

Ephesians 1 part 1

A devotional study of Ephesians 1:1-4

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Ephesians 1:1-4

Welcome to this devotional study on Paul's letter to the Ephesians. It is a collection of daily posts and essays written over a period of time. May it be a blessing!

Ephesians 1 *'Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God.'*

Paul was an unlikely candidate to become a founding apostle in the church of Christ. He was neither a brother or cousin of Jesus nor a fellow Galilean. Even worse, he had been instrumental in the persecution of the emerging church.

Yet Paul stepped out as an apostle, planting and nurturing churches, knowing that he was chosen by the will of God to serve the church in this way.

There are any number of reasons why we might consider ourselves unsuitable for the work that the Lord has prepared for us: our past history and our perceived lack of ability are two of the main reasons.

Doubts and fears will always try to halter us and hold us back but the passion of the Lord will drive us onwards. Paul knew the will of God for his life and he strode forward, obediently serving his Lord.

Whether we are called to serve as apostles planting churches, or baking cakes for our next-door neighbour, I am praying this morning that the will of God, the *'thelema'*, will become so strong in all of us, that we will step out in confidence and serve the Lord according to his will.

Ephesians 1 *'Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God.'*

The original twelve disciples, that were sent out by Jesus, became eleven when Judas came to his demise. The disciples chose a replacement but this did not work out for it was Jesus' desire that Paul should become the twelfth apostle.

Paul was very different than the others by nature of his upbringing. He was born in Tarsus and brought up in Jerusalem under the tutelage of Gamaliel. He had become a fervent and well-taught Pharisee.

Many in the church had misgivings of Paul joining their ranks. After all, he had previously been a zealous persecutor of the Church. And he was not a fisherman. And he did not have a rough Galilean accent!

I could imagine a scenario where Peter and John and the other disciples would be sitting eating their supper, reminiscing of when they had gone fishing with Jesus and perhaps some joke he had told them about the Pharisees. They would laugh at the memory.

But Paul had never been part of this small group of disciples and may well have felt left out.

And so I dedicate this post to those who sometimes feel left out. In the church, like any social group, we have circles and inner circles, and these can easily become cliques where like-minded persons gather close together and shut out others who are not like them.

Praying this morning that we will all have the wisdom and kindness to reach out and include those on the fringe of the church that they may feel a part of the church.

And praying for those, like myself, who are sometimes shy and lacking in social skills, who often feel awkward and foolish in groups, that we might feel welcome and hugged by the church.

Ephesians 1:1 *‘Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God.’*

Paul would labour with a passion and an energy that went way further than his own natural strengths.

Colossians 1:29 *‘To this end I labour, struggling with all his energy which so powerfully works in me.’*

The word used here for ‘labour’, in the Koine Greek, is ‘kopos’ which denotes ‘striking’. The image I have here is of a blacksmith, wielding his hammer upon the anvil, beating with a natural rhythm but finding an inner force also working within him. Or perhaps a gardener wielding a bill-hook, allowing the balance and weight of the sharp hook to scythe the long grass.

It is for this reason that some are driven to serve the Lord, even though they may see no obvious results.

The missionary will leave his home and labour in fields far away; the evangelist will preach the gospel and be mocked by the crowds; the preacher will preach his socks off to rows of empty pews; the writer will wrestle with words that few will read and the neighbour will bless the street where he lives and be greeted by derision and suspicion.

In the midst of their blessings and their disappointments, there is an energy working within all of them that is greater than themselves that keeps them going.

They have all become servants of the gospel and relinquished their right to live a selfish and self-serving life. They have immersed themselves in the all-consuming will of God.

Ephesians 1:1 *'Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God.'*

Many have commented on the style of letter-writing in Paul's time, where the sender would sensibly start the letter with their name. This contrasts with modern practice where you begin a letter or e-mail by reminding the person what their name is and then keeping them in suspension until the end of the letter to reveal who exactly you are!

