten Son) and *us* (whom he proposed to make his adopted sons, and indeed daughters, for of course the word embraces both sexes).” BST The Message of Ephesians. John. R.W. Stott. PG 36

I. We are CHOSEN

Ephesians 1:4

*⁴ just as **He chose us in Christ** before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before Him in love.*

- What does this mean?
- Do I have a say in this?
- Does this just happen to me?
- Can I lose it?

- The verb: He Chose

Indicates a past tense with no present tense or no future tense. **IT IS DONE.**

Aorist tense: Past tense with no indication of the action being in the moment or continuous.

1. (especially in Greek) an unqualified past tense of a verb without reference to duration or completion of the action.

- In His planning:

In His mind.

God put His yet to be created people together with Christ...WHY?

To make us His own children....HOW?

Through the redeeming work of Christ...THAT HAD NOT HAPPENED YET.

God put us and Christ together in His mind. He determined to make us (who did not yet exist) His own children through the redeeming work of Christ (which had not yet taken place).

It was a definite decision, for the verb *he chose* (*exelaxato*) is another aorist.

BST The Message of Ephesians. John. R.W. Stott. PG. 36

PREDESTINATION – It is *supposed to* contain the mystery of the Godhead.

(Hard to wrap our brain around just like the concept of Trinity.)



- Paul not only chose to address this in the letter to the Ephesians.
- **He begins the letter with it.**

The opening section of Ephesians (1:3–2:10), which describes the new life God has given us in Christ, divides itself naturally into two halves:

- First: Praise

Paul blesses God that he has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing (1:3–14).

- Second: Prayer

Paul asks that God will open our eyes to grasp the fullness of this blessing (1:15–2:10).

II. We are CHOSEN TO...Now What?

Ephesians 2:1-10 By Grace Through Faith

2 And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, ² in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, ³ among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

⁴ But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶ and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast. ¹⁰ For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. NKJV

Ephesians 2:1-10 By Grace Through Faith

*2 And you **He made alive**,*

- Am I? What does ALIVE look like? Talk like? Live like?

who were dead in trespasses and sins,

*² in which you **once walked***

- Is this PAST tense in my life?
- You are a dead man walking

according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, ³ among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

⁴ But God,

- Does this make me think negative? “But God!!!”
- Or, does predestination change that...



who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ **even when** we were dead in trespasses, made us alive

- Am I thankful for this?
- How thankful am I?
- What in my life portrays thanks? Exhibits thanks? Screams thanks?

together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

- PREDESTINED

⁶ and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

- Rapture

1 Thessalonians 4:15-18

¹⁵ For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore comfort one another with these words.

^{7a} that in the **ages to come**

- Millennial reign **Revelation 20:1-7**
- Eternity [New Heaven, New Earth] Revelation
2 Peter 3:13 But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.
John 14:2-3 My Father's house has plenty of room; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.
Revelation 21 – New Heaven and a New earth
Revelation 22 – New Eden restored

^{7b} He might show the **exceeding riches of His grace** in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

- **Revelation 19:6-9** (Marriage Supper of the Lamb)
- **2 Corinthians 11:2** (Presentation of the Bride of Christ)
² I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him.
- **2 Corinthians 5:10 (Judgment Seat of Christ)**
¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that everyone may receive what is due them for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.
Luke 14:14 And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; **for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."**

1 Corinthians 3:10-15 ¹⁰ By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. ¹¹ For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, ¹³ their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. ¹⁴ If



what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames.

(NOTE: The different tone used with the Corinthians)

⁸ For **by grace** you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is **the gift** of God, ⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast.

- Do I boast?
- HOW do I boast? My ministry???
- What do I boast in?
- How do we live with “it is the gift”?

Closing:

¹⁰ For we are **His workmanship**, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that **we should walk in them.**

We are back to predestined:
His Workmanship
For Good works
Which God prepared beforehand
That we should walk in them.

The question is...do we?
Do we even notice?
What priority is “good works” in our life?
Do we feel God owes us for them?

PAUL IS NOW ASKING US:

WHAT TYPE OF ATMOSPHERE/INFLUENCE DOES MY LIFE BRING?



Ephesians 1:3-14 Spiritual Blessings

³ All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ. ⁴ Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. ⁵ God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure. ⁶ So we praise God for the glorious grace he has poured out on us who belong to his dear Son. ⁷ He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins. ⁸ He has showered his kindness on us, along with all wisdom and understanding. ⁹ God has now revealed to us his mysterious will regarding Christ—which is to fulfill his own good plan. ¹⁰ And this is the plan: At the right time he will bring everything together under the authority of Christ—everything in heaven and on earth. ¹¹ Furthermore, because we are united with Christ, we have received an inheritance from God, for he chose us in advance, and he makes everything work out according to his plan.

¹² God's purpose was that we Jews who were the first to trust in Christ would bring praise and glory to God. ¹³ And now you Gentiles have also heard the truth, the Good News that God saves you. And when you believed in Christ, he identified you as his own by giving you the Holy Spirit, whom he promised long ago. ¹⁴ The Spirit is God's guarantee that he will give us the inheritance he promised and that he has purchased us to be his own people. He did this so we would praise and glorify him. NLT

NOteS:

TIMOTHY

Scripture references:

Acts 16:1; 17:14–15; 18:5; 19:22; 20:4;

Romans 16:21; 1 Corinthians 4:17; 16:10;

Philippians 1:1; 2:9;

1 Thessalonians 1:1; 3:2; 2 Thessalonians 1:1; 1 Timothy; 2 Timothy

Date: A.D. 50

Name:

Timothy [TIM-uh-thee; "honored by God"]

Greatest Accomplishment: Timothy was a second-generation leader of the church, trained by the apostle Paul.

TIMOTHY'S ROLE IN SCRIPTURE

In the early church, itinerant ministers who traveled from place to place maintained communication between the apostles and local congregations and between congregations. Timothy frequently fulfilled this role as he went to various churches on missions for Paul.

Timothy is named with Paul in the salutation of four New Testament letters (Philippians, 1, 2 Thessalonians, and Philemon), but most of what we know about Timothy comes from the two letters of instruction and encouragement Paul wrote to him. Indeed, the letters to Timothy have had a more lasting impact on the church than did Timothy himself.

TIMOTHY'S LIFE AND TIMES

Paul enlisted Timothy as a companion on his second missionary journey. Luke noted that Timothy was the son of a Jewish woman and a Greek father. According to Jewish custom that traces Jewishness through the mother rather



than the father, this meant that Timothy was a Jew. Timothy became a believer at an early age, taught by his mother Eunice and grandmother Lois (2 Tim. 1:5). Timothy may have been in his early twenties when he began traveling with Paul, who would have been closer to fifty. Paul obviously valued Timothy, and referred to him as “my fellow worker” in Romans 16:21, and three times mentioned sending Timothy to churches as his representative (Phil. 2:9; 1 Thess. 3:2; 2 Thess. 1:7).

At the same time it is clear from the letters Paul wrote to Timothy that Timothy lacked the confidence and the powerful presence of the apostle. In urging Timothy to let “no one despise your youth” (1 Tim. 4:12), Paul seems to have had Timothy’s timidity in view, as well as the fact that in the first century wisdom and authority were associated with age. It must have been difficult for the relatively youthful Timothy to represent the apostle Paul and expect churches to respond to his authority.

In a real sense, anyone who is expected to step into the shoes of giants, as the second generation of Christian leaders surely was expected to do, faces a daunting task. Yet Timothy, Titus, and others like them maintained the integrity of the church, helped to preserve its deposit of truth, and continued the spread of the gospel throughout the world.

For a deeper insight into Timothy see the discussion of Paul as a mentor of young, future leaders, on page 180.

TIMOTHY: AN EXAMPLE FOR TODAY

Timothy can be a great encouragement for young men and women who appear to be thrust into leadership before they have matured sufficiently. God not only calls but also enables those whom he intends to serve him.

- Timothy reminds us of the importance of having a relationship with a mature believer who can mentor us in the faith.
- Timothy encourages us, for in Timothy we see that even the young can play an important part in carrying out God’s purposes in the church and the world.
- Timothy challenges us to provide young people with opportunities for truly significant ministry. When youth are denied opportunities to put their faith into practice, they will not catch a vision for what God is able to do in and through them. Young people may need guidance, but they *can* minister, as Timothy surely did.¹

PRISCILLA

Scripture references: Acts 18:1–26; Romans 16:3; 1 Corinthians 16:19; 2 Timothy 4:19



Date: About A.D. 50

Name: Priscilla [prih-SIL-uh: meaning unknown]

Main

contribution: With her husband Aquila she supported Paul’s missionary efforts and led a house-church in Ephesus.

PRISCILLA’S ROLE IN SCRIPTURE

Priscilla and her husband were Christian Jews who met Paul in Corinth. The couple had moved to Corinth when the Emperor Claudius expelled all Jews from Rome. Paul stayed with this couple, who apparently became Christians before meeting the apostle. When Paul left Corinth after a ministry of some two to three years, Priscilla and Aquila went with him to Ephesus. There they hosted a house-church in their home (1 Cor. 16:19), as they probably did in both Rome and Corinth.

Paul and Priscilla had both the trade of leather-working and Christian ministry in common.

