

Ephesians part 1 - Intro to Ephesians, care required

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[0 : 00] then to Ephesians chapter 1. So Ephesians chapter 1 comes after the book of Galatians.

In fact, there's an easy way to remember at least the first half of the New Testament. You know, the rhyme, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, Acts and Romans follow on. 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians and then your vowels, A-E-I-O-U, Galatians, Ephesians.

Philippians, although the trouble is when you get to you, it doesn't rhyme with Thessalonians, but you have to pretend at that point. So like all human analogy, it breaks down when you're trying to define God.

We're going to read the first six verses. Our attention will be drawn particularly to verses 3 through to 6. And these are the words of God.

Now hear God's word. 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.

[1 : 45] 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 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.

Well, may God... Something which you may not have noticed, but might be worth pointing out just as a preface to the book of Ephesians, is that...

So, you know, I look back when I began in ministry, and there are some books which I tackled early on, and some books which I left for a long time.

Ephesians is one of those books, eight years in, or just about eight years, and we're now tackling Ephesians. Someone likened the book of Ephesians to carrying a sidearm that's not on safety.

[3 : 00] Okay? It's one of those books that is... If you're not careful with it, then, you know, you can get yourself... It can lead you down a path, and you're not going to be able to get yourself back.

So, some of God's word needs to be handled carefully, because God's word is like a swimming pool, or like the sea, where there are shallow parts and there are deep parts, and there are bits where you're thrown about because, well, this is strong.

And this is a bit like the way Ephesians starts. You know, it starts with things like election and predestination, the adoption. Now, these are things not to be frightened of. They are things to be embraced, but it's one of those things that are embraced over time.

Okay? Over time, we all grow in our understanding of Scripture. We all grow into handling stronger meat. This is the way Hebrews puts it.

In fact, the criticism to the church, you know, the Hebrews there, was that they just wanted to stay on baby's milk. They never wanted to be moved on to solids. Paul was the parent trying to get them on to solids, and they were refusing.

[4 : 10] And, of course, this, you know, you can live on baby's milk when you're a few months old, but you can't live on baby's milk when you're seven years old, or eight years old, or 20 years old.

And so if you liken that to a spiritual reality to the Christian, if you stay on spiritual milk, you know, as a Christian your whole life, you're missing out on the necessary growth that needs to happen, and growth needs to happen because you need strength to be able to handle certain other things.

And Ephesians, Ephesians in many ways, is assuming a certain strength level to the people listening. It's assuming a certain strength level to the people listening.

And even if it isn't, it puts it across in such a way where it is graciously understood. So the verses that we're going to be focusing on this morning is verses 3 through to 6.

Ephesians is broken up into two halves as a book. The first half being theology, the second half being the application of the theology. The first half being learning theology, the second half being doing theology.

[5 : 22] So there's a learning part here, and then there is a doing part. Chapters 1 through 3 is, this is what you are to learn. And the learning process is necessary before the applicational process.

You know, we've all seen people who pick up a power tool, or perhaps you haven't, but I've seen a few people pick up a power tool and not quite sure what to do with it. They just love the sound it makes. And they vroom, vroom with a drill, but they never ever get round to using the drill.

You know, or they bend saws and make lovely sounds that come out of it, but can't cut a straight line. Okay, the learning that needs to happen is absolutely crucial for the application that needs to happen that follows.

So Paul, knowing this, simply divides the book straight down the middle, nice and simply. The first three, learn. The second three, do. Okay, first three, learn.

Second three, do. Now, Paul begins by highlighting something that should be unusual. It's unusual in the world, but it should not be unusual in the church.

[6 : 32] And that is believers speak well of God. And that's not something to be overlooked. Why do you speak well of God? Why do you speak well of God when you live in a world where you can come across a numerous amount of people who don't speak well of God?

Why do you speak well of God? Paul begins by speaking well of God, and then he explains to these people here, it's the same reason why you will speak well of God.

But ask yourself the question, why do I speak well of God? Now, the issue here is not to draw attention to us speaking well of God, but rather through us speaking well of God to draw attention to God.

It's a bit like this, you know, when, you know, let not, let, you know, don't praise yourself, let somebody else do it. Well, God doesn't praise himself. We praise God.

Okay, so our praise isn't reflective of us, it's reflective of him. So Paul is drawing our attention here through the praise of God to something absolutely crucial.

[7 : 37] And that is God's ultimate goal, okay, God's ultimate goal was not your salvation. And everything that God did, his ultimate goal was not your salvation. His ultimate goal is not your redemption.

Rather, his ultimate goal is what your redemption allows you to do. His ultimate goal is what your salvation leads you to see and leads you to do.

