

PM Ephesians 1:1-14

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[0 : 0 0] and are faithful in Christ Jesus. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 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 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before him.

In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ according to the purpose of his will to the praise of his glorious grace with which he has blessed us in the beloved.

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 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.

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 so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.

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.

[1 : 4 5] who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it to the praise of his glory. May God bless to us this reading too.

Now we'll again join us. And verse 3 Ephesians chapter 1 and verse 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.

Now I think of this verse as somewhat like the headlines of a newspaper where you've got the content expressed in a few short words in a short sentence perhaps and the main features of the story which follows are there set before us as headlines that grab our attention.

What we've got here is an introduction to what follows. And the basic elements of what we've got in the remaining verses in the passage are summed up and presented in this opening verse.

The headlines as I say and the rest of the section develops the story. Now this is an introduction to what is generally called the doctrine of election.

[3 : 1 8] And of course this is probably the most fiercely debated doctrine that there is. It stirs up extremes. Either you love it or you hate it.

And here is the picture from one perspective. It's a picture from the inside we might say. From the experience of somebody that knows what this means for himself.

And that's shown by the words our Lord Jesus Christ. Here is somebody speaking who knows the Lord Jesus who has allegiance to him and who in the company of others acknowledges his lordship.

This is the church speaking of his experience of election. It's election from the inside we might see. But of course that's the problem that other people see election from the outside from a different perspective.

I thought it would be a good idea to quote Robert Burns here because after all he's buried in St Michael's Cemetery and he's known in the area.

[4 : 29] Then I realised that half of you weren't brought up in the Scottish system where Burns was probably quite a popular poet. But I'm going to quote Burns nonetheless. It may well be that in his own age election was badly taught.

But what he says is the expression of the way that people understood it or misunderstood it in his time. And it's a pretty severe caricature that he brings to our attention of the doctrine of election in one of his more famous poems namely Holy Willie's Prayer.

And this is how it starts. O thou that in the heavens dost dwell wha as it pleases best thyself sends ain to heaven and ten to hell offer thy glory and no for any good or ill they've done afore thee.

Which I hope is understood in English. Really I think is quite straightforward. Now you see that is a caricature as a C but you can see the sort of picture that it gives to us of God.

He's arbitrary just doing whatever he wants to do. He's kind of capricious and he's very selfish all for his glory. That's the way it's depicted as a selfish thing for God to do.

[5 : 51] And he's generous and he's ungenerous and grudging. One to heaven and ten to hell is the way that he sees it. And above all the thing that bugs me about this he says that he acts without reference to moral criteria.

But that's the picture that people had in his day and Burns is simply giving expression to it. And it's the sort of thing that people still think about it if they look at it from the outside.

But we're looking at it from the inside. And you know I do think that that's fair that's a fair way to do things. You might say well he's biased of course he's biased.

He's stating the matter from his point of view. And I think that that is a reasonable thing to do for this reason. In general the player in the middle knows better than the spectators on the sidelines.

The sportsman on the field knows better than the one who shouts advice from the terraces. And much more so is that the case here.

[7 : 02] The one who has known the blessings of election is in a far better position to describe it accurately than the godless person who shouts abuse from the terraces we might see.

Or to use another illustration which makes the same point. Here's an old old castle and it's a pretty grim looking building from the outside.

The stones are worn and they're dirty and black and it looks a grim forbidding sort of place. But you go in the door and you discover it's beautiful inside.

There's great panelings there's great plaster on the ceilings and it's all well decorated bright and spacious and spectacular.

That's what we've got in election. From the outside it looks horrible the way Burns describes it it looks horrible repulsive unattractive but you just come inside and you see it in a different way.

[8 : 10] And that's what we're going to look at. What we see of election from the inside because that's the place we've got to start. The problem is you see that unconverted people are looking at this doctrine and they can't understand it and they don't understand it and they misrepresent it and think it's terrible because that's the unconverted mind.

But if you come to this with a converted mind it makes sense. It gives a different perspective altogether and that's the way we've got to look at it.

So if you're unconverted don't bother yourself with election until you are converted because it's then that things will fall into place. if you're doing a jigsaw puzzle usually you start with the framework and once you've got the framework you can see where bits fit in.

If you didn't have that framework you had nothing to build on as it were and that's the way that it is with doctrine in general and with this one in particular.

Come to this in itself doesn't make sense. Put it in its proper framework and it makes sense. You have to start with knowing this for yourself and once you know this for yourself you can grasp it better.

[9 : 29] So what we're going to do this evening and perhaps we're going to continue with this another time I'm not dead certain that I will but perhaps we will come back to it another time. What we're going to look at this evening is three things that we've got here.

