

PM Ephesians 1:1-14

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[0 : 00] 1 Corinthians chapter 1 and from verse 17. 1 Corinthians chapter 1 and at verse 17.!

To those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.

Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

For since in the wisdom of God the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.

For Jews demand signs, and Greeks seek wisdom. But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles.

[1 : 21] But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the power of God, and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

For consider your calling, brothers. Not many of you were wise according to worldly standards. Not many were powerful. Not many were of noble birth.

But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are.

So that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him, you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption.

So that as it is written, let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord. May God bless to us this reading.

Now our reading is in the letter to the Ephesians, chapter 1, verses 1 to 14.

[2 : 42] Ephesians chapter 1, verses 1 to 14. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus 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.

[4 : 17] 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, will sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, 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. We continue our studies in Ephesians chapter 1, and if you want the key words that we'll be looking at, although we'll be bringing other bits in, it's from the last bit of verse 4 through verse 5 and into verse 6.

In love he predestined us for adoption of the Son through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace.

Now as you may remember, we've been going through this passage, and this is the last time I'm going to deal with this. Now last time we talked about the doctrine of election in terms of a syndrome.

[5 : 41] A syndrome in medical terms is when you've got a disease that is manifested in various symptoms, and you've got to have this and this and this and this all together, before you're diagnosed as having this particular disease.

It's things brought together to make a complete picture. And that's what we're saying about election. If you look at election just from one point of view, if you just take one or two simple ideas, you're missing out on what it really means.

And you're liable to have a distorted picture of what the Bible is telling us about. Or to use another illustration we use then, it's like stained glass windows of varied colours.

And those that like that sort of thing say, how beautiful, glorious to see the sun shining in all these varied colours. But supposing most of it was just plain glass, and there was just one colour there only, it would lose its splendour.

It would look pretty ugly. And folks wouldn't say, isn't it beautiful? And that's what happens with election. If you just take one or two ideas, and leave the others out, then what is designed to be glorious and splendid becomes pretty miserable looking.

[7 : 09] And we've got a distorted view of it. Now last time we applied that to the goal of election. What is it that God is aiming to do by electing people?

And usually we think of it as simply, he elects us to heaven. As we mentioned, Robert Burns had this in his poem, reflecting the way that people thought at the time.

Aim to heaven and tend to hell, offer thy glory, and no for any gooder ill do not afford thee. That's the way he looked at it. Heaven, that was the goal.

But this passage doesn't speak in those terms. He elected us to be holy. He chose us to be as children, to be adopted as sons. And therefore, it's these things together that make up the goal of God and election.

It's a syndrome. It's a beautiful picture comprising various colours. Now what we're wanting to do this evening is to look at the starting point of all this in the mind and purpose of God.

[8 : 16] We've said, what does it all result in? Holiness, adoption as children, and so on. But where did it all begin? What was it, what was it driving for us, the motive we might call it that, in the mind and purpose of God?

And what we're going to do is say, it's a syndrome. And if we leave out certain aspects of it, we get something that is pretty miserable and distorted.

And we need to have the full picture, all the colours there, in order to appreciate the glory of it. Now, what did God elect us for in the sense of what led him to do this?

And of course, the obvious answer is that this was for his glory. He did it for his glory. And we've got that quite plainly in the passage.

To the praise of his glorious grace, it says. That's the driving force, the glory of God. Or, another place, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.

[9 : 26] And that's the factor that people looking at this doctrine have mainly in mind. it's for the glory of God. Or for his glory, as Burns put it.

And, that's quite obvious to anybody that was brought up in the Presbyterian tradition, and many people that weren't. Everything's for God's glory. What is the chief end of man?

The chief end of man is to glorify God. So, what else could there be except the glory of God? That's quite plainly the teaching of scripture.

This is the driving force. This is a motive, if you like, that led God to do this the way he did it. That his name would be glorified. But, the point that we want to make is that there's other things that go along with that.

There are alternative explanations that are given here. and it's only as they put these things together that we get the proper picture. To say it's for God's glory is good and right and proper.

[10 : 38] But, it's not all that can be said about the matter. After all, what is the chief end of man? Not to glorify God, but also to enjoy him forever.

And, that puts quite a different perspective on matters. And, if that bit had been emphasized as much the first bit, we wouldn't have been brought up the way we were. Just because it's for God's glory doesn't mean to say there are not other reasons in it as well.