And Paul's quite clear here that these people who have been elected, predestined, adopted, have been brought in to God's people who have seen what God has done, who have experienced what God has done, have now been brought to the place where they're able to praise God for it.

God's ultimate goal doesn't stop its salvation. It leads you, the person who has been saved, to praise God. So how do we recognize the work of God in my life?

How do you recognize the work of God in your life? How do we recognize it in other people? Well, by how they speak of God. It'll always come down to how they speak of God.

[8 : 44] Do they speak well of God? Do they speak well of God in a whole number of areas, whatever it is they're speaking about, whatever facet it is?

Are they speaking well of God? See, if it ends its salvation, then the trouble is, is what next? What is salvation for? And that's a very selfish thing because we think, well, it must end with me.

Well, it doesn't end, it doesn't finish with me. Salvation is so that I can see what God has done and praise God for it. The reason we're here this morning is so that we can speak well of God.

The very fact that we're here doing it is evidence of the salvation that we have received. So here's the summary of how Paul takes us through this. You'll notice in verse three that Paul begins by speaking well of God.

He says, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. To bless someone in this sense, when Paul blesses God, he can't convey anything onto God that God doesn't already have.

[9 : 47] He can't give God a blessing because God is in need of nothing, hence why we're saved, okay? But what he is doing is that he is speaking well of God.

And you'll notice why he's speaking well of God in the second part of verse three. Because God has blessed these people in Ephesians with every spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus.

Paul looks at this church. Paul looks at these people praising God and he blesses God. He speaks well of God because of what God has done over there, okay?

Can anything good come out of Ephesus? Okay, can anything good come out of Westerhailes? Can anything good come out of Snorstow, Cornwall? Can anything good come out of it? Or can anything good come out of Nazareth?

Well, only the salvation of the world, okay? Why does anything good come out of anywhere? Because God, okay, as it says in Philippians, pours in and then we work out, okay?

[10 : 46] This idea of God blessing beforehand is the reason we speak well of God. We're drawing attention to what God has done. Now, you'll notice in verse four that the end of verse three, we have received every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

And then in verse four, okay, which does it put first? Foundation or chose? Well, if you read it carefully, Christ, God has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world.

I want you to think about that for a moment. Okay, God chose us even before we existed. In fact, God chose us even before the world existed. Okay, even before the world existed, God chose a group of people out of the world who would serve him, who would be holy and blameless before him.

And he did this in love at the end of verse four into verse five. God chose us before the foundation of the world. In love, he predestined us.

Here's the move of God. He predestined us. Now, predestination is something really quite easy to understand. A destination is somewhere where you're going to end up.

[12 : 05] Okay, hopefully. What is your destination? You tap it into the sat-nav and you've arrived at your destination. To predestine is to determine where that person will end up before they even begin.

Okay? It's to determine where that person will end up even before they begin. This is what Paul's saying. Paul's saying that God chose you in Christ before the foundation of the world and has destined already where you're going to turn up even before any of this begins.

And the place that you're going to turn up is in a position of being holy and blameless and able to praise God for it. Okay?

How do you get to where you are? How do you get to heaven? Well, God gets you to heaven. How do you get to give Jesus thanks? God gets you to give Jesus thanks.

So notice carefully, and you're not going to be able to do this by listening to me. You're only going to be able to do this if you've got God's word in front of you for the very simple reason, okay? Trust God's word.

[13 : 10] So notice carefully, verse 4 clearly says that he chose us in him before the foundation of the world to be, that we should be, holy and blameless. Verse 5, he predestined us and brought us into the family for the adoption through Jesus Christ.

That is to be brought into the family of God. And then he says, verse 6, that this, that all of this is to the praise of his glorious grace with which he has blessed us in the beloved.

In other words, we are sat here having received every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, every blessing that is yet to come to us, okay? All the ones that are still ready to be received, and we get all of them because of something that God decided even before any single one of us was alive, even before the world was created, okay?

All of this has been planned by God, hence why we praise him. Now the only way Paul highlights this now that a person is able to recognise God's grace is if they have actually come to receive God's grace.

Particular grace, not just common grace. They have come to receive every spiritual blessing in Christ. I'm going to put this in a slightly different way.

[14 : 34] That when you receive Christ, you receive everything else. When you receive Christ, you receive every blessing of God. But we live in a world where people think that they can have the additional blessings without having God.

And this is spelled out for us in the very famous parable of Luke 15 where you've got two sons that are lost and they're both lost in the same way. Okay? They're both lost in the same way.

They both want what the Father has but they want it without the Father. Okay? Okay? Now, that there will then be mirrored in human relationships. Okay? Where you want something from someone more than you actually want them.