We've got the originator of this great plan of salvation the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. we've got the object of the plan to bless us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places and we're told about the operation of this plan all this comes to us in Christ that's the way it works in Christ the originator the object and the operation of this plan of redemption and we're looking at it just to refresh our minds about it and to try and capture the magnificence of it so that we will say blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who chose us in Christ who chose us in Christ blessed be the God and Father that's what we want to say it evokes a spirit of praise and of thanksgiving that's the outcome of what we want to do that's the intended outcome of what we want to do so it's not to give a discourse of theology which I can do anyway and it's not to try and do something practical beyond this look at it isn't it wonderful praise God for it so we start with the originator of the plan of redemption it is

God the Father who is spoken of here as the originator of the plan but it's a strange way of speaking about him there are two roles that he fulfills here in regard to our Lord he is both the God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ now these are not normal ways of speaking about Jesus or about the Father either we have God the Father we have Jesus the Son and that's the way that we speak about them but God the Father being the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is not a very common way of thinking about things and I just want to briefly say something of what that implies now you know trouble I think about recognizing that what we're talking about here is our Lord Jesus Christ in regard to his human nature we're not talking about him in regard to his

Godhead he is God but as we said this morning he's also man fully and completely human except that he's without sin which is an intrusion into human life so it doesn't count he's fully human he's got all the bits which make up a human being that we have he's truly human and it's in regard to his human nature that this is being spoken about in regard to that the Father is the God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ Christ now what does that mean well what does it mean for us who are believers to say that God is our God and of course we could say several things but I'm going to speak about three just as an example we might say well he's our creator he shaped our coming into this world he made us what we are creator he's our God he's our creator we might say we're accountable to him we have got to give an account of our lives to him we have got to respond to his orders and follow his commands and his direction we're accountable to him because he's our God or we might say he cares for us because he's our God and we have no real difficulty with that in regard to ourselves as human beings he's our creator we're accountable to him he cares for us he's our

God and these things you see can be clearly said about Jesus Christ as well in regard to his the human side of his being was was God the one that brought him into being was God the father the one that brought him into being well he wasn't born by the ordinary or he wasn't conceived in the normal means it was by the power of the Holy Spirit that he was conceived it was the Holy Spirit the agent of God the father that made his genes what they were and that's the way in which his human body his human nature was brought into being so that he's the creator of Jesus as surely as he's our creator and he presided over the environment in which Jesus was brought up he made sure that he was put into a safe environment into a married a home where the parents were married and were able to look after him and that was under the care and direction of God so God shaped him and molded him and made him what he was and when he grew in stature and in wisdom and in favor with

[14 : 52] God and man it was under the creative governing influence of God the father that we're speaking about here in that sense he was Jesus God Jesus was accountable to him in the Old Testament in Psalm 40 it says to you your will I take delight O thou my God that art so there is Jesus speaking and he says you are my God what did that mean for him to do your will I take delight he felt that he was accountable to God his God and that's what we have in the New Testament quite plainly I have come not to do my own will but the will of the one that sent me so just as we say we are accountable to God we've got to listen to him and do his will and fulfill the purpose for which we're here so Jesus said precisely the same thing and so God the father was his God and as for the father's care surely there can be no doubt at all that there was a hand in heaven that directed the course of Jesus life and upheld him and cared for him and protected him and supported him in every way possible

God the father was Jesus God in as much as he cared for him look at the story of his birth or shortly after his birth at least the wise men come they tell Helen that they're looking for a king herod says come back to me tell me where he is and he does that so he can go and destroy him but God the father doesn't let that happen he moves the wise men not to go back and tell Herod about it and he moves Joseph and Mary to take the baby down to Egypt as refugees there and the higher hand of God is at work caring for him so that the tyrant Herod wouldn't snuff out his life before it got underway properly and so the father was there caring for him throughout his life what comfort it brought to him when he heard the voice at baptism saying you are my beloved son I'm well pleased with you there was the human nature of

Jesus being stimulated by this encouragement from the father in heaven the father was his God caring for him and so he was promised twelve legions of angels if he needed them to protect him that was the father's care over him so you see in these ways we can say yes yes it is true it's not natural to look at it that way but when you think about it it is true the role that God performs in our lives as our creator the one to whom we're accountable and as our carer these are also the roles that God the father fulfilled in the case of Jesus and so Jesus is the Jesus can look in this way and say he is my God now if you ask how is he his father well I'm not going to say anything more than that because one way that we look at God is that he is our father so