Acts 18:24–28 gives us some insight into the ministry of this couple in telling the story of Apollos, an Alexandrian Jew. Apollos had heard the teaching of John the Baptist on the imminent appearance of the Messiah, and he had traveled to spread the message to Jewish groups in the cities of the Roman Empire. During Apollos’s presentation in

¹ Richards, L. (1999). *Every man in the Bible* (pp. 213–215). T. Nelson.



the synagogue Priscilla and Aquila remained silent. Then they “took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately” (Acts 18:26). This ministry of quiet instruction seems to have been one of the gifts of this couple.

EXPLORING PRISCILLA’S RELATIONSHIPS

Priscilla’s relationship with her husband. As a Jewish wife Priscilla would have been expected to be subject to her husband. Aquila would have been the one who studied God’s Law and who sat with the other men in the synagogue. Priscilla would have been expected to know the laws governing a kosher kitchen, but in all other matters she would have been expected to defer to her husband. In mentioning the couple, if both were mentioned at all, normal mode of speech would have identified Aquila “and his wife.”

But here in the New Testament not only is Priscilla identified by name, she is frequently mentioned first:

- Acts 18:2: “Aquila ... with his wife Priscilla”
- Acts 18:18: “Priscilla and Aquila”
- Acts 18:26: “Aquila and Priscilla”
- Rom. 16:3: “Priscilla and Aquila”
- 1 Cor. 16:19: “Aquila and Priscilla”
- 2 Tim. 4:19: “Prisca and Aquila”

It is interesting to compare this with the way Luke states the names of the missionary team of Paul and Barnabas. When the team sets out, Luke referred to Barnabas and Paul (Acts 13:2). But almost immediately Luke began to refer to Paul first and Barnabas second. Paul became the recognized leader of the team. The easy exchange of the names of Priscilla and Aquila makes it clear that Priscilla was a full partner with her husband in ministry. She did not dominate him, but neither did he dominate her.

Aquila and Priscilla’s marriage as portrayed here adds insight to the changed status of women in Christianity. Without “lowering” the man, the new faith exalted the woman, making them partners in ministry as well as in life.

Priscilla’s relationship with God. As a Jewess Priscilla would have had no guarantee of direct access to the Lord. As a Christian she not only had immediate access to God through Christ, but she was also given the privilege of serving Him. Hosting a house-church, supporting Paul’s ministry, teaching and instructing, were all privileges that Priscilla enjoyed as a believer in Jesus. We can measure the closeness of her relationship to God by the commitment she and her husband showed to sharing the gospel message. They even moved their business from city to city to be with Paul and support his ministry.

Priscilla’s relationship with Paul. Priscilla and Aquila were close to Paul. They shared a Jewish heritage and Christian faith. They also shared the trade of leatherworking. When Paul first came to Corinth, he plied this trade in the couple’s shop. The friendship they developed was deep and lasting. Aquila and Priscilla even accompanied Paul when he left Corinth to go to Ephesus. Paul not only trained the couple in ministry, but they kept in touch while apart. When together Paul added their names to the greetings he sent to Corinth. Later when Paul wrote letters to churches in cities where the couple lived, he was sure to say, “Greet Priscilla and Aquila.” Priscilla, with her husband, was surely one of Paul’s “fellow workers in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 16:3).

Priscilla’s relationship with other believers. In writing to Corinth from Ephesus, Paul sent greetings from the couple, calling them “my fellow workers in Christ” (Rom. 16:3). Priscilla and her husband welcomed fellow believers into their home and made it available for Christian gatherings.

The experience with Apollos, however, gives the most insight into the sensitivity the couple brought to ministry. Rather than correct Apollos publicly, Priscilla and Aquila sensed the faith that was in his heart. They took him aside privately to share the good news that the One of whom John spoke had indeed come. Guided by this caring couple, Apollos responded to the gospel and later “greatly helped those who had believed through grace; for he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ” (Acts 18:27, 28).

PRISCILLA: A CLOSE-UP

Genesis tells us that when God created woman, He determined to make a “help meet” for Adam. That phrase emphasizes mutuality. Like Adam, Eve shared those unique qualities of personhood that God granted to human beings. As a helper corresponding to Adam, Eve had the potential of being a true partner in his life here on earth.

In the case of other women in the New Testament, such as Mary of Bethany, we saw how Christianity transformed woman’s traditional role. In Priscilla and Aquila we see the transformation of marriage and the restoration of God’s original intent that married couples should be partners in all things in their life.

Priscilla is mentioned first in some passages, and some Bible students have concluded that Priscilla’s gifts made her the more significant of the two. They suggest that Paul mentioned Priscilla first because she, rather than Aquila,



was the “leader” in the relationship. Yet the text guards against this interpretation. That Priscilla is named first in three passages and Aquila is also named first in three indicates that these two truly were *equal* partners. Neither was the leader; neither was the follower. These two were one, in the sense that the original text implies: these two shared in common all of their life here on earth. They were partners in life and in ministry.

PRISCILLA: AN EXAMPLE FOR TODAY

- Priscilla worked closely with Paul and earned his respect. If we want a significant role in our church, we need to serve with present leaders so they can know us and recognize our spiritual gifts.
- Husband-and-wife relationships may be difficult, but Priscilla’s relationship with Aquila reminds us of an important principle. Partnership is not achieved by bringing a husband down but by lifting the wife up. In living together as one in all things, Priscilla and Aquila stand as an example of what Christian marriages are to be—and can be—through Christ.²

3. Resurrected with Christ

2:1–10

I sometimes wonder if good and thoughtful people have ever been more depressed about the human predicament than they are today. Of course every age is bound to have a blurred vision of its own problems, because it is too close to them to get them into focus. And every generation breeds new prophets of doom. Nevertheless, the media enable us to grasp the worldwide extent of contemporary evil, and it is this which makes the modern scene look so dark. It is partly the escalating economic problem (population growth, the spoliation of natural resources, inflation, unemployment, hunger), partly the spread of social conflict (racism, tribalism, the class struggle, disintegrating family life) and partly the absence of accepted moral guidelines (leading to violence, dishonesty and sexual promiscuity). Man seems incapable of managing his own affairs or of creating a just, free, humane and tranquil society. For man himself is askew.

Against the sombre background of our world today Ephesians 2:1–10 stands out in striking relevance. Paul first plumbs the depths of pessimism about man, and then rises to the heights of optimism about God. It is this combination of pessimism and optimism, of despair and faith, which constitutes the refreshing realism of the Bible. For what Paul does in this passage is to paint a vivid contrast between what man is by nature and what he can become by grace.

And you he made alive, when you were dead through the trespasses and sins² 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.³ Among these we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of body and mind, and so we were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.⁴ But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us,⁵ even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),⁶ and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,⁷ that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.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 because of works, lest any man should boast.

² Richards, S. P., & Richards, L. (1999). [*Every woman in the Bible*](#) (pp. 244–247). T. Nelson Publishers.



¹⁰For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

It is important to set this paragraph in its context. We have been considering Paul's prayer (1:15–23) that his readers' inward eyes might be enlightened by the Holy Spirit to know the implications of God's call to them, the wealth of his inheritance which awaits them in heaven and above all the surpassing greatness of his power which is available for them meanwhile. Of this power God has given a supreme historical demonstration by raising Christ from the dead and exalting him over all the powers of evil. But he has given a further demonstration of it by raising and exalting us with Christ, and so delivering us from the bondage of death and evil. This paragraph, then, is really a part of Paul's prayer that they (and we) might know how powerful God is. Its first few words emphasize this: 'And you being dead ...' In the Greek sentence there is no main verb portraying God's action until verse 5 ('He made us alive with Christ'); the English versions bring it forward to verse 1 simply in order to ease the awkward suspense of waiting for it so long. In any case the sequence of thought is clear: 'Jesus Christ was dead, but God raised and exalted him. And you also were dead, but God raised and exalted you with Christ.'

1. Man by nature, or the human condition (verses 1–3)

Before we look in detail at this devastating description of the human condition apart from God, we need to be clear that it is a description of everybody. Paul is not giving us a portrait of some particularly decadent tribe or degraded segment of society, or even of the extremely corrupt paganism of his own day. No, this is the biblical diagnosis of fallen man in fallen society everywhere. True, Paul begins with an emphatic *you*, indicating in the first place his Gentile readers in Asia Minor, but he quickly goes on to write (verse 3a) that *we all once lived* in the same way (thus adding himself and his fellow Jews), and he concludes with a reference to *the rest of mankind* (verse 3b). Here then is the apostle's estimate of everyman without God, of the universal human condition. It is a condensation into three verses of the first three chapters of Romans, in which he argues his case for the sin and guilt first of pagans, then of Jews, and so of all mankind. Here he singles out three appalling truths about unredeemed human beings, which included ourselves until God had mercy on us.

a. *We were dead*

And you he made alive, when you were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once walked (verses 1–2a). The death to which Paul refers is not a figure of speech, as in the parable of the Prodigal Son, 'This my son was dead'; it is a factual statement of everybody's spiritual condition outside Christ. And it is traced to their *trespasses and sins*. These two words seem to have been carefully chosen to give a comprehensive account of human evil. A 'trespass' (*paraptōma*) is a false step, involving either the crossing of a known boundary or a deviation from the right path. A 'sin' (*hamartia*), however, means rather a missing of the mark, a falling short of a standard. Together the two words cover the positive and negative, or active and passive, aspects of human wrongdoing, that is to say, our sins of commission and of omission. Before God we are both rebels and failures. As a result, we are 'dead' or 'alienated from the life of God'



(4:18). For true life, 'eternal life', is fellowship with the living God, and spiritual death is the separation from him which sin inevitably brings: 'Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you so that he does not hear.'

