

Ephesians 1:1-14 is quite the passage, various authors have called it life transforming due to all that it includes and explains. It explodes off the page as Paul opens the letter in an outburst of praise, it's been called a blessing fest! Words come tumbling out as Paul praises God for who he is and for his sp'l blessings. Paul is obviously excited as he writes to the Ephesians, Tim Keller notes Paul is taken with the enormity of it all because in its original form V3-14 is one continuous sentence! It seems Paul can't even take a breath; he has overflowing joy, the blessings of the Lord God just stream one after another, one continuous sentence explaining God's plan for saving us. These verses are like a great doxology, announcing the wonder of all that God has done for us in Christ. Praise and blessing will be a dominant theme throughout the passage.

Paul is writing to new believers living amid conditions of false morality and deceitful idolatry. As with many of his letters, he wants to encourage and give hope to the believers he ministered to years before. Paul wants the members in this young church to be above all else, people of praise, and now *us* as we read his letter to be similarly motivated. Is praise a natural part of your daily life? There's so much we can be thankful for as we go about our days. And as we begin chapter 1 of Ephesians, I hope a renewed appreciation and thankfulness will be stirred in your hearts. (Amazing love- a song about many of the themes of this passage; how can it be that you my king would die for me amazing love I know its true that it's my joy to honor you) Paul's praise is contagious!

I will cover some main topics or themes of this passage, some more in depth than others with the time allotted and you will see them interwoven throughout this passage. They are the praise of God, Identity (who we are in Christ), the doctrines of election and predestination, adoption, redemption & forgiveness, the HS, God's will and the revealed mystery of God's plan.

Paul addresses our heavenly identity, in Christ, doctrines of our faith, what we believe and what Christ has done for us. Also, it is one of the few places in Scripture that has a Trinitarian focus, we see God as the Triune God involved in his salvation plan; the Father initiates, the Son accomplishes, and the HS guarantees.

Along with Paul's passion and praise in the opening verses, he immediately speaks of identity in v1 when he calls himself an apostle of Christ Jesus called by God, he knows who he is. Then addresses the believers in Ephesus as saints, meaning set apart and belonging to God. We can include this as our identity as well. All God's people are saints, you and I are set apart and belong to God if we are in Christ.

Identity is a popular word in our culture – have you given much thought to your identity, your primary identity? Who you are, your purpose, your meaning in life? Is it by what group of people you relate to, by what organization, club or church you belong to, your job, or is your identity primarily your family? It is not unusual to hear about struggles with identity issues, they can include deep confusion about who you are and your place in life, your values. We desire to belong because we were designed to belong. We all want relationships in which we are accepted, valued and wanted. For the Christian none of this futile struggle is necessary because we have been chosen by God before time ever began. We can be secure, we belong; we matter, we have been accepted, we are part of his family, which we will see soon as adoption, we are daughters of the King.

The desire to know where we came from and find our ancestors is strong isn't it? Did you know one of the largest Ancestry sites, Ancestry.com, has more than 3.8 million paying subscribers and over 30 million people in its DNA network. They have access to over 71 billion international records.

It certainly shows people want to know who they are and who they might be connected to as family, it shows what our hearts long for. There are some heartwarming stories of reunions from this site but, as good as all the ways may be that we find identity, guess what? They will fail us at some point, and we will fail others. But for us as believers, our identity lies in our relationship to Christ who will never fail us. Sisters, take note of how many times and various ways the phrase "in Christ" is used, "in Christ Jesus", "in the Beloved," "in Him", they are all meant to show our *best* identity, we are His. 1JN 4:15 "Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God."

V3 is said to be key to the whole passage; 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. Paul is blessing God (blessing here meaning declaring God's goodness) because he has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms in Christ. What does that mean, what are the sp'l blessings and what are the heavenly realms? Well, these sp'l blessings are far better than any material blessings God can give. Of course, we all need certain material blessings to live which God does provide, but how greater is our need for security in Christ, redemption and forgiveness? So, the sp'l blessings are exactly the themes or topics I mentioned earlier. Tim Keller describes God's blessings to us as "every joy and every benefit that our heart and soul long for." Doesn't that sound wonderful? (repeat) And if you are in Christ, you've already been blessed because it is past tense, God the Father who *has* blessed us.

