

# Check out our Great God! – Ephesians 1:1-14

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## What's the Point?

I wonder if you have ever thought about what the point of Christianity is. Why God sent Jesus into the world. Why we go to church and bible study. What is the point of Christianity? I reckon there would be a whole range of answers to that question. Some would say that there is no point. Christianity is just another useless religion. Others would say that the point of Christianity is to do good things and please God so that we can go to heaven. Still others would say that Christianity is all about God blessing us, giving us our best life now. In churches like ours, I think people would probably say something like, Christianity is all about Jesus offering us the gift of salvation so that we can have eternal life with God. I think that is a pretty good summary of what most reformed, protestant, evangelical Christians of any denomination would agree with. But our description falls far short of Paul's description. It is not that our description is wrong, it just doesn't go far enough. That is probably because we like to sum things up in a single sentence with one basic idea. Besides which, we also like the focus to be on us and our salvation. But these opening sentences in the book of Ephesians touch upon a number of ideas which all have profound meaning. In fact, it is impossible to even begin to explain the depth of these ideas in a short sermon like this one. So, I want to encourage you to continue to grapple with the ideas which Paul presents us with in this passage in the following days and weeks. Read over each verse and try to think through the different ideas and how Paul fits them all together.

## Praise

The first thing to note is that Paul begins and ends this passage with words of praise to God.

***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.*

***Ephesians 1:13b-14** When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, <sup>14</sup> who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession-- to the praise of his glory.*

Paul speaks in words of praise, placing all his focus on God. We see similar things in the book of Revelation when all the peoples of God bow down around the throne and praise God in worship. You see, God is the main focus in Christianity for Paul. Not us or our salvation. I wonder how often you praise God. Do you spend time in prayer, reflecting on the awesomeness of God, who he is, and what he has done? Too often, we think about ourselves, our desires, our struggles, and expect God to fix things for us when we want them fixed. But Paul's focus is not on himself, or his problems, though there were times when he did pray about those problems. But notice how he starts this letter, in words of great praise for God. We need to spend more time focusing on God and praising him in our prayers. We need to spend more time contemplating the greatness of God which helps us to remember how insignificant we are without him.

## The Trinitarian God

Paul praised God, he praised the Trinitarian God. He starts by praising God the Father. God the Father is the one who has blessed us, chosen us, and predestined us. God the Father used his wisdom and will to not only plan for all this to happen, but for it to happen in accordance with his wisdom and will. This means that nothing

happens outside of God's wisdom and will. God is in total control and will continue to fulfil things according to his wisdom and will.

Paul also focuses on the Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, Paul refers to the second person of the Trinity 14 times in the 14 verses of today's reading. Most of the time, Paul points to how God does things in, or through, Jesus. We are blessed in Christ, we are adopted through Christ, we have redemption and forgiveness through Christ. We know the will of God, and his whole purpose for creation, through Christ, which is that all things will be united under the headship of Christ.

Finally, Paul turns to the Holy Spirit, and while he does not praise the Holy Spirit, he does recognise his role in God's will and works. Paul says that the Holy Spirit's work in our lives is like the deposit of God in our lives. In eternity, we will have that family relationship with God as his adopted sons. It is a close bond between God and us through Jesus. The Holy Spirit is already at work in us, even before we enter into the heavenly realms. So, we already have a taste of the intimacy we may have with God as we are already in a relationship with him through the Holy Spirit. Paul reminds us that when we praise, worship, and honour God, we must remember that he is the three in one God who is at work in our lives right now.

## **God's Sovereign Will**

God is still working. He is working to make sure his plans and purposes will come true in the fullness of time. One of the hard concepts for us to understand is how God planned for all this to happen before the creation of the world. We see this in...

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

***Ephesians 1:11** 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*

What this is saying is that your salvation is not an accident. It is not even something you have done. God has chosen you. God has predestined you. You may ask, "How do I know he has chosen me?" and the easiest answer is, "You don't." But if you have responded to Jesus and remain true to him, then you are one of God's chosen people. It is not that his choice is dependent on your response, but your response indicates his choice. If God has chosen you, then your salvation is assured, because it is based in God's will, and God's will always comes to pass.

## **Mystery Revealed**

Now, God's mind, his plan, his will, is beyond our comprehension. And yet, we now have the privilege of knowing some of God's plans and purposes for his creation.

***Ephesians 1:8b-10** With all wisdom and understanding, <sup>9</sup> he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, <sup>10</sup> to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment-- to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.*

The more we understand Jesus, who he is and what he is meant to do, the more we understand God's purposes and plans for his creation. Paul tells us that God has made known to us the mystery of his will. Now, in this context, the word "mystery" is not about solving a riddle or a crime, like we see in those TV shows. It is

not about Scooby Doo and the gang jumping into the mystery machine and solving another crime. No, when Paul speaks about mystery, he is speaking about something we could never work out for ourselves. So, what is that mystery? What is the thing that we could never work out unless God revealed it to us through Jesus? The great mystery is that God put everything into place so that there would be unity between the things of heaven and the things of earth.