This biblical statement about the 'deadness' of non-Christian people raises problems for many because it does not seem to square with the facts of everyday experience. Lots of people who make no Christian profession whatever, who even openly repudiate Jesus Christ, appear to be very much alive. One has the vigorous body of an athlete, another the lively mind of a scholar, a third the vivacious personality of a filmstar. Are we to say that such people, if Christ has not saved them, are dead? Yes, indeed, we must and do say this very thing. For in the sphere which matters supremely (which is neither the body, nor the mind, nor the personality, but the soul) they have no life. And you can tell it. They are blind to the glory of Jesus Christ, and deaf to the voice of the Holy Spirit. They have no love for God, no sensitive awareness of his personal reality, no leaping of their spirit towards him in the cry, 'Abba, Father', no longing for fellowship with his people. They are as unresponsive to him as a corpse. So we should not hesitate to affirm that a life without God (however physically fit and mentally alert the person may be) is a living death, and that those who live it are dead even while they are living. To affirm this paradox is to become aware of the basic tragedy of fallen human existence. It is that people who were created by God and for God should now be living without God. Indeed, that was our condition until the Good Shepherd found us.

b. We were enslaved

Paul is not content to say simply that we *once walked* in *trespasses and sins*. The expression is a Hebraism, indicating our former behaviour or lifestyle. But a 'walk' suggests (at least to western minds) a pleasant promenade in the countryside, with leisured freedom to enjoy the beauties of our surroundings. Very different, however, was our former 'walk in trespasses and sins'. There was no true freedom there, but rather a fearful bondage to forces over which we had no control. What were they? If behind death lies sin, what lies behind sin that we are held in such captivity? Paul's answer, when put into later ecclesiastical terminology, is 'the world, the flesh and the devil'. For he refers to these three influences as controlling and directing our former pre-Christian existence.

First, he describes us as *following the course of this world*. The Greek phrase is 'according the age of this world'. It brings together the two concepts of 'this age' of evil and darkness (in contrast to 'the age to come' which Jesus introduced) and of 'this world', society organized without reference to God or—as we might say—'secularism' (in contrast to God's kingdom, which is his new society under his rule). So both words 'age' and 'world' express a whole social value-system which is alien to God. It permeates, indeed dominates, non-Christian society and holds people in captivity. Wherever human beings are being dehumanized—by political oppression or bureaucratic tyranny, by an outlook that is secular (repudiating God), amoral (repudiating absolutes) or materialistic (glorifying the consumer market), by poverty, hunger or unemployment, by racial discrimination, or by any form of injustice—there we can detect the sub-human values of 'this age' and 'this world'. Their influence is pervasive. People tend not to have a mind of their own, but to surrender to the pop-culture of television and the glossy



magazines. It is a cultural bondage. We were all the same until Jesus liberated us. We 'drifted along the stream of this world's ideas of living' (JBP).

Our second captivity was to the devil, who is here named *the prince of the power of the air* or (AG) 'the ruler of the kingdom of the air'. The word for 'air' could be translated 'foggy atmosphere', indicating the darkness which the devil prefers to light. But the whole phrase need mean no more than that he has command of those 'principalities and powers' already mentioned, who operate in the unseen world. It is unfashionable nowadays in the church (even while satanism flourishes outside it) to believe either in a personal devil or in personal demonic intelligences under his command. But there is no obvious reason why church fashion should be the director of theology, whereas the plain teaching of Jesus and his apostles (not to mention the church of the subsequent centuries) endorsed their malevolent existence.

A further phrase is *the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience*. Since the words *the spirit* are in the genitive, they are not in apposition to *the prince* (accusative). We must rather understand that 'the ruler of the kingdom of the air' is also 'the ruler of the spirit which works in disobedient people'. 'Spirit' then becomes an impersonal force or mood which is actively at work in non-Christian people. Since Scripture identifies the devil not only as the source of temptations to sin, but also as a 'lion' and a 'murderer', we may safely trace all evil, error and violence back to him in the end. When he and the mood he inspires are said to be at work in human beings, the verb (*energeō*) is the same as that used of God's power (1:20) which raised Jesus from the dead. Only that divine energy or action could have rescued us from the devil.

The third influence which holds us in bondage is *the passions of our flesh* (verse 3a), where 'flesh' means not the living fabric which covers our bony skeleton but our fallen, self-centred human nature. Its 'passions' are further defined as *the desires of body and mind*. This addition is particularly important because it shows the error of equating 'the passions of the flesh' with what are popularly called 'the sins of the flesh'. Two clarifications are needed. First, there is nothing wrong with natural bodily desires, whether for food, sleep or sex. For God has made the human body that way. It is only when the appetite for food becomes gluttony, for sleep sloth and for sex lust, that natural desires have been perverted into sinful desires. Secondly, 'the passions of the flesh' include the wrong desires of the *mind* as well as of the *body*, namely such sins as intellectual pride, false ambition, rejection of known truth, and malicious or vengeful thoughts. Indeed, according to Paul's exposition in Philippians 3:3–6, 'the flesh' covers all forms of self-confidence, even pride of ancestry, parentage, race, religion and righteousness. Wherever 'self' rears its ugly head against God or man, there is 'the flesh'. As F. F. Bruce justly comments, it 'can manifest itself in respectable forms as well as in the disreputable pursuits of first-century paganism'. And, however respectable the public guise (or disguise) it adopts, our ingrained self-centredness is a horrible bondage.

So then, before Jesus Christ set us free, we were subject to oppressive influences from both within and without. Outside was 'the world' (the prevailing secular culture); inside was 'the flesh' (our fallen nature twisted with self-centredness); and beyond both, actively working through both, was that evil spirit, the devil, 'the ruler of the kingdom of darkness', who held us in captivity. Not that we can now conveniently shift all the blame for our slavery on to 'the world, the flesh and the devil', and accept no responsibility for it ourselves. On the contrary, it is significant that in these verses 'you' and 'we' are not identified with these forces but distinguished from them,



although enslaved by them. We ourselves, however, are termed *sons of disobedience* (verse 2b), that is, 'God's rebel subjects' (NEB). We had rebelled, knowingly and voluntarily, against the loving authority of God and so had fallen under the dominion of Satan.

c. *We were condemned*

Paul has not yet completed his description of our pre-Christian state. He has one more unpleasant truth to tell us about ourselves. Not only were we dead and enslaved, he says, but we were also condemned: *we were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind* (verse 3b). I doubt if there is an expression in Ephesians which has provoked more hostility than this. Some commentators make little or no attempt to understand, let alone defend, it; they dismiss it as untenable today. The causes of their hostility are three. They concern the words 'wrath', 'children' and 'by nature'. We must now consider carefully what Paul means by them, and try to clear them from misconception.

First, the wrath of God. God's wrath is not like man's. It is not bad temper, so that he may fly off the handle at any moment. It is neither spite, nor malice, nor animosity, nor revenge. It is never arbitrary, since it is the divine reaction to only one situation, namely evil. Therefore it is entirely predictable, and it is never subject to mood, whim, or caprice. Further, it is not the impersonal outworking of retribution in society, 'an inevitable process of cause and effect in a moral universe', whether through social disintegration or through the administration of justice by the law courts or in some other way, as C. H. Dodd argued in his famous Moffatt commentary on the letter to the Romans. The fact that 'wrath' (*orgē*) or 'the wrath' (*hē orgē*) occurs without the addition of the words 'of God', does not make his wrath impersonal any more than his grace becomes impersonal when the words 'of God' are omitted as in verses 5 and 8 of this chapter ('by grace you have been saved'). No, the wrath that judges and the grace that saves are both personal. They are the wrath and the grace of God.

So what is his wrath if it is neither an arbitrary reaction nor an impersonal process? It is God's personal, righteous, constant hostility to evil, his settled refusal to compromise with it, and his resolve instead to condemn it. Further, his wrath is not incompatible with his love. The contrast between verses 3 and 4 is notable: *we were by nature children of wrath ... But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us ...* Thus Paul moves from the wrath of God to the mercy and love of God without any sense of embarrassment or anomaly. He is able to hold them together in his mind because he believed that they were held together in God's character. We need, I think, to be more grateful to God for his wrath, and to worship him that because his righteousness is perfect he always reacts to evil in the same unchanging, predictable, uncompromising way. Without his moral constancy we could enjoy no peace.

The second problem people find is in the phrase *children of wrath*. For the words conjure up a picture of little children, even newborn babies, as under God's wrath, and understandably people do not like what they see in their minds. But it is safe to say that there is no allusion here to little children. The expression is another Hebraism, like 'sons of disobedience' in verse 2, and refers to people of all ages. NEB helpfully substitutes the statement: 'we lay under the dreadful judgment of God'.