Please do not feel offended that Paul begins this letter by mentioning his name first. Paul is not exalting himself. Koine Greek has ways of expressing emphasis and in this sentence, the absence of a definite article attached to Christ Jesus shows that the emphasis is upon Jesus and not Paul himself. The genitive tense is also used denoting possession and so Paul belongs to Jesus, he is his bond-servant.

The expression *'the will of God'* uses the word *'thelema'* which speaks of God's keen desire that Paul should serve as an apostle. God has not forced Paul to be an apostle but rather He is pleased and desires that he should serve in this way.

Praying this morning that we should all know the will of God and His pleasure in serving Him.

Ephesians 1:1 *'To the saints in Ephesus...'*

It has been well taught that '*saints*' (Gk. *hagios*) are not exalted beings but rather they are the faithful who have been chosen, sanctified and consecrated in service to God.

We are called to be very different from the world.

We have been chosen out of this world to become something quite special, to walk to a different rhythm and in a different direction than the world. We are called to be holy saints, faithful to our Lord Jesus, consecrated in his service, following the path that he has laid out for us rather than the way of the world.

But Paul also reminds us that we all live somewhere; we are not nebulous angels floating in the stratosphere. We may live in Ephesus, Birmingham or Timbuktu but we are all rooted on this planet with neighbours and neighbourhoods, no matter how distant or remote they might be.

Peter puts it well, in 1 Peter 1:1, when he describes us as '*sojourners of the dispersion*'. We are pilgrims passing through this world but yet we are dispersed and cast and sown into this world that we might bear fruit.

We might wish we had been sown somewhere else! The grass invariably looks greener elsewhere. But God has placed you exactly where you are, for very good reasons, that you might serve him in the local community where you live. This is your mission field.

Ephesians 1:1 *'To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus.'*

Ephesus was a veritable cauldron of gods and goddesses and magic societies. Yet the faithful in Christ Jesus were staying true to their consecration to their Lord and Saviour.

The Christians in Ephesus were rooted and established in their relationship with Christ Jesus. They were entering into God's blessings through this relationship.

John 15:5 *'I am the vine and you are the branches.'*

Jesus is the vine and we have been deeply united with him as the branches. The sap that flows through Christ flows through us. The Ephesian Christians were being spiritually nourished by dwelling in the presence of Jesus.

There is a perfect balance here: that we are called out of this world to be separate, sanctified and holy but yet also chosen to dwell in this fallen world to share the gospel of righteousness.

And so we dwell in these two worlds, the down-to-earth locality where we have been sown and the heavenly dimension, wrapped in the righteousness of Christ Jesus at the right hand of the Father.

As the saying goes: we are not called to be so heavenly that we serve no earthly purpose, and nor are we called to be so earthly that we have no heavenly presence about us.

Ephesians 1:2 *'Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.'*

Ephesians is a beautiful study into the riches of God's grace. When we cease striving to please God by our own perceived abilities and surrender instead to his transformative powers, then we will know an inner peace growing within us.

It has been well taught that Paul spanned both the Greek and the Hebrew worlds. He was born a Roman citizen yet taught in the highest echelons of Jewish rabbinical schools.

The word '*grace*' is very much a Greek word and the word '*peace*' is very much a Jewish word. Hence Paul was the consummate ambassador here, using both the Greek and Jewish language to address the Ephesians and this looks forward to one of the main themes of this letter, where Paul brings both the Gentile and the Jewish worlds together as one under Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 1:2 *'Grace and peace to you from God our Father...'*

This is the sublime and perfect combination: He is both the all-powerful God and the loving Father.

God is the transcendent creator who is above all. Who can even approach His mighty and awesome presence?

Psalms 8:1 *'O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name on all the earth.'*

Yet God is also our Father, watching over us, concerned for us and tenderly wiping away our tears of sorrow.

Revelation 21:3a *'They will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes.'*

The deepest sadness for our heavenly Father is when we perversely insist on worshipping hopeless idols that will bring us only spiritual poverty.