To fully appreciate the sp'l blessings God so graciously gives, we need to put this life and eternity in perspective. In C.S. Lewis' *The Last Battle* he reminds us that when our life on earth ends it will only have been the "cover and the title page" of the real story that will go on for eternity. Or maybe you're familiar with the dash poem, the reminder that the small line between our date of birth and date of death signifies our life. Humbling, isn't it? Both tell us eternity should take more of our focus. And it puts clarity on what we strive for in this life, material vs spiritual.

One author explains it this way, "In our union with Christ, we are already partakers of this spiritual reality, the heavenly realms, even though it is not fully realized until we are in our glorified state freed of our mortal bodies and the constraints of our temporal existence." This means we are already experiencing aspects of heaven, although we are not yet there. The aspects of heaven are the spiritual blessings. We're already enjoying Sonship with the Father, already experiencing forgiveness and redemption and we already have the HS. But we are not yet in our perfected glorified bodies with the Father and Son. This is the "already and not yet" believers often hear spoken.

I had a recent reminder of a similar experience of A & not Y. Years ago, my husband and I took our young children on a cc trip. Don and I took turns driving and I was at the wheel one evening, everyone was nodding off and I became distracted with my thoughts. Did I mention it was a

lonely road in the wilderness of Montana? It's beautiful during the day but as it became dark and the gas gauge was leaning on E, for a while, it became a little frightening. My natural recourse was to pray, not to wake up and startle everyone. I had confidence the Lord would lead me to a gas station in time but there was nothing for miles (now I'm on the reserve tank). As soon as a gas station's sign became visible in the dark sky, I could relax, knowing there was safety ahead. I wasn't there yet but I already knew we were safe. Sisters, we can have the confidence of what's ahead in this *not yet* phase of life no matter what darkness may surround us, because Jesus has *already* called us His and blessed us in the heavenly realms. I can't say I totally understand this sphere of invisible reality of the H'I realms, but we're already but not yet there because we are "in Christ" and Scripture tells us it is where Jesus sits at the right hand of God.

Looking at V4-5, "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 for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will." So, let's dive into predestination and the doctrine of elect, a nice light topic! It's a big one, not necessarily a topic of conversation on a first date or even a commonly discussed topic among friends, why is that? Every author /commentator has admitted what a controversial subject this has been. There has always been a theological conflict between predestination and free will and can probably never be settled completely among those who argue it since it is impossible for finite human minds to comprehend adequately the infinite wisdom of God. Commentor Megan Hill states, "The Doctrine of election is in the Bible so we can't ignore it or say we don't agree because it doesn't make sense to us". There are some people who can't believe because they can't understand the controversial doctrine of predestination, *but* it is a teaching of Jesus. Isn't it a staggering thought that God "chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world?" How incredible is it to think about God wanting us in his family before the creation of the world? Before we could show him how wonderful we are and what we could accomplish to impress him! Or from God's perspective, that he already knew the good, the bad and the ugly about each one of us, and *still* chose us! That should instill such humility

and security in us *and* a desire to tell others of this amazing God.

The main point behind the word predestined is the idea that God has a plan for your life. Think about Paul and God's upending plan for his life. He is overwhelmed as he realizes he was the "chief of sinners." This was the man who hated and persecuted Christians, and helped to imprison them yet God called him and used him greatly in his heavenly plan. Pastor and commentator, Bryan Chapell writes, "When there was no desire to seek Jesus, the Savior made this Pharisee of the Jews an apostle of Jesus. Paul had been transferred from one universe to another, and it is plain to him that this was not and could not be his own doing but, rather, the sovereign work of God." He wasn't called because he was holy and blameless, but to become H&B. The ESV explains holy here means moral purity and blameless refers to freedom from the guilt of trespasses and sin in which one formerly walked.