God being God to us is also a father to us and so it was in Jesus case here so there we've got this unwrapped a wee bit here we've got this picture of this doctrine of election and where does it originate from it originates from God the father who supports Jesus cares for him brings him into being in regard to human nature cares for him and supports him and commands him in his earthly life and ministry that's where it originates from but think a wee bit more about that you know this statement is still a wee bit strange why is God the father not identified by something in his own self instead of his relationship with somebody else you may think that's strange but I think most of us I certainly do you know this is actually quite common in life today we identify somebody by the relationship with somebody else for example when I was a young student and a young minister people knew my father better than me and somebody might introduce me to somebody

I didn't know and say this is Ronald Christie the son of Christie Salkots which means the son of Robert Christie the minister in Salkots I was introduced because I was my father's son for a few years I was myself and then in no time I was being introduced in a different way somebody might say this is Ronnie Fiona's dad and I was identified in terms of my daughter I didn't mind either of these ways some people don't like that but I didn't mind either of these ways but it's that second one that is being put before us here here is God the God and you see this is something that gives place to Jesus here that is quite important it means that those that know election know it through the experience of Jesus and therefore God the Father is identified in terms of his relationship with Jesus and so to me you know although he's talking about the originator as

[20 : 29] God the Father he's already bringing in this idea that the central figure here in Christ and that you see is what enriches our understanding of election especially in relationship to the cold and barren and repulsive sort of thing that we've got in Robert Burns expressing the opinions of people at that time does he mention Jesus no does he bring into account Jesus and his work it's absent entirely but this is saying you can't have a doctrine of election that doesn't centre largely upon the experience of our Lord because even the father who originated it is described in terms of his relationship with Jesus put Jesus in his place and election will take on a new meaning leave Jesus out of it and it's cold and barren and impersonal and kind of repulsive put

Jesus in his place and becomes the sort of thing that we can say praise God the father of our Lord Jesus Christ that's the originator of the plan of salvation now what is the object of this plan of salvation and the answer is to bless us with all with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places this is the goal the practical goal that he has in mind what did he elect us for in order that we might enjoy all spiritual blessings in heavenly places now that's quite a big thing the object that he had in view was the happiness of those to whom this purpose was directed we'll see more about this in regard to his glory in a minute but that's the way it's presented here what did God have in mind when he chose these people for their happiness blessing them with blessings that's what he had in mind and that's pretty positive and it's pretty glorious and it's pulled apart from the cold legalistic sort of spirit that

Burns uses to describe the doctrine of election blessing with blessings that's the centre of it as the object of it but he enlarges on it and we'll just mention that it's blessing us with spiritual blessings it's not that he envisaged that the people whom he elect would have health wealth and prosperity which are outward although these sometimes do come to God's people that was not the centre of it that they should have a good balance and a lovely car and a great house and no worries about their finances or their business life that was not the purpose of election it was with spiritual blessings riches and wealth it isn't that we're poor and he's endowed us with a little but he's endowed us richly all special blessings they're blessings in heavenly places and this doesn't just mean that we're going to experience heaven the blessings of heaven are going to come to us and that means of course in the whole context of

New Testament that they're not restricted to heaven their heavenly blessings blessings in heavenly places but that doesn't mean to say that we don't experience them now and all this you see adds up to something that is rich and vivid and warm and it pulls apart from the sort of niggardly way in which Burns describes the thing you go to heaven you go to hell cold and indifferent no he said I want to bless these people with all blessings of a heavenly nature wonderful that's what we've got in mind now you might say but wait a second now Burns said offer thy glory isn't he right there well if we read this passage certainly we'd notice that it said that on various occasions this is all for God's glory but the outstanding feature of God's glory is that he wants to bless us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly linked inextricably linked with the fact that he wants to bless people like us with blessings like these that's the display of his glory he can't be glorified unless this is the nature of the object of his election and you see that means that

God isn't a selfish God that wanted all the glory to himself like a selfish politician or sports star or whatever that wasn't the nature of his glory he wanted it to be known that he delighted to take poor people and make them rich he wanted to be made known that he took people that were twisted and broken and he made them whole and presented them faultless before his own presence he wanted it to be known that you took trash and made them into a treasure that's what he wanted to be made known and it was in doing that that he was displaying his own glory so to think of God displaying his glory is not something of selfishness mere a display of one's own characteristics but rather it's in this index really linked with this idea that he wanted to enrich us and that's something that would make us say blessed be the