The third problem is in the adverbial clause *by nature*. In what sense is it 'by nature' that we were the objects of God's wrath and judgment? To begin with, we can surely all agree that Paul draws a deliberate contrast between what we were 'by nature' (*phusei*, verse 3) and what we have become 'by grace' (*chariti*, verse 5). It is a contrast between the past and the present, between what we were when left to ourselves and what we have become because God intervened on our behalf, and so between judgment and salvation: 'By nature we were under God's wrath, by grace we have been saved.' That much is clear, and uncontroversial.

But *phusei*, 'by nature', seems to describe more than our 'natural' condition, when left to ourselves. It seems also to point to the origin of our condition 'as members of a fallen race', and so to raise difficult questions about our genetic inheritance, and therefore about our moral responsibility. Is Paul's phrase shorthand for something longer such as that by birth we have a tendency to sin, that we therefore do sin, and that our sin brings us under the judgment of God? Or is he saying that our very being as humans is from birth under God's judgment? I have not found a stronger repudiation of the latter notion than the following words of R. W. Dale. Without doubt he speaks for many: 'This phrase is sometimes quoted as though it were intended to affirm the dreadful doctrine that by our mere birth we incur the divine anger and that apart from any voluntary wrongdoing we are under the divine curse. This appalling theory receives no sanction from either Old Testament or New.'⁶ Yet R. W. Dale knew that the very doctrine he so vigorously repudiated is taught by the great reformed confessions like the Thirty-Nine Articles and the Westminster Confession. Here is Anglican Article 9: 'Original sin standeth not in the following of Adam (that is, in imitating him) ... but it is the fault and corruption of the nature of every man that naturally is ingendered of the offspring of Adam; whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusteth always contrary to the spirit; and therefore in every person born into this world, it deserveth God's wrath and damnation ...' In other words, our inherited human nature itself deserves God's wrath and judgment. This is what Paul seems to be teaching here; how can we understand him?

Probably the best commentary is his own as it is found in Romans. Just as these verses are a condensed version of Romans 1–3, so the expression 'by nature children of wrath' is a summary of Romans 5:12–14. His argument there that 'death spread to all men because all men sinned' is not that all inherited a sinful nature which led them to sin and so to die, but that 'all men sinned' in and with Adam. The Old Testament has a strong sense of the solidarity of the human race. It speaks of the next generation as being already 'in the loins' of the present generation, a truth which modern genetics may be said to underline. Paul is saying, then, that we cannot make Adam our scapegoat and blame him for our sin, guilt and condemnation. For we were ourselves in Adam. It may truly be said that we sinned in Adam, and that in and with him we incurred guilt and died. Is it not in this sense that we may be described as 'by nature' sinners and subject to God's just judgment? The great majority of Protestant theologians have always wanted to add (even if tentatively) that they believe God's grace and Christ's atonement cover the years of childhood before the age of responsibility, and those in the reformed tradition have drawn attention to the biblical evidence that children with Christian parents are born within the covenant. Yet even these important qualifications do not alter the facts of our inherited sin and guilt, or of the judgment we deserve.



Death, slavery and condemnation: these are the three concepts which Paul brings together in order to portray our lost human condition. Is it too pessimistic? Well, we must agree (as he would have done) that this is not the whole truth about mankind. He says nothing here about 'the image of God', in which human beings were originally created and which—now grievously damaged—they retain, although he certainly believes it and speaks of our redemption in terms of a re-creation in God's image (verse 10 and 4:24). He says nothing either about different degrees of human depravity, although again he would have accepted this. For the biblical doctrine of 'total depravity' means neither that all humans are equally depraved, nor that nobody is capable of any good, but rather that no part of any human person (mind, emotions, conscience, will, etc.) has remained untainted by the fall. Nevertheless, despite this necessary qualification which affirms the continuing dignity of man on account of the divine image which he has not altogether lost, Paul's diagnosis remains. Outside Christ man is dead because of trespasses and sins, enslaved by the world, the flesh and the devil, and condemned under the wrath of God.

It is a failure to recognize this gravity of the human condition which explains people's naive faith in superficial remedies. Universal education is highly desirable. So are just laws administered with justice. Both are pleasing to God who is the Creator and righteous Judge of all mankind. But neither education nor legislation can rescue human beings from spiritual death, captivity or condemnation. A radical disease requires a radical remedy. We shall not on that account give up the quest either for better education or for a more just society. But we shall add to these things a new dimension to which non-Christians are strangers, namely that of evangelism. For God has entrusted to us a message of good news which offers life to the dead, release to the captives and forgiveness to the condemned.

2. Man by grace, or the divine compassion (4–10)

Verse 4 begins with a mighty adversative: *But God ...* These two monosyllables set against the desperate condition of fallen mankind the gracious initiative and sovereign action of God. We were the objects of his wrath, *but God, out of the great love with which he loved us* had mercy upon us. We were dead, and dead men do not rise, *but God* made us alive with Christ. We were slaves, in a situation of dishonour and powerlessness, *but God* has raised us with Christ and set us at his own right hand, in a position of honour and power. Thus God has taken action to reverse our condition in sin. It is essential to hold both parts of this contrast together, namely what we are by nature and what we are by grace, the human condition and the divine compassion, God's wrath and God's love. Christians are sometimes criticized for being morbidly preoccupied with their sin and guilt. The criticism is not fair when we are facing the facts about ourselves (for it is never unhealthy to look reality in the face), but only when we fail to go on to glory in God's mercy and grace.

We need now to enquire exactly what God has done, and also why he has done it.

a. *What God has done*

In one word he has *saved* us. In both verse 5 and verse 8 the same assertion is made: *By grace you have been saved*. Some commentators have even suggested that verses 4–10 are a kind of



hymn celebrating the glories of salvation and of *sola gratia*, which is twice interrupted by the liturgical acclamation 'By grace you have been saved'. 'Saved' is a perfect participle (*sesōsmenoi*). It emphasizes the abiding consequences of God's saving action in the past, as if Paul should say, 'You are people who have been saved and remain for ever saved.' Many today, however, are saying that they find traditional salvation language meaningless. So we need to probe into what Paul writes.

In fact he coins three verbs, which take up what God did to Christ and then (by the addition of the prefix *syn*, 'together with') link us to Christ in these events. Thus first, God *made us alive together with Christ* (verse 5), next he *raised us up with him* (verse 6a), and thirdly he *made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus* (verse 6b). These verbs ('made alive', 'raised' and 'made to sit') refer to the three successive historical events in the saving career of Jesus, which are normally called the resurrection, the ascension and the session. We declare our belief in them when we say the Creed: 'The third day he rose again from the dead, he ascended into heaven, and he sits at the right hand of God the Father.' What excites our amazement, however, is that now Paul is not writing about Christ but about us. He is affirming not that God quickened, raised and seated Christ, but that he quickened, raised and seated us with Christ.

Fundamental to New Testament Christianity is this concept of the union of God's people with Christ. What constitutes the distinctness of the members of God's new society? Not just that they admire and even worship Jesus, not just that they assent to the dogmas of the church, not even that they live by certain moral standards. No, what makes them distinctive is their new solidarity as a people who are 'in Christ'. By virtue of their union with Christ they have actually shared in his resurrection, ascension and session. In the 'heavenly places', the unseen world of spiritual reality, in which the principalities and powers operate (3:10; 6:12) and in which Christ reigns supreme (1:20), there God has blessed his people in Christ (1:3), and there he has seated them with Christ (2:6). For if we are seated with Christ in the heavenlies, there can be no doubt what we are sitting on: thrones! Moreover, this talk about solidarity with Christ in his resurrection and exaltation is not a piece of meaningless Christian mysticism. It bears witness to a living experience, that Christ has given us on the one hand a new life (with a sensitive awareness of the reality of God, and a love for him and for his people) and on the other a new victory (with evil increasingly under our feet). We were dead, but have been made spiritually alive and alert. We were in captivity, but have been enthroned.

b. Why God did it

Paul goes beyond a description of God's saving action; he gives us some understanding of his motivation. Indeed the major emphasis of this whole paragraph is that what prompted God to act on our behalf was not something in us (some supposed merit) but something in himself (his own unmerited favour). Paul assembles four words to express the origins of God's saving initiative. He writes of God's 'mercy' (*God who is rich in mercy*, verse 4a), of God's 'love' (*out of the great love with which he loved us*, verse 4b), of God's 'grace' (*by grace you have been saved*, verses 5 and 8) and of God's 'kindness' (*his ... kindness toward us in Christ Jesus*, verse 7). We were dead, and so helpless to save ourselves: only 'mercy' could reach the helpless, for 'mercy' is love for the down and out. We were under God's wrath: only 'love' could triumph over wrath.



We deserved nothing at God's hand but judgment, on account of our trespasses and sins: only 'grace' could rescue us from our deserts, for grace is undeserved favour. Why then did God act? Out of his sheer mercy, love, grace and kindness.

More than that. He saved us in order *that in the coming age he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace* (verse 7). In raising and exalting Christ he demonstrated 'the immeasurable greatness of his power' (1:19–20); but in raising and exalting us he displayed also 'the immeasurable riches of his grace', and will continue to do so throughout eternity. For as living evidences of his kindness we shall point people away and beyond ourselves to him to whom we owe our salvation.

