

## **The Unsearchable Riches of Christ**

Ephesians is one of the most profound and exciting documents ever composed. It is a sublime piece of Christian literature containing profound and penetrating insights. The author writes with a sense of wonder at the enormity of the power and grace of God. Over the next few days, Dr Barry Chant, Australian author and teacher, will take you on an exciting journey of discovery from just the first ten verses.

### **Saints Alive!**

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints in Ephesus, the believers in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 1:1, ESV).

Imagine you are introducing a friend for the first time and you say, 'This is an old friend of mine. She is a saint.' Most people would think you meant she was an outstandingly good person. A rare human being like a Mother Teresa or a Count Zinzendorf.

But our text tells us that every believer is a saint (see also Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 2:1; Phil 1:1,21).

In the original language of the New Testament, 'saint' and 'holy' are one and the same word. The term 'holy' basically means 'separate'. In other words when we are in Christ we are separated from the world and its ways. We are different. Our values are different. Our hopes and dreams are different. Our relationships are different. Our future is different. we cannot live any longer for the things of this world. How can we lie, or cheat, or hate, or envy, or resent, or inflict pain, or commit adultery, or steal, or kill?

This is both a responsibility and a privilege. We are responsible to live godly sinless lives. To be different. But how can we do this? That's where the privilege comes in. we do it by being 'in Christ Jesus'. When we link ourselves to Christ we are necessarily separate from sin and evil. It cannot be otherwise. All we need to do is remain in Christ.

So the apostle also addresses us as 'believers in him'. It is by faith that we live as saints. We cannot do it alone. As Jesus Christ only did—and does—holy things, when we are in him, so do we. But what if we don't? We'll come to that later. But meanwhile it is important to know that by faith, by trusting him, we can rely on him to live a new, holy, godly life.

### **So what?**

1. How does the realisation that you are holy by being in Christ help you to live a holy life?
2. On a scale of one (little) to ten (much) how do you describe your holiness? First from God's viewpoint. Second from yours.
3. Memorise Ephesians 1:1.

## Grace and Peace

*Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:2, ESV).*

This is actually an astonishing statement. What if Paul had put his own name here instead of the name of Jesus? Unthinkable. By linking the names of the Father and the Son together like this, he is presenting the Lord Jesus Christ as equal with the Father. This is nothing less than an expression of Christ's deity.

This is a short verse, but it contains two of the most wonderful words in the Bible: grace and peace.

*Grace* is undeserved favour. This beautiful word covers everything that God has for us. Grace means kindness, love and favour that we have no right to receive. It is not based on what we do or what we have done. Not even what we hope to do. It is based entirely on what God has done for us in Christ. God is good to us because he loves us. It has nothing to do with feelings either. Grace is bestowed on us whether we feel it or not. In fact, it may be that when we feel it least we need it most. Or putting it another way, the complete precedes the incomplete. God's perfect grace far exceeds our imperfect state.

*Peace* is the absence of hostility. When two people are at peace, they are not fighting. So when the Bible says we have peace with God (Romans 5:1), this is what it means. We are no longer at loggerheads with him. All cause for anger and wrath has been removed. When Jesus was crucified for us, he bore the brunt of the penalty and curse of sin. He removed all the hostility that once existed between us and God. He made us one. Peace was restored.

It is easy to read this passage as referring to a feeling of peace or tranquility. Of the absence of personal turmoil. But peace is more than a feeling. Naturally, knowing that we are at peace usually means we feel at peace. But even if it doesn't, nothing changes. We have been reconciled with God through what *Jesus* has done, not what *we* have done. We are at peace with God. Wow!

### So what?

1. Make a list of five acts of God's grace that you have experienced this week.
2. Name five indicators in your life that there is no longer conflict between you and God and that you are at peace with him.
3. If you had trouble answering the previous two questions, what do you think you might do about it?
4. Memorise Ephesians 1:2.

## **Blessed Be God**

*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 (Ephesians 1:3. ESV).*

To bless someone is to speak well of them. The Greek word originally used here is *eulogeo*, which is a combination of *eu* (well) and *logeo* (I speak) So to bless God means to speak well of him. Some translations use the word 'praise' here which basically has the same meaning. Continuous and regular praise to God is a practice we should cultivate (Psalm 34:1,2; Luke 19:40; Heb 13:15). It is a vital part of Christian living.

