

Tuesday, January 8th

Introduction to Prison Epistles and Ephesians

The prison epistles—Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon—are so named because they were written by the apostle Paul during one of his incarcerations. It is generally accepted that Paul wrote the prison epistles during his first Roman imprisonment. The exact dates he wrote each of the prison epistles is unknown, but the two-year period he spent under house arrest in Rome has been narrowed down to the years AD 60–62. Paul’s imprisonment in Rome is verified by the book of Acts, where we find references to his being guarded by soldiers, being permitted to receive visitors, and having opportunities to share the gospel. These details, along with Paul’s mention of being with “those who belong to Caesar’s household” in Philippians, support the view that Paul wrote the prison epistles from Rome. Paul’s Roman incarceration produced three great letters to the churches of Ephesus, Colosse and Philippi, as well as a personal letter to his friend Philemon. His letters reflect his pastor’s heart and his love and concern for those he thought of as his spiritual children.

While the prison epistles reflect Paul’s earthly position as a prisoner of Rome, he makes it clear, in each of the aforementioned books, that his captivity was first and foremost to Christ. Paul’s time in prison was for the purpose of spreading the gospel in the Gentile capital of Rome. In Acts 23:11, the Lord Himself told Paul to “...Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.” Paul’s time in captivity was no less profitable to us today than it was to the first-century churches he loved so well.

Ephesus was the capital and the religious, commercial and political center of Asia. It was noteworthy because of two prominent structures. First, the great theater which had a seating capacity of 50,000 people, and second, the temple of Artemis. This temple was a Greek temple dedicated to the ancient pagan goddess, Artemis, and was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

Paul had spent more than two years serving as a missionary in Ephesus, resulting in the gospel spreading throughout the entire region (Acts 19:11). It has been called the third capital of Christianity, with Jerusalem being the first and Antioch being the second. Ephesus was the central point of work in Asia through which all the churches of Asia were founded, especially the seven churches which Jesus sent the messages found in the book of Revelation. Paul would have known the leaders of the Ephesian church and many of its members. Since he does not mention specific personal references, many scholars believe Ephesians was a letter intended for distribution among several of the churches in western Asia Minor, with Ephesus being the major city and church.

Paul writes Ephesians to his mainly Gentile Christian readers, for whom he has apostolic responsibilities, with the intention of informing, strengthening and encouraging them. He assures them of their place within the gracious saving purpose of God and urges them to turn from their sinful ways and live by following the example of Christ. Keep in mind these profound, unfathomable truths were not written to great scholars or theologians, but to ordinary church members.

He knew the great themes, including God’s sovereign choice and predestination of us before the foundation of the world, were essential for all of us to know and rejoice in if we

want to live holy lives. He wrote to expand the horizons of his readers, so that they might understand better God's eternal purpose and grace, leading them to come to an appreciation of the high goals God has for the Church.

The letter concentrates on the Church, the working body of Christ and is the fullest New Testament account of how believers are to protect themselves against spiritual warfare. The intent of the epistle is not to solve a particular problem, but rather give God's plan for the ages. Some scholars find the contents to contain the most reflective truth revealed to men, and the church at Ephesus was, perhaps, better prepared than any other to be the custodian of such truth, since Paul's long stay there had prepared them well to hear and understand his message.

Clarke, Adam. "Ephesians Overview - Adam Clarke Commentary." *StudyLight.org*, www.studylight.org/commentaries/acc/ephesians.html.

Cole, Steven J. "Ephesians." *Bible.org*, 2007, bible.org/series/ephesians-0.

GotQuestions.org. "GotQuestions.org." *GotQuestions.org*, 2018, www.gotquestions.org/.

Wednesday, January 9th

Read Ephesians 1:1-3

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,

To God's holy people in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus:

2 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Praise for Spiritual Blessings in Christ

3 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 introduces himself and makes a point to declare his apostleship by the will of God. He then addresses his audience, the holy people in Ephesus. Some translations use the term saints, which describes all of those who profess believe in Christ.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ is Paul's common greeting. Yet how lightly we tend to drop the words grace and peace off our tongues without stopping to consider what they mean. Grace is God's goodness and kindness which is freely extended to those who are utterly underserving – which would be all of us. Grace is the means of our salvation through Christ and the basis by which God sees us. By Grace we are declared righteous. All of our guilt and shame have been removed and Christ's righteousness is credited to us as our own. Peace with the holy God is the basic need of every sinner. We cannot appease Him by our own sacrifices or good deeds, because these cannot erase the stain of our sin. Christ reconciled us to God and He gives us peace within our hearts even in the midst of our trials. Paul intended these words to carry a spiritual dimension as he often repeats them throughout the letter.

In the ancient Greek verse 1:3-14 is one sentence. This is Paul's overture of the entire letter and it sets the tone for the rest of Ephesians, which is the work of the triune God on behalf of the believer.

Paul speaks first of the blessings we have through the Father, then those that come through the Son and finally of blessings that come through the Holy Spirit. In verse three, God has already blessed us with every spiritual blessing so praise him. "Us" includes Jew and Gentile – which is a prominent theme. He praises God for calling the Gentiles to be included in the adoption of God's children by Jesus Christ. Paul identifies his flock as the Church, separate from the Jewish temple, which would include Jews who became believers in Christ as well as the Gentile believers.

The spiritual blessings are the pure doctrines of the Gospel, and the abundant gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit, justifying, sanctifying and building us up in our faith. These blessings are secure and cannot be taken from us.

Cole, Steven J. "Ephesians." *Bible.org*, 2007, bible.org/series/ephesians-0.