[27 : 28] God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who chose us for blessings like that okay that's the object then of this plan and the last thing we've got here is the operation of the plan now how is he going to do this how is he going to bring it about and the mechanism of it if you want to call it that the modus operandi you want to call it that is described for us here in two simple words or maybe not so simple simple in outward form in Christ that's how it was all going to be accomplished it was all going to be done in Christ two simple words but very far reaching in their meaning and left footprints in sand and you can look back in your life and there is one set of footprints that belong to

Jesus and here is another set of footprints belonging to the believer and there's one part where there's only one set of footprints and the believer says to Jesus why did you leave me alone at that point it was the most difficult and Jesus says these are your footsteps these are mine that's when I was carrying you very nice if you like that think on it very good but not quite the whole truth as Paul would have said it Paul would have said there's only one set of footsteps on the beach Jesus in good times and in bad he's carrying you because every blessing that comes to you comes to you in him and that's the way that Paul is looking at things here it's only in virtue of us being united to Christ that these blessings come to us and all the spiritual blessings in heavenly places come to us because

Christ is carrying us all the time think about some situations here's a person before the judgment seat of God if he looks at his own sin he says if you should hold our sins against us I couldn't possibly stand in your presence but God looks at him and says you're in Christ and what he sees therefore is not the sins of the believer but the righteousness of Christ that was lived out in human experience and was counted as belonging to the one that was in Christ and he sees the death that Jesus died taking upon himself the punishment of sin and he sees that person as being in Christ and he says you may feel yourself to have been a sinner you were but looking at you in Christ I can say there is no condemnation for those who are in

Christ Christ takes us up into his arms and carries us before the judgment seat and represents us there and the blessing of freedom from condemnation comes to those who are thus carried in Christ or think about the difficulties and trials that we experience the Old Testament speaks of these in terms of fire and water passing through the fire and the water and the New Testament perspective and it says in the prophet I'm thinking about they'll not touch you when you pass through them and the New Testament would add this perspective it's because he's carrying you through them you'll go through the fire you'll go through the water you'll go through the trials and difficulties they'll be all there around you but they won't touch you because Christ is carrying you through it that's the sort of thing we've got to think about here when it says here these happen to you in

Christ Jesus and that's something that in my mind transforms the whole idea of election we're elected because Christ is elected and we are in him therefore we enjoy the blessings that he enjoys and that is thought to be something by some people is thought to be something quite important from a philosophical level now I'm not dealing with philosophy here but I just do happen to remember one thing I learned in university when I had to do a class of philosophy which I didn't understand and the only thing that remains in my mind is what one lecturer said about this question of election and free will he wasn't a Christian to my knowledge he was speaking from a philosophical point of view and he said something like this if the goal is determined then there's no free will but if God does not just determine the goal but also the means by which that goal is to be achieved that changes the picture entirely and that's what we've got here we don't have just the goal determined but with the means of achieving that goal determined as well and to some people who are disturbed over that that might make a difference and that's why I say it to you but the point I'm making here this picture of election is much much much bigger than anything

[33 : 45] Robert Burns envisaged in that caricature that I've been referring to that's a poor poor thing that he's got there lacking in details lacking in vividness lacking in warmth compared to the few words that we've got here it's an entirely different thing that he's speaking about compared to the rich warm full expression of things as we've got in the New Testament here and that's what would make us say blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has elected us with this object in view and laid down this means of operation what a wonderful thing it is we should praise God for it and there are two applications of this just to finish it wrap it up if you're on the outside looking in you're not going to see very much beneficial or helpful about the doctrine doctrine of election you're going to see a grim forbidding building that looks dark and repulsive but the door is open and the voice is there that says come to me and I'll give you rest you're invited in you're commanded to come in the blessings are there before you the door is open everything's now ready and what you have to do is not wrestle in your mind over this difficulty of election and try and clear away the repulsive nature of it your job is to take Christ at his face value and the promises he has given and lay hold them for yourself and go in through the door and then you'll see it differently take Christ at his word and come to him and receive him and know his forgiveness and you'll look at election and say what a wonderful thing we've got there and that's what we leave with ourselves nothing very practical in this for our lives except to think once again on the remarkable nature of this plan of redemption originated in the father's will with a great object of enriching those that were poor and the means appointed to do it as well so that it couldn't possibly fail what a wonderful thing we've got there and we can bless

God for it and I don't know what bless means but I think of it as a combination of praise and thanksgiving let's thank God for this let's praise God for this because there's nothing like this so wonderful beyond the human mind to conceive but revealed to God through his spirit to Paul here and in the writings of the scriptures in general let's make sure that we say what a wonderful thing we've got here we must praise God for it may God bless to us his word we're going to sing in conclusion good you good man good good good