Sometimes we may have doubts about our place with the Lord, not feeling loved or accepted. We may feel unworthy due to times of failure or bad decisions and hopelessness creeps in. It's been said the indication that we have been chosen by God, set apart for him, is ultimately the fact that we are increasingly conformed to the image of his Son, that is, we are being sanctified. And that is accomplished by the HS, another sign we are one of His. Sisters, the Christian life is a *process* of becoming more and more like Christ and will not be complete until we see Jesus face to face. (Col 3:12-13) describes the character of those who understand they are chosen. It reads, "Therefore as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love which bind them all together in perfect unity." Some good verses to gauge our walk in the Lord!

. Today's culture could be described as an individualist culture, valuing independence and individual rights. We're all about our free will, maybe you've encountered others along the way, or you have argued, wasn't it my decision to follow Jesus or maybe even wondered, why share the gospel if God has already decided who will believe? Predestination is meant to bless believer's hearts. It is *not* meant for endless argument, *and* it is *not* meant as an excuse not to evangelize. After all, how will others know about

the saving grace of God if they don't hear it from one of God's people? According to J Piper, 'Evangelism and the preaching of the gospel is the very means that God has appointed by which he delivers those whom he chose in Christ before the creation of the world.' And this is Rom 10:17 "So faith comes from hearing and hearing through the word of Christ." And sisters, those words of life can come from us as well.

Still there are some who have difficulty reconciling our responsibility and freedom with the sovereignty of God. Stott states, "It is not likely that we shall discover a simple solution to a problem which has baffled the best brains of Christendom for centuries." Why? Because the answer lies in God himself. We forget who God is and must humbly remember our position before the eternal and holy God. Listen to Isaiah 40:13, "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?" Or read chap 38 to the end of the Book of Job! God answers Job's questions at length.

The question lingers - Do we have a free will or does God determine our steps? Tim Keller responds, "Yes and yes. Although admitting we cannot really understand this paradox, we can accept both aspects of it by faith and then act accordingly, trusting God to make it all clear in eternity. That's why it calls for us to bow down in wonder. These are mysteries of God that can't be explained."

When we speak of the unfairness of this doctrine, we forget none of us should see salvation. Luke 19:10 "For the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost." We all need a savior because we are all lost apart from God, and on our own we would not seek him. The most important thing, of course, is the decision to accept or reject God's offer of eternal salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ.

We speak of accepting Christ and know that we have done so voluntarily. Yet, when we reflect more carefully, we see many different circumstances involved in the decision; family background, friends, personal difficulties, the messages and testimonies heard, Scriptures read (the W's BS), have all contributed to that decision. Then we begin to see that God was working in our lives long before we came to the actual point of decision. Phil 2:13 "It is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill His good purpose." Each of us has a unique testimony that shows God's individual

call and care for us, that is why hearing others' stories is so encouraging. We are free but there is a plan, everything God is doing is part of His plan for history, and we have a part to play in his plan. God's plans and purposes will always be beyond our understanding, but in faith we commit our lives to him to be used by him. (Weaver's loom?)

(will move onto the other themes w/o as much depth)

As I mentioned earlier, Paul is praising God endlessly and in v5-8 we read praise for adoption and redemption, grace, forgiveness, wisdom and understanding. With packed phrases like "with his pleasure and will, freely given us in the One he loves, with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us," we see the description of a loving father. B. Chapell says "The goal of God's predestination of us is his will and pleasure to *adopt* us as members of his own family through the work of Jesus. In his infinite kindness, God made us a permanent part of his family, like the legal procedure that secures a child's identity in a new family. God signed the adoption papers, so to speak, with the blood of his Son." Adopted by the Father, we have all the rights, privileges, and affection that the Son of God himself receives from God. And it was in accordance with his *pleasure and will*-to the praise of his glorious grace.

Paul continues to speak of the blessings of redemption and forgiveness. Redemption always implies a price being paid for the freedom that is purchased. Here the price is the blood of Jesus. The eg on minds of those in Paul's day may be God redeeming Israel from slavery in Egypt. For the Ephesians and for us, it's a ransom paid for the penalty we owed from slavery to sin and forgiveness thru the work of Christ on the cross, and then, the best thing we could hope for, pardon and peace. *Today*, we are accepted, *today* we stand acquitted before God's court, *today* we have eternal inheritance.