And, that's what we want to focus on in regard to this. Yes, it's for God's glory. That was the purpose. But, there were other things in play as well.

So, what are they? Two other things. He did this in love. Now, this passage here in our translation says, according to his, according to the purpose of his will.

That's at the end of verse 5. And, there, the will of God is predominant. The idea that can be got from that is very much he did it because he wanted to do it.

[11:50] But, this actually is not the best translation that we've got here. The old translation says, according to the good pleasure of his will. And, that puts a different perspective on it.

But, for many people, not a greatly different perspective. The good pleasure of his will. My problem, I may have mentioned this before, forgive me, I have.

My problem with that is it reminds me of, makes me think about a sovereign that is tyrannical. and just does what he wants to do.

And, there's no real pleasure in what he does. He may say, I am pleased to do this and that, but there's no real pleasure in it. And, therefore, if the king says, I am pleased to appoint so-so as ambassador somewhere, the king might not even know the man or woman.

He might feel no feelings at all. It's just a way of speaking. It's a way of a sovereign expressing his purpose.

[12:57] And, there's no warmth or love or concern or affection or real genuine feeling in this idea of the pleasure of the sovereign.

And, I'm afraid, has come over, at least to me, it came over in the words of the Shortner Catechism where it speaks of God electing us to everlasting life out of his mere good pleasure.

Mere good pleasure. It didn't come over to me as something very warm. In fact, it came over to me as something ice cold. Here is the picture of a sovereign that said, I'm doing this just because I want to do that, without any real pleasure in it.

Now, that's the way I misunderstood it, but that's the way I suspect that many do understand it. when we speak about God doing this from the mere good pleasure of his will.

But that's a misunderstanding because of this. This word here means good pleasure. There's real delight in this. There's real warmth in this.

[14:01] It's not the cold and personal statement of a sovereign who doesn't know the people involved. There is real delight in this. It's genuine love and feeling suggested by this word.

And the way that I think about it is this. It's virtually the same word that was used about Jesus when he was baptized and he had committed himself to the task of associating himself with sinners and acting as a representative.

And there was this voice from heaven which said, you are my beloved son. With you I am well pleased. Now, what was there in the mind of God expressed by these words?

I am well pleased. Was there not delight? Was there not warmth? Did he not look with a smile of approval up in Jesus? And if we might use the expression, did his heart not warm when he saw Jesus fulfilling the purpose for which he had been sent into this world?

There was real pleasure in this. And that's the word that's used here. And that's the spirit we've got to see in regard to the purpose of election. It wasn't just a sovereign saying I'm going to do this.

[15:18] It was somebody who took delight in it, who looked with love upon a person, who had genuine affection for the person we might see.

And that's why it says in love he predestined us. And that factor is repeated in this chapter. It's not just love that suggests warmth and genuine pleasure.

It's love that works on the basis of grace. This is the language later on in the chapter. According to the riches of his grace which he lavished upon us.

Now tell me, does that sound cold and indifferent? Or does it sound warm and affectionate? And there's no problem about that one. This is the love of God towards people that don't deserve it.

It's a special quality of love. And it's a love that is manifested to them. God commends his love towards us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

[16:20] It's that sort of love to the unloving and lovely that lies at the basis of this plan of redemption. And it's generosity attached to it.

He lavished this upon us. Not in a niggerly fashion, giving us a little of his grace, giving us a little of his affection. He poured it out upon us. Just as Mary poured out the oil in gratitude and affection towards Jesus and she poured it out completely so that she lavished it upon him.

So he lavishes his love upon us, pours it out in abundance on us. That's the sort of spirit in which this was done. Yes, he did it for his glory, but he did it in love.

A love that was genuine and feeling. A love that was gracious in its roots. A love that was generous in its expression. And all this is to be taken into this picture of why God did what he did.

For his glory, yes, but don't neglect that he also did it in his love. And then there's a third thing and this makes up the trinity of things that we're speaking about.

[17 : 31] He did this also in wisdom and discernment. Wisdom and insight it says in verse 8, which he lavished upon us in all wisdom and insight.

Wisdom and discernment. It was from these fountains that the purpose of election came. Yes, from his desire to glorify himself.

Yes, from the genuine expression of love, but also this was done in wisdom and discernment. Now, the difference between the two words I cannot see very clearly. I'm not very good at making sharp distinctions between these things.

