

## EPHESIANS – “GOD’S MASTER PLAN”

**Ephesians 1:1-14**

**May 15, 2022**

Today we are starting a new series on Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, which was written while Paul was in a Roman prison around AD 60. Paul first visited the city of Ephesus only briefly during his second missionary journey, but on his third missionary journey, he spent at least two years there. The city of Ephesus was located on the Aegean Sea in what is now Turkey and was a very large city with a population around one-half million people. This city was large and prosperous because the pagan temple of the Greek goddess Diana (or Artemis) was located here, which was one of the Seven Wonders of the World at that time. Not only did the local people worship the goddess Diana, but pilgrims also travelled here from a vast area to worship Diana and purchase silver shrines to take back home with them. Also located here was a huge theatre which held 50,000 people, so you can see this was a place similar to one of our major cities like Toronto where people would have travelled from far-and-wide for both business and pleasure.

Paul spent more time here in Ephesus than at any other place where he had ministered – and his time here is recorded for us in **Acts 19**. Paul made such great inroads here for Christ that as more-and-more gentile pagans became believers, the influence of the worship of Diana grew less-and-less. As a result, revival broke out and they publicly burned their valuable books of spells and incantations (worth millions). As well with fewer people coming to the temple to worship and buy silver shrines the silversmiths were losing a lot of business and caused a riot, with the end result that Paul was forced to leave Ephesus; however, Paul’s faithful followers continued to proclaim Christ and the church continued to grow. It is believed that Paul never returned, and years later he writes them this letter of encouragement from his prison cell in Rome. What is interesting about this letter is that unlike Paul’s other letter, this letter doesn’t deal with any problems or issues dealing with their beliefs and practices; instead, it teaches believers some of the most important lessons of our faith and how to gain victory in the daily spiritual battles we face.

The author of the Passion translation describes this letter in this way: *“What you are about to read is meant to be taught to every church. It is the constitution of our faith, the great summary description of all that is precious and esteemed in Christian doctrine and Christian living. Paul firmly plants the cornerstone of our faith in this powerful letter, cementing, in its few pages, the position and authority of the church over every other force. In it, Paul brings before every believer the mystery of the glory of Christ. The theme of Ephesians is that God will one day*

*submit everything under the leadership of Jesus Christ (our hope). He is the head of the church and the fulness of God in human flesh. He gives His church extraordinary power to walk filled with the Holy Spirit, revealing the nature of God in all things. The church is the new humanity, the new temple where God dwells.*” We are kingdom people – hosting His presence wherever He takes us!

Why Ephesians? Because as believer, we often get discouraged with our faith and with the church. Especially, when we see our members suffering through various health issues and family problems; when we are not seeing the lost around us coming to salvation; when we question our purpose and our calling as His church within this community; when we begin to wonder what God is doing in this world with all of the natural disasters, political issues, wars, our woke culture, the sexual identity crisis with our youth, skyrocketing prices – as believers, in times like these we need encouragement. So, this letter will help us to remember who we are in Christ (our identity) and help us to see ourselves as God sees us.

Ephesians is all about encouraging the church that’s living in a world that is out of control – reminding us how privileged and powerful the body of Christ is that nothing, absolutely nothing in this world, and not even Satan can ever defeat the church. The church is the bride of Christ who will endure for eternity and is destined to rule with Christ one day when His Kingdom comes down to this earth. YES, the current Canadian church may not be what it should be or can be. What’s needed today to turn things around is not a new way to present the Gospel message, but believers who come to understand who they are in Christ, and step into their calling as an unstoppable force, because God’s power within us trumps all other principalities, powers, and authorities in this world.

Ephesians is truly an amazing letter to the church – and through this series we will come to understand God’s eternal purpose and master plan for His church is found in **Ephesians 1:10**, *“To bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.”* Plus, Ephesians gives us the answer to that question about life, **WHY AM I HERE**, in **Ephesians 2:10**, *“For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do.”* God’s answers to both His purpose and our purpose should give us hope and direction, helping us to view life from a *heaven-to-earth* perspective rather than an *earth-to-heaven* perspective, calling us to something much better than what this life has to offer us. Paul emphasis is that there is much more to this life that what we see with our physical eyes, and the riches we are to seek are not earthly riches, but heavenly riches. Studying Ephesians should leave us longing for more of Christ and help us come to understand that God has more grace, more blessings, and more

power for us to live by than we've ever imagined when our perspective is in the right place and we know who we are in Christ. Then nothing should deter us, or cause to stumble, or fall, if we live with a heavenly perspective, realizing how much God has blessed us and what great spiritual riches we have in Christ Jesus!