Okay? You're good for this but, you know, I'm not really... Right? And that kind of perpetual sin of, you know, I'll take what is beneficial to me means that you live your life out of convenience rather than out of conviction.

This is something that I'm... This is just good for me. Well, here, every single blessing is only received when you receive Christ.

[15 : 49] This means that if you're outside of Christ, you've not received Christ, you don't have any of the other blessings. So my nan, who I love very much, who seems persistent in her goodness, to tell me that this is qualification enough for me to be in the eternal kingdom.

Okay? And I have to, you know, tell her the truth because the truth matters because if I don't tell her the truth, she's going to live under an illusion and then that's not a pretty thing to be faced with at the end when you get there.

The truth is, is if you want, if you want God in the end, you have God's son now. Okay? If you want God in the end, you have God's son now. That's the way it works.

We are meant to understand that we have everything because we have been given Jesus. Okay? We have everything because we have been given Jesus and you can't get to enjoy any of these things outside of him.

Now that doesn't mean that God isn't good to the world. It doesn't mean that God doesn't care for the world. He cares for the whole world. He cares for the whole world in ways that most of the world doesn't understand.

[17 : 01] But these spiritual blessings, these spiritual blessings here are particular to belonging to Christ. They only, you only get them by belonging to Jesus.

And Paul uses this phrase in Christ a lot just to strengthen the argument. Okay? It's a virtue of union. Okay? There are some things things that you get to enjoy only because a union exists.

Okay? So, you know, a man and a wife will get to enjoy certain things together that a boy and girl wouldn't outside of marriage because the union, the union allows certain things to happen, certain things to take place that can be blessed that are not allowed to be, that won't be blessed if they happen outside of that union.

And that's kind of what's happening here. The spiritual blessings in Christ are in him. Now, that's an encouragement for us who belong. But all of this is to lead us to one particular destination.

And the destination is not salvation. The destination is to give praise to God for salvation. To give praise to God for all of these things. To actually turn around and not just say thank you but to recognize that God is worthy of praise.

[18 : 21] Now, the trouble here is that praise is one of those things that needs to be defined. Because praise, when you praise a person in this world, humanly speaking, you can't then transfer that kind of praise and then give it to God.

It doesn't work like that. It's two different things. So before we can understand what praise is, we need to understand what praise isn't. So here's an example. Imagine one person saying to another person words that build them up.

Okay? We call it praise. It probably better be called encouragement. Okay? But we call it praise. So someone's done something that deserves applause. You know, and you give them a round of applause and they're being praised.

Well, maybe. Or a child did well in exam and the child comes home and they show you their exam results. Well done. And you worked really hard and you've done really well and you start praising them for what they've done.

You're building them up. You're acknowledging that. Or others have achieved certain other things and you're giving praise for that achievement. Now, when people speak of praise as building another person up, okay, that clearly cannot be the same type of praise that God has designed us for.

[19 : 42] Because God is not built up by what we say of him. God doesn't come into this world with a deflated ego, needs to be told nice things so that he can leave feeling good about himself.

Okay? We do. Okay? And there's a lot of people, in fact, 10 years ago, self-esteem used to be the big thing.

Okay? Counselors were hooked on self-esteem. But biblically speaking, this is rejected from the get-go. Okay? And one counselor in America wrote a brilliant article on this. I forget her name, Dr.

So-and-something. But she says that's never been the problem. The problem has always been hubris, ego. Okay? That my ego can either be inflated or deflated.

And when it's deflated, I need, I desperately need, to be told the things I want to hear so that I can leave feeling good about myself. But I know, I know that in a week's time, I'm going to wander back into the counselor's office.

[20 : 42] Okay? Not because my depression is returned, but because I'm now deflated. I've lost the, I've not been filled up, I have been puffed up. Okay? Now, that's the type of praise that the world offers to each other.

But it, it, it, not only is it not good to give to other people because it's not what they need. Okay? It looks, you know, there's, there's a difference between filling a balloon with sand and it being solid and firm and unable to deflate, and filling a balloon with air that eventually, over time, that air seeps through even, and it just goes down.

When we praise God, we are doing none of these things. When Paul praises God here, you'll notice that his praise is what?

Praise is, finish the sentence. Praise is speaking well of God. Praise is only saying those things which are reflected in God that can be recognised.

So we can't, we're not even allowed to determine what praise is. Praise is recognising what God has done and then saying it. Praise is speaking words to God that truly reflect who God is and what God has done.

[22 : 00] That's true praise. Okay? Anything else is, is a misguided praise. to say something about someone that isn't true isn't praise.