V9-10 deals with the Mystery of His will –Here Paul reveals the future culmination of God's salvation plan. That is, the unity of "all things" under Christ's authority. M Hill states, "this has been God's purpose all along, but in the OT it was somewhat hidden, believers had only shadows to point to what God intended to do through His Messiah. In Jewish literature a mystery is the secret plan of God that will become apparent at the end of the age."

Paul tells the Ephesians that what the prophets and people of old had long anticipated has now been revealed, that is, God's will. We can almost hear J Piper as he proclaims, "unfathomable, mind boggling, off the charts amazing to know the mind of God."

God allows us as his children to know his plans. It was only hidden until Christ came and rose from the dead. Through Christ it was made open to all who believe in him—even Gentiles, all the people and churches who received Paul's letters. This revelation was hard for some Jews to accept as they considered themselves privileged and exclusive people to God and had other ideas about a Messiah.

In V10 Paul writes of "the fullness of time" or "fulfillment of the plan to unite all things in Him" which describes the culmination of the world. Right now, the world might look like a mess, but one day God's purposes will be fully accomplished. This is the great resolution and deliverance that even creation groans for the day when every wrong will be righted and every matter resolved according to God's holy love and justice. Sisters, every injustice, every hurt, betrayal, every sadness, pain and suffering will be resolved and we will be delivered.

God's plan, in the Messiah, is for everything in heaven and on earth, the original creation, the heavens, would be brought together into one. Do you ever ponder this event? It is Phil 2:10-11, "so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow—in heaven and on earth and under the earth—and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father." Basically, it is the new heavens and the new earth of our eternal lives. It's where we will live with believers of the past, OT past, loved ones gone ahead of us but best of all, we will be with Jesus. If our being in Christ is anchored in eternity, then we have every reason to be confident that he will see us safely through time and bring us back into his eternal presence. Safe in the arms of Jesus, safe in his tender care.

What does this mean for us now, while we wait? C Spurgeon- "Let us live so our lives fulfill His purpose. Let us live committed, useful, holy lives "to the praise of his glorious grace." Because we are part of God's plan and

purposes, we are to be salt and light in every area of our lives. To quote B Chapell, "We are to be active reconcilers, working past our differences so that the unity provided by the gospel is present in our relationships- sustained animosity is never our option." He goes on to say, "if we cannot love the unlovely or desire reconciliation with those who have sinned against us, then we have no credibility in speaking the gospel to the world." Sisters, beware of contentment of leaving unresolved differences with others, let's be active reconcilers and live out the gospel for others to witness and see the Spirit alive in us.

Nearing the end of the passage, we see in v 13-14 God in his graciousness gives us the Holy Spirit who is the *assurance* that God is active in the lives of his people. Belief itself indicates the presence of the seal of the Spirit of God because w/o the Spirit we could not or would not believe. 1Cor 2:14 "The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit."

The HS is described in three ways- a promise, a seal and a guarantee. God promised thru OT prophets and thru Jesus to send His Spirit. He did on Pentecost, and he does for us when we believe. The HS is a seal, God's mark of ownership, his seal of the HS is in our hearts to mark us as his own. And, the HS is a guarantee by which he brings his people safely to their final inheritance. Because we have the HS now, we have a little foretaste of our final inheritance, the guarantee of the promise of what is to come. Again, to the praise of his glory.

This final inheritance is really the goal, and our determined number of days until then are in God's purpose and plans. God sees the past, present and future all at the same time, we certainly do not, so we can know by faith our lives, even the hard things we do not understand, are part of God's design.

We cannot let the evil one or forces of our culture distract us from our identity in Christ, we need to remember we are chosen, we are loved, we are predestined and adopted, we are forgiven, we are saved, and we

are sealed with the HS for our inheritance.

How like God to have the very last thing of the whole bible an invitation to take the water of life freely. Listen to Rev 22:17 "Let the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life."

God invites all people everywhere to come, salvation cannot be earned, but God gives it freely. The gospel is for every single one who comes to Christ by faith, anyone who comes to him will not be cast out.

Amazing love, how can it be, that you my King would die for me

Amazing love I know it's true, it's my joy to honor you, in all I do I honor you.