Paul's letter to the Ephesians is divided into 2 parts – chapters 1 to 3 are about who we are in Christ, the amazing things Jesus has done for us, how much He loves us, and the wonderful relationship we have with God. In this first section, Paul is telling us to remember who we are in Christ, to remember how God stepped into our lives when we were lost and spiritually dead and gave us CPR of the soul, changing us from the inside out. Chapters 4 to 6 are about how we are to behave as Christians, challenging us to live a life worthy of the divine calling we have received as the body of Christ, as we live out our lives in our homes, neighbourhoods, communities, and workplaces, which is summed up by Paul's appeal in **Ephesians 4:17**, "*You must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking.*" Then, Paul ends his letter with a warning, warning us that if we live the life that God has called us to live, Satan will send opposition and persecution our way to deter us and get us off track, so we need daily protection from spiritual evil by putting on the full armour of God, so we can stand against our spiritual enemies. This armour is modeled after what was worn by a Roman soldier!

Now imagine yourself sitting in a lawyer's office waiting to hear the reading of your grandfather's will. When you were young, your grandfather often told you, with a smile that because of his love for you he was going to make you wealthy beyond your dreams one day. Now, grieved by his passing, you start reflecting on his past comment, wondering if it was really true that this day you will be wealthy. Then, as the lawyer reads your grandfather's will, you are overwhelmed by his generosity and amazed at your newfound fortune. As a result, your life will never be the same. One moment you are wondering, "*How am I going to pay my bills?*" The next moment you are thinking, "*How am I going to invest all of my money?*" The lawyer's good news has changed your whole outlook on life, giving you a new perspective!

Paul is telling us in Ephesians that the Good News of the Gospel message should have the same effect on our lives – your life should never be the same after accepting the abundant inheritance God has given to those who come to believe. When you come to believe in Jesus as your Lord and Saviour, God becomes your heavenly Father, and you become part of His family, and one of the most vital lessons of Ephesians is our relationship with God must come first and change our

lives from the inside out so that we can understand how much He loves us and the great plan He has for our life to bear the good fruit God intends. So, Paul's prayer and my prayer as we study this book would be this, ***"I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe"*** (Ephesians 1:18-19).

We all have needs – physical needs, financial needs, and emotional needs, but our greatest needs are spiritual needs. The world tries to tell us otherwise, but in Ephesians God is telling us, *"I have already given you the most precious possession I have. I have given you my Son, Jesus. And because I have given you the most precious possession I have, anything else pales in comparison."* So, if God has already blessed us by giving us His very best and precious gift, His one-and-only Son, anything else we get from our Heavenly Father is just icing on the cake, so why ever be discouraged, or fearful, and not get excited about your faith. You are forgiven and blameless because of Jesus' righteousness! You are blessed! You are spiritually rich! You belong – you have a part in God's kingdom because you are chosen as an heir of God!

Now let's get into Paul's letter – In **verses 1-2**, Paul sets the foundation of this letter by clearly stating that he is an apostle by the will of God, he's not here on his own choice or decision, but chosen as the representative of Jesus Christ to the saints (God's people who are faithful to Christ) in Ephesus. And then Paul breaks into this beautiful Jewish style poem in **verses 3-14** filled with all of this identity language as Paul enthusiastically praising God for all the amazing things He has done in Christ Jesus by blessing us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing **IN CHRIST** at this very moment – we don't have to wait. And then all because the cross has leveled the playing field – we have been adopted into God's family regardless of our circumstances, whether Jew or Gentile, black or white, male or female, rich or poor, we are unified together by God's gifts of forgiveness and grace. We are this new humanity! In this way, Paul wants us to remember that spiritual blessings are different than material blessings – a person can have great material wealth and be at the top rung of the ladder of worldly success yet be completely bankrupt when it come to spiritual blessings of salvation, peace, joy, happiness, and contentment!