Towards the end of my time as a theological student at Ridley Hall, Cambridge, the Rev. Paul Gibson retired as Principal, and a portrait of him was unveiled. In expressing his thanks, he paid a well-deserved compliment to the artist. He said that in future he believed people looking at the picture would ask not 'Who is that man?' but rather 'Who painted that portrait?' Now in our case God has displayed more than skill. A patient after a major operation is a living testimony to his surgeon's skill, and a condemned man after a reprieve to his sovereign's mercy. We are both—exhibits of God's skill and trophies of his grace.

Verses 8–10 elaborate on God's grace, and explain why in the coming ages God will show his grace and kindness towards us in Christ Jesus. It is because of our salvation. God will show his grace towards us because he has saved us by his grace: *For by grace you have been saved through faith*. Here are three foundation words of the Christian good news—salvation, grace and faith. 'Salvation' is more than forgiveness. It is deliverance from the death, slavery and wrath described in verses 1–3. Indeed, it includes the totality of our new life in Christ, together with whom we have been made alive, exalted and seated in the heavenly realm. 'Grace' is God's free and undeserved mercy towards us, and 'faith' is the humble trust with which we receive it for ourselves.

In order to enforce this positive statement that we have been saved only by God's grace through trust in Christ, Paul adds two balancing negatives: first *and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God* (verse 8b) and secondly *not because of works, lest any man should boast*. Some commentators have taken the word 'this' in the former of these two negatives to refer to faith (*i.e.* 'you were saved ... through faith, and even this faith by which you were saved is God's gift'). Theologically, this is true. We must never think of salvation as a kind of transaction between God and us in which he contributes grace and we contribute faith. For we were dead, and had to be quickened before we could believe. No, Christ's apostles clearly teach elsewhere that saving faith too is God's gracious gift. Nevertheless, Paul is not directly affirming this here because 'this' (*touto*) is neuter, whereas 'faith' is a feminine noun. We must therefore take 'this' as referring to the whole previous sentence: 'By God's grace you are people who have been saved through faith, and this whole event and experience is ... God's free gift to you.' It is neither your achievement (*not your own doing*) nor a reward for any of your deeds of religion or philanthropy (*not because of works*). Since, therefore, there is no room for human merit, there is no room for human boasting either. Salvation is God's gift, *lest any man should boast*. Christians are always uncomfortable in the presence of pride, for they sense its incongruity. We shall not be able to strut round heaven like peacocks. Heaven will be filled with the exploits of Christ and the praises



of God. There will indeed be display in heaven. Not self-display, however, but rather a display of the incomparable wealth of God's grace, mercy and kindness through Jesus Christ.

One might imagine that by now Paul has made his point and is ready to pass on to another topic. But no, he is determined not to leave his theme until he has expounded it beyond any possibility of misunderstanding. So he adds one more positive, decisive and glorious affirmation (verse 10): *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.* The first and emphatic word of the sentence is *autou*, 'his'. Paul has already declared that salvation is not our achievement. Now he does not just state the opposite, namely that it is God's achievement. He goes further. He leaves behind any thought of salvation as an 'it' or a 'this' outside and apart from ourselves. He is concerned about us, living human beings, who were dead. What are we now? We are God's *workmanship* (*poiēma*, 'his work of art, his masterpiece') *created* (*ktisthentes*) *in Christ Jesus*. Both Greek words speak of creation. So far Paul has described salvation in terms of a resurrection from the dead, a liberation from slavery and a rescue from condemnation. And each declares that the work is God's, for dead people cannot bring themselves to life again, nor can captive and condemned people free themselves. But now he puts the matter beyond even the slightest shadow of doubt. Salvation is creation, re-creation, new creation. And creation language is nonsense unless there is a Creator; self-creation is a patent contradiction in terms. 'You see then', writes Calvin, 'that this word "create" is enough to stop the mouths and put away the cackling of such as boast of having any merit. For when they say so, they presuppose that they were their own creators.'

Not that we remain passive and inert. Some critics have always thought this, and supposed that Paul's doctrine of salvation by grace alone actually encourages us to continue in sin. They are entirely mistaken. Good works are indispensable to salvation—not as its ground or means, however, but as its consequence and evidence. We are not saved *because of works* (verses 8–9), but we are created in Christ Jesus *for good works* (verse 10), *good works which God prepared beforehand*, which he designed in a past eternity and for which he has fashioned us, so that we should continuously *walk in them*.

Thus the paragraph ends as it began with our human 'walk', a Hebrew idiom for our manner of life. Formerly we walked in *trespasses and sins* in which the devil had trapped us; now we walk in *good works* which God has eternally planned for us to do. The contrast is complete. It is a contrast between two lifestyles (evil and good), and behind them two masters (the devil and God). What could possibly have effected such a change? Just this: a new creation by the grace and power of God. The key expressions of the paragraph are surely *but God* (verse 4) and *by grace* (verses 5, 8).

Paul was under no illusions about the degradation of mankind. He refused to whitewash the situation, for this might have led him to propose superficial solutions. Instead, he began this paragraph with a faithful portrayal of man as subject to three terrible powers, namely 'sin', 'death' and 'wrath'. Yet he refused also to despair, because he believed in God. True, the only hope for dead people lies in a resurrection. But then the living God is the God of resurrection. He is even more than that: he is the God of creation. Both metaphors indicate the indispensable necessity of divine grace. For resurrection is out of death, and creation is out of nothing. That is the true meaning of 'salvation'.



1:3–14

The opening section of Ephesians (1:3–2:10), which describes the new life God has given us in Christ, divides itself naturally into two halves, the first consisting of praise and the second of prayer. In the ‘praise’ half Paul blesses God that he has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing (1:3–14), while in the ‘prayer’ half he asks that God will open our eyes to grasp the fullness of this blessing (1:15–2:10). We shall be concerned in this chapter with the apostle’s expression of praise.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,⁴ even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.⁵ He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace⁸ which he lavished upon us.⁹ For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

¹¹ In him, according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will,¹² we who first hoped in Christ have been destined and appointed to live for the praise of his glory.¹³ In him you also, who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit,¹⁴ which is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

In the original Greek these twelve verses constitute a single complex sentence.

As Paul dictates, his speech pours out of his mouth in a continuous cascade. He neither pauses for breath, nor punctuates his words with full stops. Commentators have searched for metaphors vivid enough to convey the impact of this opening outburst of adoration. ‘We enter this epistle through a magnificent gateway’, writes Findlay. It is ‘a golden chain’ of many links,² or ‘a kaleidoscope of dazzling lights and shifting colours’. William Hendriksen likens it to ‘a snowball tumbling down a hill, picking up volume as it descends’,⁴ and E. K. Simpson—less felicitously perhaps—to ‘some long-winded racehorse ... careering onward at full speed.’ More romantic is John Mackay’s musical simile: ‘This rhapsodic adoration is comparable to the overture of an opera which contains the successive melodies that are to follow’.⁶ And Armitage Robinson suggests that it is ‘like the preliminary flight of the eagle, rising and wheeling round, as though for a while uncertain what direction in his boundless freedom he shall take’.



A gateway, a golden chain, a kaleidoscope, a snowball, a racehorse, an operatic overture and the flight of an eagle: all these metaphors in their different ways describe the impression of colour, movement and grandeur which the sentence makes on the reader's mind.

The whole paragraph is a paean of praise, a doxology, or indeed a 'eulogy', for that is the word Paul uses. He begins by blessing God for blessing us with every conceivable blessing. More particularly, he makes what seems to be a deliberate reference to the Trinity. For the origin of the blessing is *the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*, who is also 'our Father' (verse 2); its sphere is God the Son, for it is *in Christ*, by virtue of our union with him, that God has blessed us; and its nature is spiritual, *every spiritual blessing*, a phrase which may well mean 'every blessing of the Holy Spirit', who as the divine executive applies the work of Christ to our hearts. As Charles Hodge put it, 'These blessings are *spiritual* not merely because they pertain to the soul, but because derived from the Holy Spirit, whose presence and influence are the great blessing purchased by Christ'.

It is partly this trinitarian reference which has made some scholars comment on what they call the 'liturgical' feel of the paragraph. It is a 'great benediction', writes Markus Barth, 'an exclamation of praise and prayer, resembling those pronounced in Jewish synagogues and homes', and it 'may ... have come to Paul from the living stream of oral, probably liturgical, Christian tradition'. Some commentators have gone further and detected in the paragraph a trinitarian structure like that of the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds—the Father electing (verses 4–6), the Son redeeming (verses 7–12) and the Spirit sealing (verses 13–14), each stanza concluding with the refrain 'to the praise of his glory' (verses 6, 12, 14). Although this is rather too neat to be probable, yet the trinitarian content of the paragraph remains obvious.

First, God the Father is the source or origin of every blessing which we enjoy. His initiative is set forth plainly, for he is himself the subject of almost every main verb in these verses. It is he who 'has blessed us' (verse 3), who 'chose us' (verse 4) and 'destined us ... to be his sons' (verse 5), who 'freely bestowed on us' his grace (verse 6, literally 'graced us with his grace'), indeed 'lavished' his grace upon us (verse 8), who also 'made known to us' his will and purpose which he 'set forth in Christ ... to unite all things' (verses 9–10). Further, he 'accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will' (verse 11). Turning from the verbs to the nouns, Paul refers in quick succession to God's love and grace, to his will, his purpose and his plan. Thus the whole paragraph is full of God the Father who has set his love and poured his grace upon us, and who is working out his eternal plan.