Notice which God it is we bless. Not all gods are the same. Our God is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

God has also blessed us. He speaks well of us. It is interesting that in the Bible there is power attributed to spoken blessing, It is not just paying a compliment. It actually makes a difference. This is seen notably in the story of Esau who wept bitterly when he realized he had lost his father's blessing (Genesis 27:38).

So when God blesses us it makes a difference. Importantly, note that God has already blessed us. It is past tense. We don't have to cry out for it, as Esau did. For it is already ours through Christ. Not only has he already blessed us but he has blessed us with every spiritual blessing. If this is true, how many blessings are there still to come for us? The reality is that they are all ours already—every one of them! We just need to receive them by faith.

Note that these are also spiritual blessings, not material. Material possessions may or may not be signs of God's grace. Some of the richest and some of the poorest people in the world may be equally blessed from God's perspective. At the end of the day, material things all perish, but spiritual blessings are eternal.

Moreover, these blessings find their origin in 'heavenly places'. Heaven is not to be thought of geographically as 'up'. It is simply the place where God dwells—his presence if you like. So when the Bible says that every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies is ours it means everything associated with the presence of God is ours. And remember again that all this, as the text says, is in Christ. When we have Jesus, we have it all!

### **So what?**

1. Name five spiritual blessings from God that you treasure most in your life.
2. Why have you chosen these particular ones?
3. Memorise Ephesians 1:3.

## Called to be Holy

*Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him (Ephesians 1:4, ESV)*

There is a common idea that election is all to do with going to heaven or hell. As if God has a heavenly daisy field and every petal on every flower has someone's name on it. So he just plucks off the petals and randomly throws them into the Saved box or the Lost box. Nothing could be further from the truth.

There is a sovereign purpose in what God does. We are chosen for two reasons.

*First, we are chosen to be holy.* We have already seen that this word means to be separate—separate from sin and all its evil effects. Like the Old Testament high priests, we have the words 'Holy to the Lord' engraved on us, as it were. And like the priests, we are to be disentangled from the world and its wickedness (Exodus 28:36-38; 1 John 2:15-16). In fact, virtually every reference to election in the New Testament mentions holiness or godliness. More than likely, some who complain that they are not chosen might actually be unhappy if they were—living a holy life might well be abhorrent to them.

We are chosen to be conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29-30); to live for God's glory (1:12); to learn humility (1 Corinthians 1:27-29) and to suffer for Christ's sake (Philippians 1:29; 2 Timothy 1:8-9; 1 Peter 2:21-23).

If holiness is required of believers generally, it is definitely a requirement for those in ministry. Charles Spurgeon, acclaimed 19<sup>th</sup> century 'prince of preachers', wrote, 'If a man has not been called to holiness, he certainly has not been called to the ministry.'

*Second, we are chosen to be blameless.* This word means without defect or unblemished. It is frequently used in the Old Testament of sacrificial animals who were to be without any flaw (Leviticus 3:1, 6). In our case, it means without sin. This is the primary goal of election (Colossians 3:12-14; 1 Thessalonians 2:12; 2 Timothy 1:9; 1 Peter 2:21; 3:9).

This does not mean what is sometimes called sinless perfection; rather it means sin-free protection. To put it succinctly, it is not impossible to sin but it is possible not to sin. Can you see the difference?

Blameless living is also a prerequisite for Christian leadership (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:7).

Election does not remove our freedom of will. We can still choose what we do. We can *decide* to stay away from sin, to be free of it. That is what the apostle John means when he says that those who are born of God do not sin (1 John 3:9). If we do sin, the blood of Jesus cleanses us (1 John 1:7-9). But it is far better not to sin in the first place. And this is what constitutes blameless living. In reality, anything less is unacceptable.

**So what?**

1. Sins may involve either acts of commission or omission. Think about the last 24 hours in your life. Write down up to five sins in each category that you may have committed.
2. How could being more aware of your calling and election help you to reduce this list?
3. Revise and memorise Ephesians 1:1-4

## God's Sovereign Choice

*Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him (Ephesians 1:4. ESV)*

As soon as you mention divine election, people tend to look at the negatives. What about those who are not chosen? How can it be fair to choose some but not others? It is wiser to begin with the positives.

