

**Ephesians I**  
**Ephesians 1:1-14****Pastor Chris Bellefeuille**  
**July 11/12, 2009**

*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, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.*

This summer we have one of those wonderful opportunities to dwell in one book of the Bible for a number of weeks. We will take a long and extended look at Ephesians, one of the New Testament letters or epistles. Pastor Wayne and I look forward to these opportunities for a number of reasons. Not the least of which is that we learn a good deal from preaching and hearing each other preach from the same book of the Bible for so many weeks. We hope it also gives you a chance to learn and to become more familiar with this book. And it gives us all an opportunity to listen deeply to one part of Scripture and let ourselves be shaped in the deep listening. And so we begin our seven week sojourn through the letter to the Ephesians.

There are some important things to consider about Ephesians before we start. First of all, while it is often called Paul's letter to the Ephesians, many scholars do not believe it was written by the apostle in spite of the fact that it bears his name. So you might ask yourself why it would bear Paul's name if it may not have been written by Paul.

It was common practice in that era for a follower of a teacher to write letters in the name of the teacher. There were good reasons for this practice, which was not limited to Christianity. It helped spread the work among a teacher's disciples. Or sometimes a situation would arise after the teacher's death and the followers found it important to address the situation the way the teacher would have addressed it. So they undertake to write the letter with that perspective in mind. It's not entirely different from a Lutheran pastor today carefully applying Martin Luther's thought processes to a part of Scripture or sermon preparation. The use of the teacher's name was important to giving the writing authenticity and authority. And by and large the followers would endeavor to closely reflect the teacher's views in their letter.

So another question you might ask is how someone can tell if a letter is not written by Paul himself. There are clues within the letter that help us. The clues vary from letter to letter but let's consider Ephesians. The vocabulary is different from letters scholars agree were written by Paul. Also, Ephesians doesn't seem to anticipate the immanent return of Jesus Christ that is typical of Paul. There is a diminishment of the status of women that is inconsistent with Paul. And it appears perhaps to have been written at a time after the death of Paul when the early church may have been re-accommodating cultural patterns of hierarchy and submission in the household. But one could just as persuasively argue that Paul evolved as a teacher and theologian, and his writing and thinking naturally reflect that change.

But here's the thing: Being certain of authorship doesn't really change anything for us. Whether or not Ephesians was written by Paul himself or by a faithful follower of Paul's, the letter was still carefully and faithfully rendered and considered important enough for those who gathered the Bible in its final form to include it. Ephesians remains authoritative for us regardless of its authorship. And in keeping with tradition, both ancient and contemporary, you will hear us refer to this as Paul's letter.

There are some things that are helpful to consider about the letter to the Ephesians as we begin our journey. Ephesians appears to have been written to a community or group of communities in Asia Minor, largely Gentile and under some pressure from outside teachings. The thrust of the letter is to maintain unity with the larger Christian church, whether Gentile or Jewish in origin. Additionally, Ephesians has a uniquely broad scope. That is, Ephesians addresses things from God's vast cosmic plans to admonitions for personal relationships. Finally, the author perceives that the benefits of the resurrection and our salvation in Jesus Christ are not just for someday, but instead are available to us in the very real present. These themes of unity, broad scope and present benefit are claims that shape the rest of the letter.

And so we turn our attention more particularly to the reading for today. The letter opens with some language that hangs us up right away. Let me read to you the first few verses we heard this evening/morning:

*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, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.*

We read this morning from the New Revised Standard Version. Here are the same verses from the New International Version.

*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. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will - to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.*

We get very anxious when we hear language about choosing and predestination and its exclusionary feel. I read a very interesting article this week written by a gentleman from another

tradition for his Masters of Divinity thesis. He wrote a very nice exposition of how when it says that God chose us, it also means that there remain the unchosen. And that if “in love he predestined” us, there are some who are not predestined. He wrote at great length, referencing just those two verses that discuss in a very limited way this issue of predestination. He argued that is how the original language reads. But his is just one opinion. The original language can also very legitimately be read another way.

Remember a little earlier I mentioned that one of the claims of Ephesians is the broad scope of God’s work and will, from the cosmic to the interpersonal? So listen again and hear the verses that follow:

just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

Can you hear the vastness, the timelessness and the abundance? To be chosen before time does not mean there remain the unchosen. Before the foundation of the world was laid, God had in mind a whole creation that would be open to receiving his love. What God chose was not that some would be in and some would be out. What God chose was that we would “be” at all. This is not skimpy language with limited scope. The language of this passage is so rich: “glorious grace freely bestowed, redemption, forgiveness according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us.” The letter goes on to describe a plan for the fullness of time, when God will gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

This is not the language of limits. This is not describing a God who draws boundaries between the chosen and the unchosen. God revealed his heart to us in creation and in Christ. We were predestined, each one of us predestined to receive the love that God has poured out in all creation. We were created to receive the love of God. The extent of that love is made clear in the cross and the bread and the wine. That’s the choice God made. That we should be. And that we should be God’s chosen. All of us.

Amen