

Ephesians 1:1-14
God's Plan to God's Glory

1:3-6 The Father Predestined Us

1:7-10 The Son Redeemed Us

1:11-14 The Holy Spirit Sealed Us

Eph 1:1-14 [ESV] Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus: [2] Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. [3] 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. In love [5] he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, [6] to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

[7] In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, [8] which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight [9] making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ [10] as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. [11] In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, [12] so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.

[13] In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, [14] who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

Paul greets the Ephesian believers as an Apostle, not as a bragging right, but in submission to the will of the God who called him. The God who Paul calls Father.

Eph 1:1-2 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus: [2] Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

God called Paul to proclaim His Son Jesus as the New King. Paul's faithfulness in that task has made him a prisoner for their sake, Paul writes in 3:1 "...*the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles*". Paul also says that being an Apostle means he is *their Servant for their sakes...* Paul serves the Gospel by serving them. 3:7 "*I was made a servant of the gospel by God's special gift...*" He brings both ideas together in 4:1 "*I who am a prisoner because I serve the Lord...*" I have really thought about this contrast between Paul as Apostle and Paul as prisoner. I find it jarring. Paul does not say, "I am an *Apostle* because I serve the Lord" but "I am a *prisoner* because I serve the Lord". Paul sees the first as an undeserved gift—the second a worthy consequence of his faithfulness to that gift.

So, Paul offers grace and peace both as a captive prisoner and as an apostolic priest, a priest serving at God's altar on behalf of people in need of grace. This is a standard greeting to fellow saints from God the Father, and from the Lord, who is God the Messiah King. This puts Jesus on equal standing with His Father—the One True

God that Paul prayed to all of His life in the great Shema “*Hear Oh Israel, your God is One...*”

Eph 1:3-6 The Father Predestined Us

Chapter 1 is really a prayer. It opens with Paul asking for grace and peace for the Ephesian Church. Then he moves quickly to offer thanks and praise to God the Father for all that He has done and will do.

*[3] Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ (**His Anointed Messiah-King**) with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, [4] even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, so that we should be holy and blameless before him, [5] he predestined us in love for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, [6] to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved (**His Beloved is also Our Beloved**).*

In verses 3-14 Paul continues his prayer, He is blessing and worshipping God who has lavished his love upon us. This has been God’s plan all along, a plan of Grace and Love that has been a hidden mystery in the mind of God. Paul has been sent out into the world with the other apostles to reveal this plan—the plan that is the theme for the entire letter, as Paul lays it out in 1:10 “... a plan for the fullness of time, a plan to unite all things in Christ, all things in heaven and all things on earth into one.” That is the big picture. Within that picture, that larger story, we experience our own calling to faith, to the spiritual life, to the obedience and the hope that unites us into one. Seeing the larger story may help us make sense of what God is doing, how He is working in *our* lives today, twenty centuries after Paul wrote this prayer and tells us God’s Plan: a plan to unite all things in Christ...into one.” We are all together in this story with Paul and all of the other saints—past, present and on into the future.

Who is this God, then? Why does Paul call us to worship and adore Him? He is the Father of the King Paul now follows and serves. He starts in v.3:

*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ (**His Anointed Messiah-King**) with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places”*

Paul is praising God as Father for what He has done *in* the Son and *through* the Holy Spirit. Paul is speaking of the One God as a Trinity of persons:

God the Father Planned our salvation in the past

God the Son Accomplished our salvation by His death and resurrection

God the Holy Spirit Applies our salvation in the present

He is not like the gods and goddesses of the pagan world. He is not some divine force or vague influence or unseen power. He is the God who made the world, and who now makes Himself known in and through Jesus, His Son. Any other view is a distortion or a fabrication of who God really is. God the Father, as we see in Paul’s words of praise, has *blessed* us in Jesus, and God *sees* us in Jesus, He *chose* us in Jesus, *predestined* us in Jesus, *redeemed* us in Jesus, set his plan to *unite everything together* in Jesus, promises our *inheritance* in Jesus, so that we can set our *hope* in Jesus, and, finally, we have been *sealed* in Jesus by the Holy Spirit as the guarantee of great and marvelous things yet to come. That is all *TRUTH!* The kind of truth that brings stability and order in the chaos of our lives.

But let's look more closely at the blessings we see in vv.3-6.

We are blessed with every spirit-empowered blessing in all of the heavenly realms! We are in "*the Beloved*" and that means we are in union with the person God loves above all others. And in the epistle to Colossae Paul tells us what it means to be "in the Beloved... [Col 1:13] *"the Father has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son."* To be "*in the Beloved*" is to be in the Kingdom that God the Father blesses. We have all the blessings of the Kingdom of THE BELOVED because the King is also OUR Beloved—OUR Lord and OUR King.

The word *BELOVED* is a great word! And it is the basis for Paul's outpouring of praise to the Father. It is the last word we see in v. 6. Everything the Father does has His Beloved in mind. His Beloved Son is the culmination—the goal—of God's plan and God's Kingdom on earth.

In the Greek NT "*BELOVED*" is not a noun, it is actually the verb *ἠγαπημενω*, from the word *αγαπη* (aGApay), and it means "the one who *has been* and is *always going to be* loved." Loved by whom? By the Father, of course, whose love and devotion go all the way back to the place before time and before creation. But once we come know God's Son He becomes our Beloved as well, and that leads to the question—HOW is it possible that we mere humans ever come to know this King Who is over all things, let alone become part of His Kingdom? There is only one reason, one cause: We came to love HIM because the Father Loved US. The most often quoted passage in the Gospel of John says, "*God so LOVED the world that He gave (as a gift) His ONLY Begotten, very unique, one-of-a-kind, beloved Son.*" God gave to US! He gave Him to us to die for us. And if He died for us then He is truly *FOR US!* The *Resurrected King* of the Universe is *FOR US!* Everything that God has done, He has done in and through Jesus. And what has He done? What is His plan?