In the Old Testament we are told that God chose only one nation, Israel, as His chosen people, but Paul tells in **verses 5-6** that God's plan from the beginning of time was to not have only one nation but have a huge family of followers from every tribe, every nation, and every language – ***"For it was always in his perfect***

*plan to adopt us as his delightful children, through our union with Jesus, the Anointed One, so that his tremendous love that cascades over us would glorify his grace – for the same love he has for the Beloved Jesus, he has for us. And this unfolding plan brings him great pleasure”* (Passion Translation). Paul has come to understand the significance of what happened to him that day he met Jesus on the road to Damascus, when he received the greatest gift that God can ever give anyone – salvation. So, in **verses 3-11** Paul wants our spiritual eyes to be open to who we are IN CHRIST and what has happened to us IN CHRIST, so that we also could break out in spontaneous praise and adoration at God’s gift of salvation towards us. Paul also wants you to know that God has chosen you, so we can’t take any credit for our salvation! God planned the event – Jesus paid the price – and our part is to believe and receive! We often take our salvation for granted, but it is the greatest miracle that God can ever perform in anyone’s life – everything else He does for us is just icing on the cake. Every other blessing and gift from God pales in comparison!

In **verse 4** Paul tells us this mind-blowing fact that our salvation was planned by the Father from the very beginning of time – ***“For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.”*** I thought my Christian life began when I was saved at age 29, but in reality, it began before Adam and Eve existed, and even before God said, *“Let there be light.”* Paul tells us this important fact to keep us humble, reminding us that salvation wasn’t our idea; not something we can take credit for, it was God’s idea, it was God’s gift to us so that we would not be filled with pride, thinking we can earn our own salvation by being good enough, or work our way into heaven.

Then Paul goes on to tell us in **verse 5**, ***“In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will.”*** When Paul wrote to the churches in and around Ephesus, telling them that in love God adopted them, he was writing to a culture where unwanted babies were routinely abandoned at the garbage dump, and at times these abandoned babies were taken in by others to become a slave. These children who were adopted and became slaves were the lucky ones, so the Ephesians would understand the importance of adoption, of being wanted, of being chosen, of someone taking them in. So, God wants you to know that He has chosen you and anyone who believes in Him will never be rejected. Knowing we are chosen by God gives us confidence to live life boldly and without fear. Let that sink into your soul: you are chosen! God wants you! He accepts you! He has adopted you! You are secure in Christ!

Paul used this word, “*predestination*” – which has caused a lot of unnecessary division within the church body. Let me try and explain what predestined means in this way: Do you remember the feeling of being chosen for a baseball game during recess back in your public school days? I’m going back to the late 50’s and early 60’s when I was in public school. Being picked first made your day; however, being picked last ruined it. Our public school experiences with being selected (or not selected) makes us uncomfortable with the idea of predestination, that God has already pre-determined who will be saved and who will not be saved, so you don’t have a choice – it all depends on someone else making the choice and you pray that you get picked. The flaw with this type of belief is that it doesn’t recognize the fact that Christ died on the cross for everyone. God wants everyone to be saved, according to **2 Peter 3:9**, “*The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*” So, what Paul means here by the word predestined is that all-knowing God in His infinite wisdom knew in advance who was going to accept His gift of salvation and who was not. It may sound like God is manipulating our choice, but God never forces anyone to choose for Him or against Him – because of free will we always get to choose for Him or against Him. The Good News of the Gospel is that unlike the school playground there is no first or last with God. His salvation is available to all, but sadly, some will refuse to receive it!

The only choice God made – was choosing His Son to die for our sins, so that all could be saved. Without exception – there’s salvation hope for every person on this earth. God choose Israel as His holy nation, but there was nothing special about them, they were a scruffy, rag-tag and rebellious people; likewise, there is nothing remarkable about us to cause God to choose you or to choose me – it’s all about grace. At birth we were all completely dead to God spiritually, destined for destruction, yet God selected us anyway **IN CHRIST**. So not one of us can boast or be proud of our gifts, abilities, good works, or accomplishments, as **verse 6** tells us, it’s all because of what Christ did for us on the cross, “*To the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the ONE he loves.*” It’s only by God’s grace that we are acceptable, and have been chosen, so all that is left for us to do is to humbly acknowledge God’s gift, giving Him all the glory, honour, and praise for offering Jesus Christ as to solution to our sin problem, and then knowing that we are loved unconditionally needs to be the solid foundation of our lives!