Habakkuk 2:18 *'Of what value is an idol since a man has carved it? Or an image that teaches lies? For he who makes it trusts in his own creation; he makes idols that cannot speak. Woe to him who says to wood, "Come to life!" or to lifeless stone, "Wake up!" Can it give guidance? It is covered with gold and silver, there is no breath in it. But the Lord is in his holy temple, let all the earth be silent before Him.'*

Like the prodigal son, who was reduced to eating the pods of the pigs in a foreign land, may we come to our senses and leave our worthless idols, in all their many forms, and return home to our Father who waits with open arms.

The idols that we worship will never fulfill our inmost needs and will always leave us bitter and disappointed. A lifeless stone is no more than a lifeless stone!

The embrace of the heavenly Father makes us complete.

Ephesians 1:2 *'...and the Lord Jesus Christ.'*

There is a great beauty in this encompassing title. The Lord reaches us at every level.

Firstly: Jesus is our **Lord** and we willingly submit ourselves to his kingly rule. He shepherds us and keeps us on the right path

Psalm 23:4a *'Your rod and your staff they comfort me.'*

There is great virtue in surrendering to his gentle Lordship. He then becomes responsible for us, guiding us along paths of righteousness and keeping us through the darkness we may encounter.

Secondly: **Jesus** took human form and came to dwell in our midst. He knows, only too well, the challenges of being human.

He is our confident, the closest friend one can ever have, who does not judge or reject but rather he is honest and he encourages with praise and gentle admonishment.

Hebrews 4:15 *'For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin.'*

Thirdly: Jesus is the **Christ**, the Messiah, who comes with anointed power to break the chains that held us in captivity.

Matthew 16:16 *'Simon Peter answered, "You are the **Christ**, the Son of the living God."*

Jesus did not just come with virtuous words but rather he comes to bring deliverance and we can have every confidence that as we enter into a deep communion with Jesus, we will experience this anointed power in our lives.

Praying this morning that we will know the fullness of our Lord Jesus Christ, our sovereign King who walks in our midst with understanding and whose anointing breaks the chains of captivity.

Ephesians 1:3 *'Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.'*

Our heavenly Father delights in pouring His holy blessings upon His beloved children.

The expression '*Praise be*' in the verse above could equally be translated as: '*Blessed be*'.

There is a beautiful flow of blessing between the Father and His children. As we bless Him by worshiping His holy name, then He blesses us with His presence...which inspires us to bless Him by worshipping Him...

There is a divine and cyclical flow of blessing between heaven and earth.

The rain falls upon the mountain and flows through the rivers unto the sea. The sea evaporates and forms rain clouds that ascend unto the mountains that cause it to rain....and so on...

And so we are called to develop a life-style of blessing. Even in the most difficult of times we pour out a blessing of gratitude and we receive in our hearts a blessing of reassurance.

Romans 5:2a *'And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings...'*

And this beautiful flow of blessing will always keep us strong.

Isaiah 55:10 *'As the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater.'*

He blesses us and we bless Him and He blesses us and we bless Him and...

Ephesians 1:3 *'Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.'*

The following verses of this chapter will describe the spiritual blessings that God has poured upon us, including election, adoption, redemption and forgiveness.

They are spiritual blessings that will speak directly to our spiritual malaise. We may well have been wishing for more down-to-earth physical blessings such as a new house or car, but they would not have resolved our spiritual crisis.

We need redemption and forgiveness far more than a new car that begins to rust as soon as we buy it.

These spiritual blessings will transform us into new creations, that we might fellowship and commune with God in the heavenly realms, and in the eternal Kingdom that is to come.

God knows our every need!

Ephesians 1:3 *'Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.'*

God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing needed to meet our spiritual crisis. Nothing has been forgotten or left out.

2 Peter 1:3 *'His divine power has given us **everything we need** for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.'*

Imagine a young child who has to travel by train for the first time on his own. His mother would no doubt pack a small bag with everything he should need on his journey: a flask and sandwich, a scarf in case of draughts, a good book and the all-important railway ticket!

God has thoroughly prepared us for our spiritual journey and there is nothing that we are lacking. We may travel in confidence. We can enter into the sabbath rest, not striving or struggling, but knowing that the Lord has gone ahead of us and provided us with our need.