The Greek verb is *eklego* from *ek* (out) and *lego* (I speak, I name, I choose). It means to call out, to select or to elect, as in choosing a piece of land, or the best produce or a business associate or life partner. Grammatically, the verb is in the middle voice and means 'to select for oneself'. This adds a remarkable and delightful personal touch to what the Bible is saying here. God chose us individually because he wanted us for himself. The choice is based, not on our worth, but on his grace.

Remarkably, God's choice was made before creation. The world was not even founded. God is above time, just as he is above distance. Like someone standing on a high building who can see the beginning and end of a long street where those on the street can see only what is immediately around them, he sees the beginning and end of both space and time simultaneously.

Did you ever play a team game at school where two of your pals were appointed captains and would then take it in turns to choose their team members? Of course, they would always choose the best players first. What if you were usually the last one chosen but one day you were selected first! Your heart would swell with the joy of acceptance. God's choosing of us is exactly like that. Even before the world was created, says Paul, we were chosen.

There are two great foundational concepts of divine election. The first is human sinfulness. No one deserves to be saved. We are all unfit for the Kingdom of God. But God selects us anyway.

The second is divine sovereignty. God can choose whom he will. There are no grounds for charging God with unfairness or injustice. He is sovereign and in his infinite wisdom he never makes a bad or unjust choice. And rightly or wrongly, for better or for worse, he chose you!

### So what?

Describe each of the following responses to being chosen by God with either 'appropriate' or 'inappropriate'. Give reasons for each choice.

- Pride
- Humility
- Gratitude
- Enthusiasm
- Complacency

Memorise Ephesians 1:4

## God's Purpose

*In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will (Ephesians 1:5, ESV),*

There is a popular idea that God knew in advance what we would do and chose us accordingly. But this would mean that predestination is the result of *our* choice. This is not what the Scripture says. Predestination is an act of God's initiative, not ours. We are chosen 'according to the purpose (pleasure) of his will'. An ambassador in ancient times might be told that he could see the king 'at his majesty's good pleasure' (compare Esther 5:1-2). This is a similar idea. The choice is entirely up to our sovereign Lord. Its goal is the praise of his glory (see verses 11, 12). It derives from his grace, love and sovereign choice. 'In love he predestined us,' says Paul.

There is some debate about whether predestination conflicts with free will. The word 'predestine' (*prohorizo*) means to mark out with a boundary beforehand. You will note that our English term 'horizon' derives from it. It may suggest the idea of freedom of choice within foreordained limits or horizons. In other words, it is not that God maps out every single detail of our lives. Rather, he sets limits within which it his purpose for us to live and within which we may make our own choices.

What follows next is interesting. Not only are we chosen to be holy and blameless. We are predestined to be adopted as God's sons. First, let's make it clear that in the Bible the term 'sons' includes 'daughters'. In New Testament usage, it is an inclusive noun.

The term 'born again' is popular these days to describe how we become children of God. But here the word is 'adoption'. In normal usage, the term 'born' refers to a physical, biological, personal, familial relationship; 'adopt' is a term describing a legal relationship. In the kingdom of God both terms are used. To be adopted means we now receive benefits that would normally be our inheritance through birth:

- we are specifically chosen
- we receive a new identity
- we receive a new name
- we have all our needs provided
- we receive new rights and privileges

All these are now our rights as God's adopted children. It is a powerful concept.

It used to be the practice not to tell children they were adopted. Nowadays we tend to go in the opposite direction: we stress that they were deliberately selected. And that makes them special. So the Scripture says God predestined us for himself. How good is that!

### So what?

1. Consider the five benefits of adoption given above. Give specific illustrations or examples of how each of these applies to you spiritually, with a relevant Bible reference if you can. (For example, 'Because I am chosen, God will care for me.' Matthew 6:25-34.)
2. Memorise Ephesians 1:5.

## The Glory of His Grace

*To the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved (Ephesians 1:6)*

A few days ago we looked at the word 'grace' (verse 2). Here it is again. God's undeserved favour towards us. 'Grace' is a favourite Pauline term, occurring twelve times in Ephesians.