It's a lie. And to say something about God that isn't true, it's exactly the same. So true praise of God, if you're, if you're to, if you're to finish the sentence, praise is, well, praise is speaking well of God.

But what does it mean to speak well of God? It means that genuine praise is using words that perfectly reflect the nature and character of God and what he's done.

And if they don't do it, it's not praise. Not even close to being praise. So when a person has received these blessings, when a person recognises what they have received from God, they then praise God.

And the way that they do it is by thanking him for the very gift that they have received. Have you ever been in that position where your wife has bought a birthday present for someone else's child or someone else in the family?

[23 : 10] And then that other person in the family comes up to you and says, thank you very much for my birthday. And you haven't got a clue what it is. You haven't got a clue what it is. You go, oh, glad you liked it.

Now, of course, there's been a few times where, where, you know, you've been caught out on this because they know you don't know and they thought, well, I'll just, I'll just string them along for the ride. So what made you, what made you think that I would like that?

Well, I'm so pleased. Where did you get it from, by the way? And they know what they're doing and you're like, do I come clean? Do I come clean? What do I do at this point?

When we praise God, when these type of things happen, we are reflecting to God that we know what we have been given. We're perfect.

We're not, we've not received, and we're saying to God, thank you God. I'm not quite sure for what. That's not praise. Praise is perfectly reflecting in speech exactly what you know you have received or recognised about God.

[24 : 18] That's when it's received by God because it is a perfect reflection of the reality of every spiritual blessing. blessing. It's not just saying good things about God even if you mean it really, really, really deep down in your heart.

If it's, even if you mean it really, really deep down in your heart and it's not true, how can anybody receive that as, as anything? It can't, it can't be received because it's not reflective of any reality.

It's not, there's nothing true there. So, think about it this way. If, if one person gives another person a gift, a gift, let's say, that they could never receive themselves, their praise or thankfulness at least increases, firstly by what the gift is.

Okay? Thank you so much. There's just no way I could have got this all by myself. Secondly, the thankfulness is increased by the fact that that gift, which could have been given to anyone, was actually given to me.

And then that's multiplied by the fact that because I could never get that gift for myself in any other way, shape, or form, now my thankfulness is overflowing. Because what I'm doing is I'm recognizing on more than one level exactly what I've been given.

[25 : 31] And exactly that if I wasn't given it by God, I couldn't have received it in any other way. So my praise of God increases by the more that I recognize. My praise of God increases the more I recognize and see exactly what God has given me.

And here's the thing, God's ultimate goal in my life is that that should happen. And God's ultimate goal of salvation and all that he has done is that that happens for you.

Okay? God doesn't stop at salvation. Rather, salvation allows us to see these other things. So we'll move on. And with moving on, we come to the recognition that being blessed in Christ means that these truths ought to be reflected throughout our whole life.

life. Every blessing we receive, we receive because we belong to Jesus. But notice how it begins. God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world.

In other words, election, now you know what an election is, it is to choose. To choose. God chose us in eternity past.

[26 : 43] past. But notice what he chose us for. To be holy and blameless. To belong to him, to serve him in this world. Now you must not think of God electing like you think of a political election.

Because they are not the same on any measure at all. So I'll explain how. How? When you cast a vote in a political election, you're looking at the party, you're looking at what the party believe, you're looking at the abilities, the qualities of the candidate.

You're also looking at whether or not the candidate can actually back up the views that he's presented. And when you vote, you are choosing one person over the other person.

Even though it's got nothing to do with them personally, you don't know anything about either of them. You're choosing one person over the other person based on things that you have heard, based on things that you have seen, based on election advertisements on the TV, based on election pamphlets that come through your door.

If you think that voting is one of those things that you should hold on to, that's the type of things that actually go through your mind. Okay? I need to weigh up the pros and cons.

[28 : 03] I need to weigh up which one is most in line with the kingdom of God, which is extremely difficult because none of them will be, and then I'll cast my vote.

Okay? What are you doing? Well, you're suddenly electing, but you're electing on the basis of differences found in people. God here, when God elects, chooses us in Christ before the foundation of the world.

God chooses people before they even exist. God chooses people before they've done anything right or anything wrong, before the color of their hair or the color of their skin or what they do for a living.

So this idea that God's election is based on what I do or what I don't do just cannot be endorsed in any way, shape, or form for the simple reason God makes his choice before anyone is alive.

God makes his choice before anyone even exists. And that is absolutely crucial. Okay? I'm not saved because God looked at me and think, he's the type of person that I will save.

[29 : 14] Okay? Because God made that decision before the foundation of the world. Now this can be illustrated in Romans 9, so I'm just going to read out a brief section.