I'm not very discerning maybe. But wisdom certainly knows this. It refers to practical knowledge. It's not cleverness, it's not intelligence, because we all know that intelligent people can be pretty impractical at times.

And just because they're very intelligent and know a lot, doesn't mean to say that they can apply that knowledge to practical matters. That's wisdom. Wisdom is taken up with problem solving.

[18 : 39] It's knowledge applied in a particular situation so that it works. And that's what God has got here. In the plan of redemption, it was motivated by this, it was the expression of God's wisdom.

Insight or discernment is a natural partner of wisdom. It implies an ability to distinguish between one thing and another, even when the differences are minute. It implies a depth of knowledge that goes beyond what a person normally sees and penetrates into the inner essence of things.

And these features of God's character were operative in this great plan. And that's the way the scriptures represent it. The outworking of election is an expression not just of the glory of God, the love of God, but also of the wisdom of God.

And that's very much what the passage that we read in 1 Corinthians is talking about. Where is the one who is wise, he says? Where is the scribe who thought themselves wise?

Where is the debater of this age who thought themselves very clever? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? When you're confronted with a problem, the wisdom of this world doesn't know how to solve it.

[19 : 56] The wisdom of this world can't produce a solution to it, but God can. He's got a wisdom that surpasses human wisdom. Indeed, it makes human wisdom look folly. And so he says, for the foolishness of God is wiser than men and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? And that passage also went on to speak about Christ being the wisdom of God. In the work of Christ, in all that he was and all that he did, the wisdom of God is revealed.

And it's that practical wisdom that is found in the plan of redemption, in the decree of election. It's motivated by his glory, his love, and his wisdom.

Now, I can imagine that some people would go into details about this wisdom and be able to talk about all sorts of ways in which the plan of salvation is very wise.

Well, I'm just going to mention one thing which I think is actually quite important, but I mentioned it because I think it's designed to show the wisdom of God in this.

[21 : 06] From a human point of view, I would think that a major difficulty in thinking about a sinner's relationship to God is simply this, justice and forgiveness.

Can they possibly go together? If God is a just God, how can he be forgiving? If he's a forgiving God, how can he be just?

The two things, from the human perspective, don't go together, and I don't really think that they can go together from the human point of view. I think in one religion in particular, that says in effect, all you've got to do is trust in the merciful God.

God is merciful. But then we can say, where's his justice? Does he just overlook sin and not deal with it? Is it simply his mercy you've got to look for?

What happens then to the demands of his justice? And that, it seems to me, is a very wise thing to say about such a religion. Another religion says we all come back to another life.

[22 : 21] And that other life is determined by the style of life that we live in the present existence. So if I've done well, I'll come back to a higher standard of living.

If I've done badly, I'll come back as a fly or something different. And it all depends on what we've been. where's the mercy in that? There's no mercy there.

So either you say God's merciful or you say God is just. But you can't say both. Not according to human wisdom. And that's the wisdom of the gospel.

That this remarkable wisdom of God has devised a plan that both provides for God's justice and provides for his mercy. God's expressed.

He did this by appointing a representative to act for us. And he took upon himself the legal responsibility for our position and our sinfulness in particular.

[23 : 24] And the result of that was that he came amongst us as one of us and on the cross he gave himself for us acting as our representative. And so God's justice was satisfied and God's mercy was expressed.

expressed. And in the Christian gospel we've got the wisdom of God expressed in as much as both these characteristics of God which are essential to his being, both these characteristics of God are in play.

And that it seems to me demonstrates the wisdom of God. And the representative that he appointed was the only one that was capable of doing this.

If God did it how could he suffer for sin? If they looked for a man to do this who could possibly represent the whole of humanity that had sinned against God?

But the one that we've got is God and man. As God, as man he can relate to us. But because he's sinless he can bear the sins of others.

[24 : 30] And because he's God there's an infinite value in the sight of God. along these lines we can say what a wise thing God did in his plan and purpose of election.

And so what we've got is what Paul speaks of elsewhere. God put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received.

God put him forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith. faith. This was to show his righteousness at the present time so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

In his wisdom God created a plan that allowed both for the justice and the mercy of God. And that it seems to me is the particular wisdom of this great plan that was expressed in the purpose of election.

Now, so that's the syndrome. That's what I want to say. Don't just think in terms of one thing, the glory of God. Because that's not the way this passage allows us to think.