1:4 "*even as he chose us in him (in His Beloved) before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love (the Father's motivation) [5] In Love he predestined us ("even as" he chose us he has predestined us. The Greek word "predestined" means 'looking and planning ahead'. What is the father planning?)—to adopt us to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will...*" God is going to adopt us into His family and He is going to do it *through* Jesus Christ. What does that mean? Everything Jesus does in His life and in His death and in His resurrection is going to guarantee that the Father's plans are going to work out. This is the grand plan! This is the plan the Jewish Nation, Paul's people, have been longing for ever since Abraham made his covenant with God. Abraham is the patriarch, the head of God's promised family. God has *chosen and predestined* this family. God has chosen every person so that He can adopt them into it, both Jews and Gentiles. And God planned this long before He created *anything* out of nothing.

Taken by themselves, these words —*chosen and predestined*—have caused endless debates in the Church, debates that go back centuries. "*Who does he choose? Why did He choose some and not others?*" we ask! I have seen anger in someone's face as they proclaim the unfairness of it all! "*How can being a follower of Jesus be a matter of God's prior decision, overriding any decision or freedom of my own?*" It is as if our rights and freedoms have been somehow violated! And if we look at these words apart from the love of God, then these words *can* be used as the ammunition for division, argument, even resentment and hatred. One side argues for a fixed determinism, the other argues for a sovereign human will. The result is anything *but* the

love and the unity the Father desires. Arguments like this grow out of an overemphasis on the salvation of the individual, as if the salvation of individual souls was the *totality* of God's plan for the world. That is a very large part of it, but our personal salvation in Christ is only a stage, a stepping stone, on the way to the much larger purpose of God. God's plan is the salvation of the whole cosmos, the entire universe. We do not have the power or the wisdom to accomplish that by our own free will, even if by some miracle, and it would be a miracle, all of as humans could come together and agree even how to do it! His choosing and calling, shaping and directing, is a process connecting us with that larger purpose. We aren't chosen for our own sake, but for the sake of what God wants to accomplish through us. This is why Paul could accept and even celebrate his being a prisoner. Even that was part of the Father's predetermined plan. This is a difficult concept for us who see individual freedom, and our rights as individuals, as the supreme virtue. It isn't. We play a small part. It takes humility to accept that and to submit to God's larger purpose. Like Paul did.

We commonly use the words "choosing" and "planning ahead" to describe the way the parents of the bride would plan a wedding feast. In Paul's Jewish/Roman culture the father of the groom actually *chose* the bride for his son, arranged a binding marriage contract with the bride's father, then began making plans for the most elaborate wedding feast he could afford when the bride will be taken for a wife. Paul clearly sees the Church as this kind of bride-in-waiting. Waiting for the predestined day of the wedding feast planned by the Father. The day when the Groom takes the Bride and presents her to the world as His wife. This is a beautiful metaphor Paul paints for us.

We also use the words "choosing" and "planning ahead" to describe the way an architect would plan and design a building. This is another metaphor Paul uses when describing the Church. The plan and the drawings of the architect are not the actual building, but an image of what the ideal building will be like. Every structure, every building, is built for a purpose and the purpose will determine its structure. This is all thought out and planned out ahead of time. It couldn't be any other way. Can you imagine building a house without any plans, without any idea of what it will be used for? How secure would you feel living in such a building? When I think of how the God of the Universe has already mapped all of this out, with perfect blueprints, I can rest easy. He is going to do it right! I just have to follow the directions He gives me.

So it is with the Church.

The Church is a living body pictured as a bride; a bride betrothed in a sealed covenant relationship that is forged in the love of the Father for the Son. It is the beginning of a family. And many of the children are adopted—taken from the foreign slave market and are not natural heirs. It paints an interesting picture. The husband and wife set out together to find orphaned children, or children who are trapped in slavery, and they rescue them, save them, adopt them into their family. By adoption they are now inheritors of the blessings and the wealth that belong to the Father.

The Church is also a building, an organized structure, built to pursue and carry out the Father's purpose. And everything needed for the growth and operation has been planned since before the Triune God formed the waters of the deep or set the foundations of the earth. Everything has been planned out; the people selected as gifted leaders and workers. Even the enemies and those who oppose us is known! Preparations are made for defense and protection of God's Beloved Church. And the Father has placed His Son at the helm; the Head of all operations, the ultimate

resource person for all that is needed to carry out God's purpose—not just in this age but in the age to come.

And Paul says all the credit, all the glory, all the praise go to the Father—because of His purpose and His will—

*1:6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us **in the Beloved (His Beloved is also Our Beloved).***

This takes us back to the first line—

*[3] Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us **in Christ...** We praise Him and Bless His name as we consider how thoroughly secure we really are. All of the power of Creation have been brought to bear. The choice and the planning and the purpose are as certain as the sea and the mountains that are set on the foundations of the earth. It goes beyond what we can even imagine.*

The other hidden story Paul is telling us is the story of the Exodus from Egypt. In *1:7–10* Paul describes the cross of Jesus in a way that we can hear the ancient Jewish story of Passover.

And that is where we will look next time—

Father we thank you for your planning and for your purpose in making sure that we will be loved and cared for, not only for today, but for eternity in the Age to Come. We are part of a Kingdom that will have no end. We pray for you to show us your purpose and our place in it. Show us there is no task too small, or suffering too great, and give us the power to do your will everyday in all that we do. We pray this in the name of the King who gave Himself for us, and who is coming for us —Jesus Christ. Amen