Secondly, the sphere within which the divine blessing is bestowed and received is the Lord Jesus Christ. In the first fourteen verses of the Ephesian letter Jesus Christ is mentioned either by name or title ('Christ', 'Jesus Christ', 'Christ Jesus', 'the Lord Jesus Christ', 'the Beloved') or by pronoun or possessive ('he', 'him', 'his') no fewer than fifteen times. And the phrase 'in Christ' or 'in him' occurs eleven times. Already in the first verse the apostle has described Christians as 'saints' and 'believers' who are 'in Christ Jesus'. Now in the rest of the paragraph he draws out the implications of this pregnant expression which denotes a new principle of human solidarity. Formerly we were 'in Adam', belonging to the old fallen humanity; now we are 'in Christ', belonging to the new redeemed humanity. It is 'in Christ' that God has blessed us in time and chosen us in eternity (verses 3–4). It is 'in the Beloved' that he has bestowed on us his grace, so that 'in him' we have redemption or forgiveness (verses 6–7). It is 'in him' that the first Jewish



believers became God's people (verses 11–12) and 'in him' also that Gentile believers were sealed as belonging to God (verses 13–14). It is also 'in Christ' that God has set forth his plan to unite all things 'in him' or under his headship (verses 9–10). Once we Gentiles were 'separated from Christ' and therefore hopeless and godless (2:12) but now 'in Christ' we have been overwhelmed with blessing.

Thirdly, there is the Holy Spirit. Although in this paragraph he is mentioned by name only in verses 13 and 14, his activity is assumed throughout, and his varied work is described in later chapters. What Paul stresses here is that the blessing God gives us in Christ is *spiritual*. A contrast is probably intended with Old Testament days when God's promised blessings were largely material. Perhaps the most striking example is to be found in Deuteronomy 28:1–14, where the blessings promised to an obedient Israel were many children, a good harvest, an abundance of cattle and sheep, and leadership among the nations. It is true Jesus also promised his followers some material blessings. For he forbade them to be anxious about food, drink and clothing and assured them that their heavenly Father would supply their needs if they put the concerns of his rule and righteousness first. Nevertheless, the distinctive blessings of the new covenant are spiritual, not material; for example, God's law written in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, a personal knowledge of God, and the forgiveness of our sins.

In order to put this beyond doubt Paul adds to his adjective 'spiritual' the clause *in the heavenly places*, or better—since no geographical location is implied—'in the heavenlies' (*en tois epouraniois*). This is the first occasion on which he uses this remarkable expression, which occurs five times in Ephesians and nowhere else in his letters. What does it mean? The word 'heaven' is used in Scripture in several different senses. Ancient authors used to distinguish between 'the heaven of nature' (the sky), 'the heaven of grace' (eternal life already received and enjoyed by God's people on earth) and 'the heaven of glory' (the final state of the redeemed). But 'the heavenlies' is to be understood differently from all these. It is neither sky, nor grace, nor glory, nor any literal spatial abode, but rather the unseen world of spiritual reality. The five uses of the expression in Ephesians indicate that 'the heavenlies' are the sphere in which the 'principalities and powers' continue to operate (3:10; 6:12), in which Christ reigns supreme and his people reign with him (1:20; 2:6), and in which therefore God blesses us with every spiritual blessing in Christ (1:3).

The teaching of verse 3 is thus seen to be extremely important. Christians are trinitarians. We believe in one God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. We affirm with gratitude and joy that God has blessed us (*eulogēsas*, an aorist tense) in Christ with every spiritual blessing. That is, every blessing of the Holy Spirit has been given us by the Father if we are in the Son. No blessing has been withheld from us. Of course we still have to grow into maturity in Christ, and be transformed into his image, and explore the riches of our inheritance in him. Of course, too, God may grant us many deeper and richer experiences of himself on the way. Nevertheless already, if we are in Christ, every spiritual blessing is ours. Or, as the apostle puts it in Colossians, we 'have come to fullness of life in him.'

Having stated the general principle, Paul moves on to the particulars. What are these blessings with which God has blessed us in Christ? In the rest of the paragraph he unfolds them. They relate to the past (*before the foundation of the world*, verse 4), the present (what *we have* in Christ now, verse 7) and the future (*the fullness of time*, verse 12). The past blessing is



‘election’, the present ‘adoption’ to be God’s children, and the future ‘unification’ when all things will be united under Christ.

1. The past blessing of election (verses 4–6)

Paul reaches back in his mind *before the foundation of the world* (verse 4), before creation, before time began, into a past eternity in which only God himself existed in the perfection of his being.

In that pre-creation eternity God did something. He formed a purpose in his mind. This purpose concerned both *Christ* (his only begotten Son) and *us* (whom he proposed to make his adopted sons, and indeed daughters, for of course the word embraces both sexes). Mark well the statement: *he chose us in him*. The juxtaposition of the three pronouns is emphatic. God put us and Christ together in his mind. He determined to make us (who did not yet exist) his own children through the redeeming work of Christ (which had not yet taken place). It was a definite decision, for the verb *he chose* (*exelexato*) is another aorist. It also arose from his entirely unmerited favour, since he chose us *that we should be holy and blameless before him*, which indicates that we, when in his mind he chose us, were unholy and blameworthy, and therefore deserving not of adoption but of judgment. Further (Paul repeats the same truth in different words), *he destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved* (verses 5–6).

Now everybody finds the doctrine of election difficult. ‘Didn’t I choose God?’ somebody asks indignantly; to which we must answer ‘Yes, indeed you did, and freely, but only because in eternity God had first chosen you.’ ‘Didn’t I decide for Christ?’ asks somebody else; to which we must reply ‘Yes, indeed you did, and freely, but only because in eternity God had first decided for you.’

Scripture nowhere dispels the mystery of election, and we should beware of any who try to systematize it too precisely or rigidly. It is not likely that we shall discover a simple solution to a problem which has baffled the best brains of Christendom for centuries. But here at least in our text are three important truths to grasp and remember:

a. The doctrine of election is a divine revelation, not a human speculation

It was not invented by Augustine of Hippo or Calvin of Geneva. On the contrary, it is without question a biblical doctrine, and no biblical Christian can ignore it. According to the Old Testament, God chose Israel out of all the nations of the world to be his special people. According to the New Testament he is choosing an international community to be his ‘saints’ (verse 1), his holy or special people. So we must not reject the notion of election as if it were a weird fantasy of men, but rather humbly accept it (even though we do not fully understand it) as a truth which God himself has revealed. It seems natural that at this point we should seek help from Calvin. He preached through Ephesians, from the pulpit of St Peter’s church, Geneva, in forty-eight sermons beginning on 1 May 1558. Here is one of his comments: ‘Although we cannot conceive either by argument or reason how God has elected us before the creation of the world, yet we know it by



his declaring it to us; and experience itself vouches for it sufficiently, when we are enlightened in the faith.'

b. The doctrine of election is an incentive to holiness, not an excuse for sin

True, the doctrine gives us a strong assurance of eternal security, since he who chose and called us will surely keep us to the end. But our security cannot be used to condone, still less to encourage, sin. Some people seem to imagine a Christian talking to himself in such terms as these: 'I'm one of God's chosen people, safe and secure. So there's no need for me to bother about holiness. I can behave as I please.' Such appalling presumption finds no support in the true doctrine of election, however. Rather the reverse. For Paul here writes that God chose us in Christ in order *that we should be holy and blameless before him* (verse 4). 'Blameless' (*amōmos*) is the Old Testament word for an 'unblemished' sacrifice. 'Holy and blameless' as a couplet recurs in 5:27 and Colossians 1:22, where it points to our final state of perfection. But the process of sanctification begins in the here and now. So, far from encouraging sin, the doctrine of election forbids it and lays upon us instead the necessity of holiness. For holiness is the very purpose of our election. So ultimately the only evidence of election is a holy life. F. F. Bruce wisely comments: 'The predestinating love of God is commended more by those who lead holy and Christlike lives than by those whose attempts to unravel the mystery partake of the nature of logic-chopping.'

c. The doctrine of election is a stimulus to humility, not a ground for boasting

Some people think that to believe oneself one of God's chosen people is about the most arrogant thought anybody could entertain. And so it would be if we imagined that God had chosen us because of some merit of ours. But there is no room at all for merit in the biblical doctrine of election. The opposite is the case. God specifically explained to Israel that he had not chosen them because they out-matched the other nations in numbers or in any other way, for they did not. Why then? Simply because he loved them. The reason why he chose them was in himself (love), not in them (merit). The same truth is hammered home in Ephesians. The emphasis of the whole first paragraph is on God's grace, God's love, God's will, God's purpose and God's choice. For he chose us in Christ, Paul declares, *before the foundation of the world*, which was before we existed, let alone could lay claim to any merit. So 'God's election is free and beats down and annihilates all the worthiness, works and virtues of men.'

Therefore the truth of God's election, however many its unresolved problems, should lead us to righteousness, not to sin; and to humble adoring gratitude, not to boasting. Its practical consequences should always be that we live on the one hand *holy and blameless before him* (verse 4) and on the other *to the praise of his glorious grace* (verse 6).