[25 : 39] We can see this stems from the desire that God be glorified. It stems from the fact that God is loving. It stems from the fact that God is wise.

And this is a syndrome, a trinity of things that work together. And that's the way we should appreciate it. And if we only say this is for God's glory, we've missed out on so much.

And that's what's happened. That's what Burns was wrong with Burns. He didn't consider the love. He didn't consider the wisdom of it all. He just saw one thing that people in those days generally did.

And not least Presbyterians who were brought up to think that everything was simply for God's glory. But for God's glory to be really glory, other things are involved in it as well.

In this case, love and wisdom. So make sure you get all the colors into this and that it doesn't just become dominated by one color.

[26 : 39] Make sure you've got the whole syndrome in mind or else you'll distort the whole picture. What was driving God, if you like to use that terms, was his glory, yes, but his love and his wisdom as well.

That's what Paul is teaching here. Now I want to just go to develop this a wee bit and say you know they've got to go together because if you didn't have love and if you didn't have wisdom you wouldn't have anything that actually glorified God.

You take the love of God out of Calvary and it's meaningless. Take the wisdom of God out of the suffering of Christ on the cross and it's pointless.

It's not a demonstration of love if love has been removed from it. It's a demonstration of barbarity. It's a brutal act that is performed there without meaning, without reason.

And that's what the cross becomes. If you take from it the message of love and fail to see it in accordance with God's wisdom. In other words, if you didn't have love and if you didn't have wisdom, you wouldn't have anything that glorified God.

[27 : 56] And it's only because these things are present that we've got a picture of God that brings glory to him. Without the love and the wisdom of it, it would be something utterly abhorrent, which is the way Byrne saw it and why he portrayed it the way he did.

Utterly abhorrent it was. But you put the love into it, you put the wisdom into it, and then it will bring glory to God. These elements are essential, because without them, God would not be glorified. I want to develop that. I've got a problem over bringing glory to God, and that's why I want just to develop this a wee bit. Now, I say that too because of this.

That's the way it was in the work of Christ. Here's a miracle that he did, a miracle of healing, for example. Why did he do it? There's no doubt at all that he did these things for the glory of God. But that wasn't the only thing in it. Was there not compassion on it? And isn't this the way people saw it? They saw compassion, and therefore they glorified God.

[29 : 06] If they hadn't seen compassion, would they have glorified God? Jesus acted in wisdom. He taught in such a way that people said, what words these are?

They marveled over his wisdom. They gave glory to God because of his wisdom. So it wasn't just that Jesus acted for the glory of God.

It was that he acted in wisdom, and he acted in compassion. And that's what made the whole thing for the glory of God. The glory of God is not a stand-alone virtue.

It's not a stand-alone thing that we've got to bow down and do obeisance to. It's something that's so intimately connected with other things, that if these other things were not there, it wouldn't be for his glory.

And I think we can quite plainly say, Jesus did these things out of compassion. He was sorry for the poor. He did it out of sympathy. When Mary wept, he burst into tears and he raised Lazarus.

[30 : 11] Genuine feeling for people, genuine sympathy with them, genuine compassion for them. And the whole plan is to see something in wisdom that we can easily appreciate.

So, Jesus himself, it seems to me, displayed this idea that if you're going to do something for the glory of God, you'd best do it for other reasons as well.

If you're going to bring glory to God, you do it out of compassion. You do it with wisdom. And if you don't have these things, you're not bringing glory to God. And that's the way I like to think about things.

Now, you see, that means something quite important for ourselves. And this is always the thing that's concerned me. I've had a bit difficulty over this, about saying it's for God's glory.

And here we've got an athlete, for example, that says, seeking to give his testimony, or Christian witness, I'm doing this for the glory of God. And we say, wonderful, here's a person saying that he's a Christian.

[31 : 16] I'm doing it for the glory of God. Or when Aberdeen won the cup, fairly recently, the chairman of the board of directors said, everything's for the glory of God.

And I say, certainly in that case, great, here's somebody giving testimony to their faith. But how are they bringing glory to God? What does it mean that they're bringing glory to God?

And I do think we've been a wee bit unthinking in this respect. If God's purpose of salvation is not glorifying to him without love and wisdom, how come we can glorify him without love and wisdom and other things as well?

If Jesus' work was not glorifying to God except through the compassion that he showed and the wisdom that he demonstrated, how come we can see glorifying God as a stand-alone thing?