A literal translation here would be 'to the praise of the glory of his grace'. This Hebraism does not make much sense in English, as it is all of his grace that we praise, not just the glory of it. Yet the glory of it is praiseworthy.

Because of biblical stories about the glory of God being demonstrated visibly in places like the tabernacle and the temple and holy mountains, we tend to think of it in those terms. But the word has wider connotations. In this context, it basically means 'splendour' or 'beauty' or 'magnificence' or 'grandeur'. All these terms and others are true of God's grace. It has an intrinsic glory. And it is

Note that this grace is 'in the Beloved'. It is universally agreed that this is a reference to Jesus, God's beloved Son (Matthew 3:17). And we know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for our sake he became poor, so that we by his poverty might become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9). Hallelujah! What a Saviour!

I sometimes wince when I hear people asking God to reveal his glory. He has already done so: the Bible states clearly that we have seen the glory of God in the face of Jesus (2 Corinthians 4:6).

Usually, people see religion as a system by which we are rewarded for our efforts to achieve moral excellence. Or to put it simply, to be saved by works. One of the saddest things I have ever witnessed was an old woman outside a temple in Asia with hands and knees padded, crawling on a journey that would take her many months in the hope of gaining credit with her god. But grace means that we are not saved by what we have done; we are saved by what Christ has done. It is undeserved, unmerited, unwarranted—but it is there. Amazing grace!

Translations vary for the middle part of this text because of the unusual expression the apostle uses. What he says literally is 'the grace with which he has graced us.' In other words, the act of bestowing grace upon us is itself an act of grace. Got that?

I don't know about you, but the is the most wonderful thing I know about God is that he is a God of grace, a magnificent, glorious grace.

### So what?

1. Think about your own life. Name three specific outcomes of God's grace in your life for which you are most grateful.
2. Memorise Ephesians 1:6



## The Riches of His Grace

*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 (Ephesians 1:7, 8, ESV).*

The greatest expression of God's grace is expressed here: redemption and forgiveness. *Redemption* means purchasing with a price in order to set someone free. You and I are like slaves trembling and terrified of what may lie in store for them when they are purchased by a rich and powerful master. Then, to their amazement, the first thing he does is set them free. So with us. We were not redeemed by material wealth but by the precious blood of Christ (see also 1 Peter 1:18-19). It cost Jesus his life to redeem us. And he did so to set us free.

*Forgiveness* means exactly what it says. There are two words for forgiveness in the New Testament. One means to express grace through forgiving. The other, used here, literally means remittance, release or dismissal, hence, getting rid of sin altogether. Forgiveness applies to all sins, past, present and future. Even sins not yet committed are included. Forgiveness is utterly of grace. No good action can add to it; no sinful action can take away from it.

The word 'transgression' includes the idea tripping over or slipping to one side. This makes God's grace of forgiveness even more remarkable: accidental sin is included too.

This text concludes with the phrase 'riches of his grace'. It is apparent that Paul simply cannot find enough words to describe grace. God has 'lavished' his grace upon us.

'Lavish' is a common New Testament verb normally translated by words like 'abundant' or 'overflowing' (e.g. John 10:10; Ephesians 3:20). The idea is of a vessel running over or of a harvest which is too abundant for the barns to contain. Like 'riches', it speaks of far more than we need. And it's all free!

'Riches' or 'wealth' are appropriate terms to use. There is nothing parsimonious about God's grace. If I were to talk about my earthly possessions or my bank balance, I would use neither of those terms. I am neither rich nor wealthy. I have no complaints. Every day my wife and I see our needs being provided (Matthew 6:25-34). But to me, both 'riches' and 'wealth' imply provision and possession far beyond mine.

Spiritually, the reverse is true. There is no limit to God's grace. Elsewhere, the Bible talks of abundant or overflowing grace (2 Corinthians 9:8) or of grace being multiplied (2 Peter 1:2) or of the 'unsearchable riches' of Christ (Ephesians 3:8). You and I are spiritual billionaires!

### So what?

1. Note that this text begins with the words 'In him'. How many times does this or a similar phrase (e.g. 'through him') occur in Ephesians chapter one? Compare your list with someone else's
2. Memorise Ephesians 1:7

## The Mystery of His Will

*In all wisdom and insight making known to us 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 (Ephesians 1:8-10, ESV).*

'Wisdom' and 'insight' are two key biblical terms. Elsewhere, Paul writes of God's wisdom being demonstrated through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross (1 Corinthians 1:18-31). Wisdom is characterised by love (James 3:17). So it was by his loving action in dying for us that Christ became the actual embodiment of the wisdom of God for us (1 Corinthians 1:30).