The enemy will always try to deter and discourage our progress by accusing us of being short of God's blessings. Indeed, deceivers will try to lead us astray by persuading us to chase after false distractions when we have already received from God all that we need.

And God will always continue to pour out His blessings, both in this age and the one to come. His blessings will flow all through eternity.

Ephesians 1:3 *'Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.'*

Remember though that these blessings are to be found in Christ Jesus. He is the doorway, the portal to these blessings.

John 10:9 *"I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out and find pasture."*

By walking in close fellowship with Jesus we may enter into these eternal blessings that have so freely been given to us.

The tale is told of a tramp who inherited a million pounds. Everyone expected that he would buy a mansion and sports-car, but instead he left the money in the bank and continued living the life of a beggar. He was a millionaire but yet he perversely chose to hold on to the past and live as a beggar.

God has poured out His blessings upon us, as we shall discover in this chapter, but we will need to walk closely with Jesus and allow these blessings to change our lives from within.

2 Corinthians 5:17 *‘Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old has gone, the new has come.’*

We will need to open our hearts to receive these blessings and then allow them to change us from within, letting the past fall away and the new to come forth.

Ephesians 1:4 *‘For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.’*

This is the most beautiful of truths. God so desires that we become part of His Kingdom that He has reached out and chosen us, even though we have no cause to deserve it.

We see God’s election of Israel in the Old Testament:

Deuteronomy 7:7 *‘The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples for you were the fewest of all peoples.’*

God did not choose Israel because of any glowing quality they might have had. Indeed, He considered them a rather awkward bunch of people.

Deuteronomy 9:6 *‘Understand , then, that it is not because of your righteousness that the Lord your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people.’*

God’s choosing of Israel was by grace, by an undeserved favour.

In the same way, God has gone ahead of us and chosen us by grace.

Ephesians 1:4 *‘For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.’*

God has not chosen us because we are holy but that we might become holy.

1 Peter 1:15 *‘But just as He who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do, for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.”*

We have a responsibility then, to dwell in God’s holy presence and allow His presence to transform us from within.

Ephesians 4:1 *‘As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.’*

God is very ambitious for us that we might live holy lives. To be chosen by God is the greatest responsibility we can ever shoulder.

Ephesians 1:4 *‘For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.’*

Before God set about creating this beautiful world that we live in, first He chose us so that we might become holy and blameless.

We were His first priority.

We begin to see the breath-taking span of Paul’s revelation. His vision will take us from the eternal depths, before the creation of the universe, before the beginning of time and will take us to its fulfilment, when Christ Jesus returns to bring all things together in eternity when he establishes his Kingdom on earth.

And in the midst of this awesome revelation lies the redemption and sanctification of fallen man, bringing him from the utter depths of depravity, bringing him by freely bestowed grace, bringing him into a perfectly righteous relationship with our heavenly Father.

Paul’s revelation spans the beginning and the end and the height and the depths of human existence.

Ephesians 1:4 *'For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.'*

This is an awesome truth that is well worth meditating upon every day: that God should choose us to come into His Kingdom.

The High Priest would choose a lamb from the flock for sacrifice and he would carefully scrutinise it for blemish or imperfection.

In the same way, we have been chosen out of the flock, redeemed, forgiven and made pure by the righteousness of Christ, so that we stand without blemish before God.

God does not cast a casual glance over us, perhaps overlooking some hidden fault or blemish. God carefully and meticulously examines us. Yet in Christ Jesus, through repentance, we are found to be perfect, wrapped as we are in the righteousness of Jesus.

God's purpose has always been to take us, fallen man, with all our rebellious and deceitful ways and to make us holy and blameless, changing us from within, that we might be the perfect bride for the perfect bridegroom.

Ephesians 5:25 *'Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish but holy and blameless.'*

Thank you for reading this. In our next pdf, Ephesians1 pt 2 we explore how we were predestined to be adopted as sons and daughters by grace.