And that's the problem that I've got. That too often we've said we're doing this for God's glory, but what does it mean in practice? We can't do anything for God's glory, unless we're not doing it for God's glory, unless we're doing it for compassion and wisdom and other things of a similar nature.

[32 : 35] Now that's an extreme statement and I'm seeing it just for you to think about. In a sense, in a sense, the more we seek to glorify God, the less we'll do so, and the more we show compassion and wisdom in our dealings, the more God will be glorified.

That's the way I see it. Now for a simple illustration, you may not like it or think it's very good, but it helped me to think along these things. Okay, here's an old lady and she's trying to cross a busy road.

And I go to up to her, this is imaginary, I take her by the arm and say, can I help you across? And we wait until there's a break in the traffic and I lead her across and deposit her in the pavement on the other side.

And she says, oh thanks very much. And I say to her, oh it's all for the glory of God. Now I don't know what she's going to make of that, but I do think she might be a bit put off by it.

And she might say, hmm, I thought he was interested in me and showing kindness to me and he wasn't doing it for me at all. But if I do that and she asks to me thanks very much and I say, oh we've all got to help each other, something like that, she'll go away thinking, oh what a kind person that was.

[33 : 58] What made him so kind? It was unusually kind the way he did it, the way he spoke to me. And that would lead her to say, he's perhaps a Christian and that will bring glory to God.

Now I don't know if that's helpful to you but it's helpful to me. Let's do things out of compassion and wisdom and God will make sure that it results in his glory.

That's the way we've to look at things. And too often we've done the right thing without compassion and wisdom. I'm thinking of myself, I counted it out, I'm afraid it's 39 years ago now, when I took up work in Govan Hill in Glasgow and we had a programme of evangelism.

Now why did we have a programme of evangelism? Well I could say, well it's a progressive thing to do these days, I could say that, but I don't know if I did. I could certainly say, well it's biblical, or I could say, and I'm sure I did say this, if we don't evangelise we're going to die.

But that's a pretty miserable motive. Is there no concern for the lost? Is there no compassion in it? It's just a programme, a formal programme, that is orthodox, biblical, and necessary.

[35 : 16] But what about the people? And it seems to me that I was wrong in the emphasis given. And more and more we've got to do evangelism, not because it's right, or because it wins us brownie points in Edinburgh, but because we love people, we're concerned for them.

And we're not doing it immediately for the glory of God, we're doing it because we're sorry for these people. We're doing it out of compassion. And when we do it out of compassion, God will make sure that he's glorified through it.

God will be so what I'm saying is this. These three things go together in the picture here. But this other two are only, the first one of bringing glory to God only operates if the other two are there.

And they make this for the glory of God. And if they were missing, it wouldn't be for his glory. And that's the same in our lives as well. If we want to bring glory to God, we've got to have other things in the picture as well that are at the forefront.

And as Jesus showed his compassion and people glorified God as a result, let's us show compassion and people will glorify God as a result.

[36 : 34] So that we don't do this simply thinking, oh, this is for God's glory. We do this out of genuine sympathy and compassion for the poor and the suffering and the lost. And then people will say, why did they do that?

It must have been the relationship with God. And that will be what will bring glory to him. I hope in a practical way this will make sense to us when we think about what I mind is quite a difficult concept that we are doing all for his glory.

Yes, we do. But let's make sure we have this trinity of virtues that we might say. Let's make sure we work in a spirit of compassion and with wisdom because that's what makes our service glorifying to God.

And one final thing is this. This is a way into the doctrine of election. Don't be thinking about this in theological terms and distorting or getting your mind all in a turmoil over it.

Start with the compassion. Start with the wisdom. and then everything else it seems to me will fall into place. What a gracious God we've got here. What a wise God we've got here.

[37 : 51] How could I have known salvation except through this love that was poured out lavished in Christ Jesus upon those that were unworthy. How could I have do anything except through that?

And it's the wisdom and the grace of God that we've got to come to terms with first of all. And then when that's in place we'll say what a wonderful God we've got.

There's no one like him. Human mind couldn't have thought out a plan like this. It's beyond our understanding it's so wonderful and that will then be something in which we give glory to God.

But the starting place in our experience is the experience of grace the recognition of wisdom that leads us on to see what a great God we've got.

May God bless to us his word. We're going to sing a song of God. Amen.