2. The present blessing of adoption (verses 5–8)

God *destined us in love to be his sons*. This expression seems to be the key to our understanding of the present consequences of our election. Election is with a view to adoption. Indeed, when people ask us the speculative question why God went ahead with the creation when he knew



that it would be followed by the fall, one answer we can tentatively give is that he destined us for a higher dignity than even creation would bestow on us. He intended to 'adopt' us, to make us the sons and daughters of his family. And in Roman law (part of the background to Paul's writing) adopted children enjoyed the same rights as natural children. The New Testament has much to say about this status of 'sonship', its rich privileges and demanding responsibilities. Both are touched upon in these verses.

Take our privilege first. It is only those who have been adopted into God's family who can say: *In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace which he lavished upon us* (verses 7–8). For God's children enjoy a free access to their heavenly Father, and their confidence before him is due to the knowledge that they have been redeemed and forgiven. *Redemption* (*apolutrōsis*) means 'deliverance by payment of a price'; it was specially applied to the ransoming of slaves. Here it is equated with *forgiveness*, for the deliverance in question is a rescue from the just judgment of God upon our sins, and the price paid was the shedding of Christ's blood when he died for our sins on the cross. So redemption, forgiveness and adoption all go together; redemption or forgiveness is a present privilege which *we have* and enjoy now. It makes possible a filial relation to God. It comes from the lavish outpouring of his grace upon us.

But sonship implies responsibility too. For the heavenly Father does not spoil his children. On the contrary, 'he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness'. So Paul's two statements are parallel, that 'he destined us ... to be his sons' (verse 5) and 'he chose us ... that we should be holy'. The apostle will return to this vital theme later: 'Be imitators of God, as his beloved children' (5:1). It is inconceivable that we should enjoy a relationship with God as his children without accepting the obligation to imitate our Father and cultivate the family likeness.

So then adoption as God's sons and daughters brings both a plus and a minus, an immense gain and a necessary loss. We gain access to him as our Father through redemption or forgiveness. But we lose our blemishes, beginning at once by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, until we are finally made perfect in heaven. The words which seem to unite the privilege and the responsibility of our adoption are the expression *before him* (verse 4), meaning 'in his sight' or 'in his presence'. For to live our life in the conscious presence of our Father is both an immeasurable privilege and a constant challenge to please him.

3. The future blessing of unification (verses 9–10)

God has done more than 'choose' us in Christ in a past eternity and give us 'sonship' now as a present possession, with all its attendant joys and duties. He has also *made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will* for the future. It concerns *his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time* (verses 9–10). For history is neither meaningless nor purposeless. It is moving towards a glorious goal. What, then, is this 'mystery' which God has 'made known', this revealed secret, this 'will' or 'purpose' or 'plan' of his? In chapter 3 the 'mystery' is the inclusion of Gentiles in God's new society on equal terms with Jews. But this present ethnic unity is a symbol or foretaste of a future unity that will be greater and more wonderful still.



God's plan 'for the fullness of the times', when time merges into eternity again, is *to unite all things in him* (Christ), *things in heaven and things on earth* (verse 10). The Greek verb translated 'unite' (*anakephalaioō*) 'is rich in allusion and significance'. It was rare in secular Greek. According to Moulton and Milligan, although unknown in non-literary documents because too sophisticated for them, yet 'the commonness of *kephalaion* ("sum", "total") would make the meaning obvious even to ordinary readers'. Thus the verb *anakephalaioō* meant 'to bring something to a *kephalaion*', 'to sum up', either in the sense of 'summing up in reflection or speech' ('to condense into a summary'—Thayer) or in the sense of 'the gathering together of things'. The only other New Testament occurrence of the verb is in Romans 13:9, where all the commandments of the law's second table 'are summed up in this sentence, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself."'

The context of Ephesians 1 certainly seems to suit the notion of 'gathering together' better than that of 'condensing'. For a little later, in verse 22, Paul will be affirming that God has made Jesus Christ 'the head (*kephalē*) over all things for the church'. So here he seems to be saying that 'the summing up of the totality takes place in its subjection to the Head'. Already Christ is head of his body, the church, but one day 'all things' will acknowledge his headship. At present there is still discord in the universe, but in the fullness of time the discord will cease, and that unity for which we long will come into being under the headship of Jesus Christ.

This prospect prompts an important question: who and what will be included in this final unity and under this headship? A number of theologians both ancient and modern have seized on the expression 'all things' as a basis on which to build universalistic dreams. That is, they speculate that everybody is going to be saved in the end, that those who die impenitent will one day be brought to penitence, and that even demons will finally be redeemed, since literally 'all things, things in heaven and things on earth' are going to be gathered together into one under Christ's saving rule. One eloquent contemporary advocate of universalism is Markus Barth. True, he seems in one or two places to deny it, saying that we must not forget Christ's teaching about the unforgivable sin. Yet the general impression he gives is plain. 'The Church ... is Christ's living and growing body. The Church includes by this definition virtually all who are still unbelievers ... Jesus Christ is not only "head of the Church". He is as much ... head also of every man, whether that man believes in Christ or not.'⁶ It is simply that all people do not yet know and acknowledge Christ, as the Church does. 'Therefore we may call the Church the firstfruit, the beginning, the example, the sign or the manifestation of that dominion and praise which are to be known universally and enjoyed consciously by all men. The Church is but a preliminary, transitory and serving institution. For the time being she is the only community on earth that consciously serves Jesus Christ.' A little later, when commenting on the middle wall of partition which Jesus Christ has broken down, he declares: 'There is no wall between the Church and the world!' Yet many Christians meet behind the walls of church buildings and ecclesiastical traditions. 'A church that secures herself against the world ... can only learn from Ephesians that the world is right in treating it or bypassing it with the pity or contempt fit for the hypocrite'. Markus Barth rejects such a 'wall-church'. 'In conclusion', he writes, 'there is according to the gospel of peace *no* wall between the near and the far, between the Church and the world!'

On reading his passionate assault on 'wall-churches', one suspects that he is reacting against the smug, withdrawn and loveless attitudes of some Christians today—and rightly so. If he means only that the church must not barricade itself against the world, but rather go out into it in



compassionate service and witness, we would wholeheartedly agree with him. But he goes well beyond this to a declaration of 'solidarity' between church and world which refuses to recognize any distinction between them except that the one has come consciously to acknowledge Jesus Christ, while the other has not.

This refusal to accept a radical distinction between church and world, between the new society and the old, really cannot be defended from Ephesians. The dividing wall which Jesus has abolished is not the barrier which separates the world *from* the church; it is the barrier which segregates groups and individuals from one another *within* the church. Besides, the Ephesians' picture of the 'Gentiles' is not just that they are ignorant of salvation. Their condition is described in 4:17 ff. To their 'futility of mind' Paul adds 'hardness of heart'. They are alienated from God's life, live in darkness and are greedy for uncleanness. Twice the apostle calls them 'sons of disobedience' (once referring to their present state, and once to their future destiny) and in both contexts he alludes also to God's terrible but righteous wrath: they are 'children of wrath' now, and 'the wrath of God' will come upon them on the last day (2:3; 5:6).

So, returning to Ephesians 1:10, we cannot legitimately press the 'all things' into an argument for universal salvation, unless we are prepared to accuse Paul of theological confusion and self-contradiction. What, then, are the 'all things, things in heaven and things on earth' which will one day be united under Christ's headship? Certainly they include the Christian living and the Christian dead, the church on earth and the church in heaven. That is, those who are 'in Christ' now (verse 1), and who 'in Christ' have received blessing (verse 3), election (verse 4), adoption (verse 5), grace (verse 6), and redemption or forgiveness (verse 7), will one day be perfectly united 'in him' (verse 10). No doubt the angels will be included too (*cf.* 3:10, 15). But 'all things' (*ta panta*) normally means the universe, which Christ created and sustains. So Paul seems to be referring again to that cosmic renewal, that regeneration of the universe, that liberation of the groaning creation, of which he has already written to the Romans.¹ God's plan is that 'all things' which were created through Christ and for Christ, and which hold together in Christ, will finally be united under Christ by being subjected to his headship. For the New Testament declares him to be 'the heir of all things'.³

So NEB translates verse 10, 'that the universe might be brought into a unity in Christ', and J. B. Lightfoot writes of 'the entire harmony of the universe, which shall no longer contain alien and discordant elements, but of which all the parts shall find their centre and bond of union in Christ.'

In the fullness of time, God's two creations, his whole universe and his whole church, will be unified under the cosmic Christ who is the supreme head of both.

At this point it may be wise to pause a moment and consider how much all of us need to develop Paul's broad perspective. Let me remind you that he was a prisoner in Rome. Not indeed in a cell or dungeon, but still under house arrest and handcuffed to a Roman soldier. Yet, though his wrist was chained and his body was confined, his heart and mind inhabited eternity. He peered back 'before the foundation of the world' (verse 4) and on to 'the fullness of time' (verse 10), and grasped hold of what 'we have' now (verse 7) and ought to 'be' now (verse 4) in the light of those two eternities. As for us, how blinkered is our vision in comparison with his, how small is our mind, how narrow are our horizons! Easily and naturally we slip into a preoccupation with our own petty little affairs. But we need to see time in the light of eternity, and our present privileges and obligations in the light of our past election and future perfection. Then, if we



shared the apostle's perspective, we would also share his praise. For doctrine leads to doxology as well as to duty. Life would become worship, and we would bless God constantly for having blessed us so richly in Christ.