The word 'insight' is interesting. It is often given as 'prudence' or even 'shrewdness'. Jesus told an unusual parable about a man who used it to solve a sticky situation (Luke 16:1-13). Its simplest meaning is 'common sense' or 'intelligence'.

It seems a strange term to apply to God, and more than likely Paul sees it as a quality that applies to us. If so, here is a reminder that while the gospel may be 'foolish' to those who do not believe, it is not 'silly'. On the contrary, it is deeply profound. We need to use wisdom and intelligence in our apprehension of it.

Another unusual word in this passage is 'mystery'. The Greek word used by Paul is almost the same (*musterion*) but it has a different meaning: it means 'secret'--God's great secret plan of reconciliation through Christ, hidden for generations but now made known through the church (Romans 11:25; Ephesians 3:6-11; Colossians 1:27). It is still a secret/mystery to many people who cannot grasp the glory of grace. But in Christ, the secret is made known and we have no fear or terror, for we know that God has a purpose for us, for the church, for the universe, and it is all being worked out according to his will.

'To set forth' is a term commonly used for reconciling accounts or balancing books: *oikonomia* from *oikos* (house) and *nomos* (law). So God's plan is accurately balanced and ultimately sets everything in order. It is his purpose to bring everything together in the fullness of time under the headship of Christ. This is our great hope for the future. And what a hope it is!

### So what?

What kind of feeling do you have when you read the last few paragraphs?

- Relief
- Joy
- Confidence
- Quiet assurance
- Excitement
- Other

Number these in order of their importance to you and then give the reasons for your choice.

Memorise Ephesians 1:8-10

## Knowing Who I Am

*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 (Ephesians 1:3, ESV).*

Being a Christian means accepting the blessings that are ours in Christ and living them out by faith. It is realising—

- what we have
- who we are

in Christ. It is not becoming what we are not; it is becoming who we already are!

Here is a list of many of the blessings listed in the first three chapters of Ephesians. It's worth making a copy and keeping it as a regular reminder of what the Lord has done.

- I am a saint (1:1)
- Grace and peace are mine (1:2)
- I am blessed with every blessing (1:3)
- I am chosen before the creation of the world
- I am predestined (1:5)
- I am adopted into God's family (1:5)
- I am redeemed (1:7)
- I am forgiven (1:7)
- God's grace is lavished on me (1:8)
- Wisdom and understanding are mine (1:8)
- God's will is made known to me (1:9)
- I am included in Christ (1:13)
- I am sealed with the Holy Spirit (1:13)
- I have a guaranteed inheritance (1:14)
- I am called to hope (1:18)
- I have a glorious inheritance (1:18)
- His incomparably great power works in me (1:19)
- God has given me life (2:5)
- I am seated in heavenly places (2:6)
- I am saved by grace (2:8)
- I am God's workmanship (2:10)
- I am brought near through Christ's blood (2:13)
- I am reconciled with others (2:16)
- I have access to the Father (2:18)
- I am a fellow citizen with God's people (2:19)
- I am a dwelling place for God's Spirit (2:22)
- I am a member of one body (3:6)
- I share in the promise of Christ (3:6)
- I can approach God with freedom (3:13)
- God is able to do immeasurably more than I can ask or imagine (3:20)

## So What?

1. Imagine seven people have come to you for encouragement because they are experiencing one of the following: (a) a sense of hopelessness; (b) a feeling that

God is distant; (c) a sense of failure; (d) a lack of confidence; (e) a lack of spiritual strength; (f) loneliness; (g) absence of joy.

2. Which of the blessings in the list above would you encourage each one to take hold of? Make a list.
3. Quote Ephesians 1:1-10 from memory. Re-learn any sections you have forgotten.

**Read more**

For an exciting and inspiring book on this subject see Barry Chant, *Living in the Image of God*. An e-book version is available at [www.barrychant.com](http://www.barrychant.com) together with numerous other resources, many of them free. Published by Tabor Publications.