Guzik, David. "Enduring Word Bible Commentary Ephesians 1 - The Work of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in God's Eternal Plan." *Enduring Word*, David Guzik <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/ephesians-1/>

Holy Bible: New American Standard Bible. La Habra, CA, Zondervan, 1999.

Thursday, January 10th

Read Ephesians 1:4-6

⁴For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—⁶to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

Yesterday we left off reading about the spiritual blessings we have that cannot be taken from us. Now Paul begins to unpack what he means by those spiritual blessings. Verse four elaborates on one of the spiritual blessings we have already received - we are chosen by Him before the foundation of the world. He chose us with a purpose, nothing of our own doing, but out of love and filled with knowledge and grace according to the good pleasure of His will. Here the word, predestined, is used to point out collectively God's purpose to include the Gentiles in the blessing of the adoption by Jesus Christ, which previously had just been granted to the Jewish people. The Jews considered themselves an elect or chosen people and wished to monopolize the whole of the Divine love. Paul shows that God had the Gentiles as much in the contemplation of his mercy and goodness as he had the Jews. His giving the Gentiles the Gospel, shows the same love and intent that He had in giving the Law to the Jews. Both the Gentiles and the Jews should be holy and without blame before him. His people should consider that as He loved them, so they should love one another. God having provided for each the same blessings, they should therefore be fully sanctified to Him.

God also chose us individually. It is awe-inspiring to ponder that God in His love, could save us and have a plan for us. But He did not stop with a declaration of his love; He also adopted us. He could have loved us without adopting us as His own. His predestination of adoption points to His desire to have a personal relationship with us and to call us His own. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave Him great pleasure. So, another spiritual blessing

we have is this highly favored position of grace and adoption into the family of God. Because we are in Christ, we are children of the King.

God's ways and His glory aren't always easy for us to understand. Imagine the pain and heartache God the Father endured knowing the price his dearly beloved Son paid for our salvation. Think of His love for us as He sacrificed His only Son on our behalf. This was all in accordance with His good pleasure and will. It is hard to fathom this amount of love, grace, redemption and forgiveness.

Clarke, Adam. "Ephesians Overview - Adam Clarke Commentary." *StudyLight.org*, www.studylight.org/commentaries/acc/ephesians.html.

Guzik, David. "Enduring Word Bible Commentary Ephesians 1 - The Work of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in God's Eternal Plan." *Enduring Word*, David Guzik <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/ephesians-1/>

Smith, Craig. "Identity Theft." *Identity Theft - Adopted-as-Children*, 17 Oct. 2016, <https://bit.ly/2F7aN7F>

Friday, January 11th

Read Ephesians 1:7-10

⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace ⁸ that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding ⁹ he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, ¹⁰ to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

Yesterday we were pondering the truth that God loves us beyond our ability to understand. God did not need to adopt us. Adopting us cost Him a price beyond our conception and yet He did it because He loves us.

The other meaning the word adoption highlights is that we weren't born into this family. God's family is not where we started out, it is not our natural family. The natural family we are born into is of Satan and his authority. We are born into a family where we are deserving of condemnation, because of Adam and our own choices, we are enslaved by sin. Before we came to Christ, we were by nature deserving of wrath, deserving of God's punishment. But now what Paul says is that in Christ, you've been adopted into a very different kind of family. A family of a deep and profound love where you were picked, pursued and purchased. That is how much God loves you.

Yet, often times when circumstances seem like they are spiraling out of control, our response is to wonder. Does God really love me? Does God really care about me? Because we think if He really loved me, He would have done what I wanted. We are tossed back and forth by every wind of circumstances rather than resting in the secure knowledge that we are loved, because of what He went through to adopt us into his family in the first place. God wants you to rest in the knowledge that you have been adopted into His family, and from that position in the family, you receive not only status as members of the family, but you receive all the other benefits that come from that.

In verse seven, Paul begins to outline the benefits. He says, "In Him, we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins in accordance with the riches of God's grace that He lavished upon us." That's one of the spiritual blessings. You have redemption which means that you have been bought with a price. You've been paid for.

He did it not because we earned it but because of His grace, that undeserved kindness, which He has given us freely in the One that He loves, who is Christ. He says that He has lavished it upon us, heaped or poured out in excess. He has also given us not only redemption, but redemption along with all wisdom and understanding. And He made known to us the mystery of His will according to the good pleasure which He purposed in Christ.

He has also given us wisdom which is the ability to know what is important and what's not. We have true insight into what really matters, which leads to understanding because it allows us to change the way we live when we know what really matters. We begin to orient our lives around what matters as opposed to what the world says matters, and so we have understanding. And in the process of doing that, He gives us insight into the mystery of His will which is ultimately to bring unity to all things.

In verse nine, the mystery refers to something we could not have known unless it was revealed to us. God revealed to the apostles His plan of salvation for a lost world, to unite both Jews and Gentiles into one Church under Jesus. This was a foreign concept for those of the first century era, thus Paul refers to this knowledge as a mystery. Paul continues to bring this idea home by explaining God would gather together all things in Christ – both in heaven and on earth. All will be determined in the fullness of time whether by Jesus as savior or Jesus as judge. All things in heaven and earth of all time will be summed up and unified in Christ at the right time.

Clarke, Adam. "Ephesians Overview - Adam Clarke Commentary." *StudyLight.org*, www.studylight.org/commentaries/acc/ephesians.html.

Guzik, David. "Enduring Word Bible Commentary Ephesians 1 - The Work of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in God's Eternal Plan." *Enduring Word*, David Guzik <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/ephesians-1/>

Smith, Craig. "Identity Theft." *Identity Theft - Adopted-as-Children*, 17 Oct. 2016, <https://bit.ly/2F7aN7F>