Then in **verse 7-10** – Paul breaks into exuberant praise about the fact that Jesus purchased our salvation with His blood, and by doing so we have been given the

treasure of redemption, the cancellation of our sins: ***“IN HIM we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, he made know to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed IN CHRIST, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment*** (that is the end of history, the climax of the ages) – ***to bring all things together IN CHRIST, things in heaven and things on the earth.***” In these verses we see the phrase “*in Him*” or “*in Christ*” several times, which are the most important phrases in the New Testament. What it means to be “*in Him*” or “*in Christ*” is that because we were born into the wrong family that was not in Christ, God fixed our problem by sending Jesus to redeem us, to forgive us, and to show us grace by rescuing us and buying back from our slavery to sin and adopt us into a new family, the family of God, with the price of His precious blood.

Those who by faith have receive Jesus as their Saviour are now seen by God as being “*in Christ*” that is our new identity. Thereby, as a child of God we live in two places – the people Paul was writing to lived in Ephesus, but Paul also wanted them to know that they also lived “*in Christ.*” I live in Chatham-Kent, but I also live “*in Christ!*” My natural life is lived with my feet on the ground, but simultaneously I have another life, a spiritual life, and it is lived “*in Christ*” in the heavenly realm. I was a Christian for many years before I learned this truth, and as a result I struggled with my faith and didn’t experience very much victory or joy in my life. The turning point for every believer comes when they learn who they are “*in Christ,*” realizing that we can rest in the finished work of the cross, which puts us in right standing with God!

Once again in **verse 11** Paul wants us to know we are chosen, ***“IN HIM we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.*”** I especially like the Passion translation, ***“Through our union with Christ we too have been claimed by God as his own inheritance. Before we were even born, he gave us our destiny; that we would fulfill the plan of God who always accomplishes every purpose and plan in his heart.”*** Our destiny and purpose was planned before we were born, which takes us back to **verse 4**, ***“For he chose us IN HIM before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.”*** In Christ we have obtained an inheritance that God had waiting for us since the beginning of time, waiting for that day we made the decision to accept Christ and follow Him. When parents leave an inheritance to their children, the sons and daughters receive at no cost what the parents have worked for and earned; likewise, we receive God’s

inheritance at no cost – the entire cost was pre-paid by Christ on the cross with the price of His shed blood! We have been written into God’s will!

I want to finish with the best part that should get us really excited – **verses 13-14**, ***“And you also were included IN CHRIST when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked IN HIM with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession – to the praise of his glory.”*** Once we come to believe, there should never-ever-ever be any doubt that you are saved and have been adopted by God into His family and blessed, all because of the promised **SEAL** of the Holy Spirit. Some products we purchase have a seal guaranteeing us that the products are good and that we can trust them. The seal means the manufacture stands behind the product and approves them. Paul tells us that the Holy Spirit seals the children of God in a similar way. The seal guarantees us that when Christ returns for us, He will take out of this world all who have been sealed by the Holy Spirit. And then this seal not only guarantees our inheritance but also preserves us while we are in this world waiting for Christ’s return, as the down payment of the good things to come for those who are *“in Christ!”*

When you know your identity – who you are *“in Christ,”* you will never listen to those lies that Satan whispers in your ear causing you to question your faith. When we say YES to Jesus and repent of our sins, He stamps us and seals us with His mark of ownership. The seal of the Holy Spirit is like receiving a permanent tattoo that can’t be removed; so, every believer is marked for eternity as belonging to Christ, an adopted child of God, and an heir to His spiritual blessings. The seal of the Holy Spirit is God constantly whispering in our ear: *“You’re mine! I bought you with my Son’s precious blood. You’re mine! I adopted you when you were totally lost in sin. You’re mine! Satan can’t touch you.”*

You’re sitting in the doctor’s office, and you are given the bad news that you have cancer. You’re sitting in a hospital room as a loved one takes their last breath. A police officer comes to your door telling you that there’s been a serious accident. Your life partner tells you that they don’t love you any longer and want a divorce. When tragedy strikes you’re crushed and broken, but through your shock, your tears and grief, you hear God whisper in your ear: *“You’re mine! You’re mine! You’re mine!”*

**Let’s say it together: I AM LOVED – I AM CHOSEN – I AM ADOPTED – I AM A SON/DAUGHTER OF THE MOST HIGH GOD!**

- When I remember that I belong to God – I will serve differently.
- When I remember that I'm loved – I will love differently.
- When I remember who I am – I will show kindness, mercy, and grace to others.
- When I remember that I am blessed – I will live my life to bless others.
- When I remember Christ's sacrifice on the cross for me – I will worship and praise my Heavenly Father in all circumstances, because "*It is well with my soul.*"