4. The scope of these blessings (verses 11–14)

After describing the spiritual blessings which God gives to his people in Christ, Paul adds a further paragraph to emphasize that the blessings belong equally to Jewish and Gentile believers. The structure of the paragraph makes this plain: *in him ... we (Jews) who first hoped in Christ have been destined ... to live for the praise of his glory. In him you (Gentiles) also, who ... believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit which is the guarantee of our inheritance ...* The apostle moves from the pronoun *we* (himself and his fellow Jewish believers) to *you also* (his believing Gentile readers) to *our inheritance* (in which both groups equally share). He is anticipating his theme of the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles which he will elaborate in the second part of chapter 2. Already, however, by the repetition of the words *in him* (verses 11, 13) he emphasizes that Christ is the reconciler, and that it is through union with Christ that the people of God are one. He shares with us three great truths about God's people.

a. *God's people are God's possession*

One would not guess from RSV that the truth of God's people as God's 'possession' was taught in this paragraph, but it almost certainly is. The apostle employs two Greek expressions whose Old Testament background strongly suggests this meaning. The first is translated by RSV 'destined' (verse 12). It is the verb *klēroō*, which can mean to give or to receive a *klēros*, an inheritance. The question is to what inheritance Paul is referring. It could be ours, a gift which we have received. So NEB: 'In Christ ... we have been given our share in the heritage.' Alternatively, it could be God's because he has taken us to be his own. RV understands it in this way: 'in whom also we were made a heritage'. So does Armitage Robinson: 'We have been chosen as God's portion.' Linguistically, this translation is more natural. But, more important, the Old Testament background seems almost to demand it. Israel was God's *klēros*, his 'heritage'. Again and again this truth was repeated. For example, 'The Lord's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage,' and 'Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people whom he has chosen as his heritage.' Paul's use of the verb *klēroō* in this paragraph seems to indicate his conviction that all those who are in Christ, Gentiles as well as Jews, are now God's *klēros*, as only Israel was in Old Testament days.

This is confirmed by the second term he employs, which is also rich in Old Testament associations, and which comes at the end of the paragraph (verse 14). The AV translation is literal but unintelligible, namely 'until the redemption of the purchased possession' (*eis apolutrōsin tēs peripoiēseōs*). The question we have to ask about this 'possession' is the same question we asked above about the 'inheritance': is it ours or God's? RSV assumes it is ours: 'until we acquire possession of it'. But J. H. Houlden goes so far as to call this 'a loose and tendentious translation'. It seems more probable that the possession (like the inheritance) is God's and that it again refers to his people. So NIV 'until the redemption of those who are God's possession'. The main



argument for interpreting it this way is once more the Old Testament background. For the noun *peripoiēsis* ('possession'), or its cognate adjective, occurs quite frequently in LXX as a description of Israel, e.g. 'You shall be my own possession among all peoples,' and 'The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his own possession.' Certainly this phraseology is taken up in the New Testament in relation to the church which Christ has purchased for himself.⁹

Putting these two Greek expressions together, with their clear Old Testament background, it is difficult to resist the conclusion that Paul is alluding to the church as God's 'inheritance' and 'possession'. These words used to be applied exclusively to the one nation of Israel, but are now reapplied to an international people whose common factor is that they are all 'in Christ'. The fact that the same vocabulary is used of both peoples indicates the spiritual continuity between them.

This teaching, though entirely hidden by RSV and obscured by most of the English versions, is nevertheless basic to what Paul is writing in this paragraph. God's people are God's 'saints' (verse 1), God's heritage (verse 12), God's possession (verse 14). Only when that has been grasped, are we ready to ask two further questions. First, *how* did we become God's people? Secondly, *why* did he make us his people? Paul answers the first question by reference to God's will and the second by reference to his glory. And he states each truth three times.

b. God's people depend on God's will

How did we become God's people or possession? There can be no doubt about Paul's reply. It was by the will of God. He destined us to be his sons *according to the purpose of his will* (verse 5); he has made known to us *the mystery of his will according to his purpose* (verse 9); and we have become God's heritage *according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will* (verses 11–12). The whole passage is full of references to God's will (*thelēma*), good pleasure (*eudokia*) or purpose (*prothesis*), and to the plan or programme in which these have been expressed. Paul could hardly have insisted more forcefully that our becoming members of God's new community was due neither to chance nor to choice (if by that is meant our choice), but to God's own sovereign will and pleasure. This was the decisive factor, as it is in every conversion.

Not that we were ourselves inactive, however. Far from it. In this very context, in which our salvation is attributed entirely to the will of God, our own responsibility is also described. For (verse 13) *first we heard the word of truth*, which is also called *the gospel of your salvation*; then *we believed in him* (Christ), and so *were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit*. Let no-one say, therefore, that the doctrine of election by the sovereign will and mercy of God, mysterious as it is, makes either evangelism or faith unnecessary. The opposite is the case. It is only because of God's gracious will to save that evangelism has any hope of success and faith becomes possible. The preaching of the gospel is the very means that God has appointed by which he delivers from blindness and bondage those whom he chose in Christ before the foundation of the world, sets them free to believe in Jesus, and so causes his will to be done.

And the assurance that God is thus active in the lives of his people is given through the Holy Spirit, who in verses 13 and 14 is given three designations—a 'promise', a 'seal' and a 'guarantee'. First he is (literally) 'the Spirit of the promise' because God promised through the Old Testament



prophets and through Jesus to send him (which he did on the Day of Pentecost) and God promises to give him today to everyone who repents and believes (which he does).

Secondly, the Holy Spirit is not only God's 'promise', but also God's 'seal'. A seal is a mark of ownership and of authenticity. Cattle, and even slaves, were branded with a seal by their masters, in order to indicate to whom they belonged. But such seals were external, while God's is in the heart. He puts his Spirit within his people in order to mark them as his own.

Thirdly, the Holy Spirit is God's 'guarantee' or pledge, by which he undertakes to bring his people safely to their final inheritance. 'Guarantee' here is *arrabōn*, originally a Hebrew word which seems to have come into Greek usage through Phoenician traders. It is used in modern Greek for an engagement ring. But in ancient commercial transactions it signified a 'first instalment, deposit, down payment, pledge, that pays a part of the purchase price in advance, and so secures a legal claim to the article in question, or makes a contract valid' (AG). In this case the guarantee is not something separate from what it guarantees, but actually the first portion of it. An engagement ring promises marriage but is not itself a part of the marriage. A deposit on a house or in a hire-purchase agreement, however, is more than a guarantee of payment; it is itself the first instalment of the purchase price. So it is with the Holy Spirit. In giving him to us, God is not just promising us our final inheritance but actually giving us a foretaste of it, which, however, 'is only a *small fraction* of the future endowment'.

c. God's people live for God's glory

From the question *how* we became God's people, we now turn to the question *why* God made us his people, and so from his will to his glory. We saw earlier how three times Paul alluded to 'the purpose of his will' or something similar. Now we have to see that three times he alludes also to God's glory. He writes that God destined us to be his children *to the praise of his glorious grace* (5–6); that he made us his heritage and appointed us to live *for the praise of his glory* (verse 12); and that one day he will finally redeem his people who are his possession, *to the praise of his glory* (verse 14).

This beautiful phrase needs to be unpacked. The glory of God is the revelation of God, and the glory of his grace is his self-disclosure as a gracious God. To live to the praise of the glory of his grace is both to worship him ourselves by our words and deeds as the gracious God he is, and to cause others to see and to praise him too. This was God's will for Israel in Old Testament days, and it is also his purpose for his people today. I myself shall always be grateful to one of my former colleagues at All Souls Church, who when he left our staff team for other work gave me a paperknife for my desk, having first had engraved upon it the words 'To the praise of his glory'. It lies before me as I write, and is a permanent reminder and challenge.

Here then are the 'how' and the 'why' of God's people, who are also his 'heritage' and his 'possession'. *How* did we become his people? Answer: 'According to the good pleasure of his will.' *Why* did he make us his people? Answer: 'For the praise of the glory of his grace.' Thus everything we have and are in Christ both comes from God and returns to God. It begins in his will and ends in his glory. For this is where everything begins and ends.

Yet such Christian talk comes into violent collision with the man-centredness and self-centredness of the world. Fallen man, imprisoned in his own little ego, has an almost boundless



confidence in the power of his own will, and an almost insatiable appetite for the praise of his own glory. But the people of God have at least begun to be turned inside out. The new society has new values and new ideals. For God's people are God's possession who live by God's will and for God's glory.³

Brought Near by His Blood – [New Society]

¹¹ Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands— ¹² that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Christ Our Peace

¹⁴ For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, ¹⁵ having abolished in His flesh the enmity, *that is*, the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man *from* the two, *thus* making peace, ¹⁶ and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. ¹⁷ And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.

Christ Our Cornerstone

¹⁹ Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief *cornerstone*, ²¹ in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, ²² in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

³ Stott, J. R. W. (1979). [*God's new society: the message of Ephesians*](#) (pp. 31–50). InterVarsity Press.