In Genesis we read about God creating everything so that humanity had a place to live. Adam and Eve lived in the Garden of Eden, in the place God had made for them, and God walked with them and related to them in this garden. There was no sin. There were no broken relationships. God's order of creation was in place, and everything was very good. But when Adam and Eve sinned, God's order of creation was turned upside down, and the relationship between God and his people was broken. Adam and Eve had to leave the garden. God no longer walked the earth. There was a chasm between the things of heaven (namely God), and the things of earth (namely God's people) and we could not bridge that chasm. But God could. He did this through Christ. The second person of the Trinity became a human being and lived among God's people. In his execution, he shed his blood, which paid the price for our sin and brought us forgiveness. The atoning work of Jesus brought us salvation. Yes, we are saved into a relationship with God right now, that is why we have the Holy Spirit in us now, but the ultimate form of this relationship will be at the end of time, when the things of heaven (namely God) and the things of earth (namely God's people) can relate in perfect unity once again.

This is what I think Paul is saying is the point of Christianity. The whole point of the Christian faith points to the idea of God's created order not only being restored, but being glorified in its restoration. Sin will be abolished, God will walk with his people in a more intimate and glorious relationship than he had with Adam and Eve. Everything will be brought into perfect unity under the headship of Christ, through Christ's atoning work, for the glory of Christ, which means that we praise God for putting his wisdom and will into action.

## **Adopted as Sons**

Now, as I have already said, the Holy Spirit's presence in our lives helps us to know that we already have a good relationship with God, but also notice what Paul says in...

***Ephesians 1:13b-14** When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit,<sup>14</sup> who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession-- to the praise of his glory.*

If you are one of God's possessions, one of God's people, then the Holy Spirit's presence in our lives helps us to look forward to our inheritance. This inheritance signifies how intimate our relationship with God is supposed to be.

***Ephesians 1:4b-5** In love<sup>5</sup> he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ*

Now, it would be easy for us to misunderstand the meaning of sonship here. Paul does not mean that only men can be adopted into God's family or that women have to become men. In fact, I would say that he is deliberately using these words to say that men and women alike are adopted as sons. The reason why I am saying that is because he uses the inclusive language of "us". No matter who you are, if you are one of God's

people, then you are an adopted son. The reason why you are an adopted “son” is because it was the sons who inherited in the cultures of Paul’s day. But for Paul, a Christian is a person who inherits because they are in God’s family, no matter whether they are a man or a woman. In fact, this was also great news for slaves. Slaves may have not been able to inherit in this life, but in the life to come, they are adopted sons who inherit the great gift of being in God’s eternal family. So, being an adopted “son”, means that you are a child of God who inherits all the glory and grace a “son” can receive through Jesus.

## God’s Love, Grace, and Pleasure

Now, we have looked very briefly at some very big concepts in this passage so far and one of the mistakes we can make is to focus too much on those big theological concepts. Some people love to try and understand concepts like predestination, God’s sovereignty and will, the purpose of the universe, and understanding the Trinity, but Christianity is not just about big concepts, it is about God’s love.

***Ephesians 1:4-8** For he **chose us** in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. **In love** <sup>5</sup> he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with **his pleasure** and will-- <sup>6</sup> to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. <sup>7</sup> In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the **riches of God's grace** <sup>8</sup> that he **lavished** on us.*

God lavished on us the riches of his grace. God is not stingy. God is not cheap. He lavished upon us his love, his grace, his mercy. And he did not do this out of a sense of duty, as if he was obligated to do something he did not really want to do. God brought salvation to us, God restores the created order, God brings together heaven and earth so that we can be part of God’s eternal family, because it brings him pleasure. He loves to do it.

I remember being told that there was this little boy ready for us to adopt. Vanessa and I had spent more than seven years in the adoption program, going to all kinds of interviews and meetings. It was difficult and frustrating, but it was all for our pleasure when we got that phone call. And it wasn’t just our pleasure, you should have seen our parents, our extended family, and friends. Everyone was so excited about this adoption and our love for Sebastian just overflowed. It’s a good thing God’s love is greater than our love.

## Praise and Glory

When we look at this passage, we see Paul praising God. We see Paul praising God the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. We read of God’s will, wisdom, and understanding. We learn about God’s plan of adoption as he saves us through Jesus’ death and resurrection. We realise the greatness of God’s grace as he lavishes it on us, and the pleasure he takes in showing us his love. And we are reminded that the whole purpose of the universe, of Christianity, is to bring together God and his people in an eternal union which will never again be broken by sin. But what we must not forget is that this was all done in the glory of God. God is so glorious, so powerful, so majestic and awesome, that if we even begin to understand what Paul is saying in this passage then we ought to join him in praising God. The focus of Christianity is not supposed to be on us and our salvation, as amazing as that is. The focus of Christianity is meant to be on God! If you are a child of God, then praise God, for he has made you an heir who will inherit eternal life with him. To God be the glory. Amen.