Romans 9 says this, concerning two twins or twins that were born. When Rebecca had conceived children by one man or forefather Isaac, though they were not yet born, okay, listen, though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad, in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works, but because of him who calls, God chose one over the other.

But not one over the other as in preference because they're not even born. They've not done anything right or wrong. So when God elects here, it's for his own purposes, not because you're electable.

Okay? When God elects here, it's so that you would become holy and blameless, not because you are holy and blameless already, and therefore God chooses you. So a believer knows, a believer knows that the reason they're a believer is not because they're better than anybody else in the world.

Okay? Because God's choice of election happens even before the world was created. This is, Paul is laboring this point so that you would understand that you are a Christian based on the very fact that God made the decision even before you were around.

[30 : 45] That's a lot to handle. This is why I said that some people refer to Ephesians chapter 1 as a loaded sidearm that's not on safety. You have to be careful with it.

You have to understand these things carefully. Now it is possible, I understand, that election can cause some people difficulty. I understand the difficulty of bringing your heart and mind around to the fact, especially if you're a person who has ever asked the question, why did God save me and not him?

You know, why did God choose me and not him? And if your problem of election is that problem, then you've not actually understood election.

Because as Paul is clearly pointing out, election is not based on present day differences. Election is based on God's purposes before the world even exists.

Okay? And the reason we struggle with election, the reason why some people struggle with election is because they cannot shift from their mind the idea that there must be a reason why I am chosen and why that person isn't.

[31 : 57] There must be a reason. And they look for it in themselves, they look for it in the other person. And you're completely looking in the wrong area. God chose people in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless.

And in time as it comes, okay, you think, well, well, I know I came to Christ, I was seeking him. Yeah, well, you were seeking him because God was seeking you first.

And when you come to Christ, you recognize at that point that all these years that I've been seeking Christ, it was actually God that was seeking me. Why? Because God gets the praise, not you.

Okay? You're a product of something that God has done, not something that you have done. And this is how election is to be understood. Now, the crucial part here for Paul is not actually the fact that the difficulty of overcoming election, but rather what election allows you to do.

If you don't want to deal with the reality of election, and I understand that because of the difficulty, if you want to ignore the reality of election, or if you want to pretend that it's something else, and that's often the route, well, it must be something different than what we're being told.

[33 : 16] The trouble is, when you go down that road, is that you're now changing the gift. You're now changing the gift. And if you change the gift, you're giving thanks to God for the wrong thing.

Okay? You're trying to give praise to God for all of these things, and God is sort of saying back to us, okay, but that's not what I gave you. That's not actually what you have been given.

So when we set aside these difficult things and say, well, we'll leave that for the theologians, and we'll leave that for other people to deal with, what it actually does is it affects the way we praise God.

Because election, adoption, is part of those things, the spiritual blessings in Christ. They are the very things that lead us, verse 6, to give God all the praise.

And if we're leaving them out, then we're leaving out essential gifts and blessings of praise to God. Here's a few considerations then as we close.

[34 : 18] God's ultimate goal is the praise of his glory. God's ultimate goal is not our salvation, it's not our redemption, but right now rather it's the fact that what our redemption and salvation leads us to do.

It leads us to witness the blessings of God and having experienced the blessings of God. And God has blessed us in Christ Jesus.

So with this, we must consider, I think, one more thing. We began by asking the question of what causes a believer to speak well of God? What causes a believer to bless God to speak well of him?

What causes him to speak in particular ways and not just ad hoc? Not just throwing out nice things? Well, it comes down to the fact that the person has recognized and begins to praise God and his speech or her speech will perfectly reflect every gift that they have received.

their speech of God will perfectly reflect exactly what God has done, why God has done it, and what they have received as a result of God doing it.

[35 : 33] That's praise. When a person praises God, their speech is reflecting the character and nature and gifts of God in their own life. That's praise. What is praise?

That's praise. So here's the exhortation. You're attending worship this morning, and many of you might call it coming to church, but you're actually attending worship.

You might think that this is something that I do, but having read Ephesians 1 through to 6, you now recognize that this is something that has been done for you. Okay?

I come to church. Okay? It's true that you come, but the reason you come is because of what God has done. This is why we're able to come here this morning and praise God in song.

This is why we're able to come here this morning and give God praise in prayer. This is why we're able to come here this morning and give God praise through his word. Why? Because we recognize we're here not by our own doing, but because this is what God has done.

[36 : 34] Okay? At the end of the day, it's a matter of who you're going to put first. Okay? Praise is really a matter of who you're going to put first. Is it me? Or is it about him?

So as Paul began, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen.