

For the next eleven weeks we are going to work through Paul’s epistle to the Ephesians.

When I began at Michiana Covenant seven years ago, I preached through Colossians, which in many ways is the twin sister to Ephesians.

It seems clear that Paul wrote Ephesians and Colossians around the same time – they cover many of the same themes and topics.

In fact, since Tychicus (6: 21 and Col 4:7) is the bearer of both letters, it is entirely possible that they were sent at the same time.

But Ephesians and Colossians are both all about who we are in Christ and what that means for our lives.

Introduction (1:1-2)

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.

Paul opens with his standard greeting

identifying himself as an apostle –

and particularly emphasizing that he was chosen by God for this task.

He writes to the saints in Ephesus.

Several early manuscripts leave the place blank,

which has led some to think that Ephesians was a circular letter.

And certainly there are no references to any specific events or concerns in Ephesus – and for that matter, no special greetings at the end.

So it is likely that Paul intended this at least for all the churches in Asia Minor, centered around Ephesus.

Some people have noticed some differences in style between Ephesians and Colossians.

They use a lot of similar language, but applied in somewhat different ways –

Ephesians to the “big picture” of the church universal,

Colossians to the particular situation in Colossae.

And since Colossians says that it was written by “Paul and Timothy”

while Ephesians simply says “Paul,”

so the differences between Ephesians and Colossians

are likely due to Timothy’s collaboration on Colossians.

Paul’s message in Ephesians can be summed up in two points:

What does it mean to be in Christ?

What does that mean for your life?

In chapter 1 Paul gives us a quick sketch of the greatness of our salvation,

starting with redemption predestined,
then redemption accomplished,
and finally redemption applied.

Weaving the three together,

Paul shows us God's eternal plan,
which was accomplished in Jesus Christ,
and is now applied to our hearts by the sealing of the Spirit.

1. Redemption Predestined: The Father Chose Us in Him Before the Foundation of the World (1:3-6)

*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.*

From the perspective of eternity,

Paul reminds us that the ultimate foundation of our redemption
is found in the predestinating love of the Father in Christ.
It was according to his kindness and mercy that he determined
to choose a people for himself
to work all things out for his own glory
according to the counsel of his will.

You have been chosen before the foundation of the world,
predestined to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ.

He chose us *in Christ* before the foundation of the world.

What does that mean?

It means that God did not merely choose an abstract number, or just random people.

Rather, he chose *us* –

and he chose us in Christ.

Of course, before the foundation of the world, there was no sin.

But already, before sin entered the world,

God had chosen us in Christ.

In other words, God had already determined to send his Son as the Anointed one
who would deliver us from sin and death.

And we hear about the accomplishment of that redemption in verses 7-10.

2. Redemption Accomplished: Forgiveness through the Blood of Christ (1:7-10)

*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.*

Redemption predestined cannot be thought of apart from redemption accomplished.
We are chosen *in Christ*, and it is only through his blood
--through his death and resurrection--
that we can have the forgiveness of our sins.

And throughout this passage,
Paul blends redemption predestined and accomplished with redemption applied.
In fact, the three are inseparable.
Because even as he turns to God's eternal purpose (which he set forth in Christ)
he refers to it as a plan for the fullness of time –
pointing to its application by the Spirit.

Simply put, redemption is grounded in the electing love of God,
accomplished by the work of Christ,
and effectively sealed to our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

3. Redemption Applied: An Inheritance Sealed with the Promised Holy Spirit (1:11-14)

*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,
were 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.*

Again “in him” (in Christ) we have obtained an inheritance.
So while the bulk of this third section focuses on the application of redemption,
we cannot escape the predestinating purpose of God
or the redemptive work of Christ.

Paul's emphasis in verses 13 and 14 is upon the accomplished work of the Holy Spirit,
which is a fixed and unchanging reality.

All of you who have believed the gospel of Christ have been marked as being in him.
This faith is rooted in hearing the word of truth--the gospel of your salvation.
Those who hear this word, and believe,
are marked, or sealed with the Holy Spirit.

The sealing of the Holy Spirit demonstrates two things:
our inclusion with Christ
and the guarantee of our inheritance.

First, the Holy Spirit is the seal of your being included in Christ.

God has stamped you with his Holy Spirit,
a stamp which declares to all who see it:
"This is MINE--don't touch!"

What is sealed,
and therefore made secure,
is your union with Christ--
your participation in his death and resurrection,
which Paul goes on to explore in chapter two.

But the sealing of the Holy Spirit also is the deposit guaranteeing your inheritance.
This is the pledge that your salvation will be consummated at the return of Christ.
The *arrabon* is a pledge or a guarantee of what is to come.
Look at it as a downpayment,
a non-refundable deposit,
which guarantees that the buyer will complete the sale--
but it is also appropriately viewed as an engagement ring,
which declares to all who see it that this woman
is beloved by her lover,
and he has pledged his life to her.

So also Jesus Christ has given you his engagement ring
--his Holy Spirit--
as the pledge of his good faith toward you.

But in both these pictures--
the deposit and the engagement ring,
we see two things:

- 1 the present reality which we have in Christ, through this deposit of the Holy Spirit;
- 2 and our future hope of the consummation of all things in Christ.

Finally, Paul declares that you were sealed *with the promised* Holy Spirit.

Here he clearly refers us to the promise of Joel 2--
the promise of the day when God would pour out his Spirit on all flesh--
as well as to the promise of Jesus in John 14 (the paraclete--the comforter).

Hence, this is ultimately pointing us to Pentecost.

In Paul's teaching, believers not only participate in the death and resurrection of Christ, but also in the session of Christ at the right hand of the Father (see 2:6) and in the day of Pentecost, as we see here.

4. Paul's Prayer

For this reason,

[why?]

because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus

and your love toward all the saints,

I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers,

But how does Paul pray for the Ephesians?

We just finished our study of the Lord's Prayer from the Psalms.

Now we hear Paul's prayer for the Ephesians, as he prays,

that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory,

may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him,

having the eyes of your hearts enlightened,

that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you,

what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,

and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe,

according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ

when he raised him from the dead and seated him

at his right hand in the heavenly places,

far above all rule and authority and power and dominion,

and above every name that is named,

not only in this age but also in the one to come.

And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church,

which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Because you have received this Spirit,

Paul prays in verses 17-19

that the Father would give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation

so that you might know him better!

And what is this knowledge?

Paul goes on to pray that the eyes of your heart might be enlightened

so that you might know three things:

First, the hope to which he has called you

Second, the riches of his glorious inheritance

and Third, the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe.

Hope. Inheritance. Power.

What is the Christian's hope?
What is our glorious inheritance?
What is this incomparably great power?
This hope of God's calling is the rule and authority of Jesus Christ.
This inheritance of the saints is Jesus Christ, and all his benefits.
This power which we *receive* in Christ,
is the power which God *exerted* in Christ
when he raised him from the dead
and seated him at his right hand in heavenly places.
It is this power which is explained in 2:6-7
where we are told that (READ)

Your confidence,
your hope,
your motivation in all that you do,
is that Jesus Christ has begun a good work in you,
by uniting you to his death,
by the power of the Holy Spirit--
But it doesn't stop there.
You also have been raised with Christ.
YOU are seated at the right hand of the Father
IN CHRIST.
And HE who began this good work in you
will bring it to completion in the day of Christ Jesus.
Therefore, says Paul,
I keep begging God to open your eyes.
To give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation
so that you may know this Christ more.
There is nothing that Paul wants for you,
besides the same Jesus Christ who is seated at the right hand of God,
far above all rule and authority,
power and dominion--
both now, and in the age to come.

Paul gives us two grounds for our hope in this passage,
One pointing backwards,
and one pointing forwards.
First, he directs our attention to what Christ has done.
In verse 7 he points us to Christ's blood--his death
In verse 13 he points us to Christ's sending the promised Holy Spirit--Pentecost
In verse 20 he points us to Christ's resurrection
and ascension to the right hand of the Father.

Your hope is rooted in the once-for-all work of Jesus Christ,
and is therefore utterly secure.
But he also directs our attention forward to the goal of what Christ has done.
In verse 21 he points us to the age to come,
and the consummation of all things in Christ.
All the blessings which we have in Christ are pointing to the great day,
when "all things in heaven and on earth will be brought together under one head,
even Christ."

These two grounds for our hope, however,
are not ultimately two--but rather are one.
Rather, the incomparable riches of his grace,
which he speaks of in 2:7
have begun to appear even now.
Paul continually points us to what Christ has definitively accomplished,
because the age to come has now dawned.
When Paul prays that the glorious Father might give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation
that the eyes of your heart might be enlightened,
He is praying that you might see what is yours in Christ.
that you might see that the age to come has dawned,
and you have been brought into the hope,
the inheritance,
and the power,
that belongs to the eschatological reign of Jesus Christ.

Your hope,
your inheritance,
your exceedingly great power,
all rest in Jesus Christ,
who has given you the promised Spirit--
the Spirit whose coming was foretold by the prophets;
the Spirit who would be poured out upon all God's people;
the Spirit who would give his people hearts of flesh to obey God's commandments.

Paul prays here that your eyes may be opened to this reality--
that your heart may be enlightened
so that you might see
that you are seated with Christ EVEN NOW in heavenly places;
that you are no longer under the power of transgressions and sins--
in which you used to live, back when you were objects of wrath.

(2:1)

This is the deposit of the Spirit:
that you have been made a partaker in Christ's death and resurrection,

so that you might EVEN NOW live a new life.

And all this is just the downpayment!

It is this Christ to whom the Holy Spirit points you.

This Christ who is sealed to your heart by the Spirit's presence;
this Christ who is the wisdom which the Spirit reveals.

I am here to declare to you

that if you have received the promise of the Holy Spirit
then the end of the ages has come upon you
and the Spirit has been poured out in your midst.

If we learn anything from Pentecost,

we must learn that the last days are upon us,
and the Spirit of God has been poured out upon all flesh--
--as was foretold by the prophet Joel.

If we hear anything ringing through the ages,

let us hear the command which Peter gave to the multitudes,
"Repent and be baptized,
in the name of Jesus Christ
for the forgiveness of your sins.
And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Peter insisted that this was a once-for-all event when he then declared
that this promise would hold true indefinitely--

"The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off--
for all whom the Lord our God will call".

Therefore, we see that just as we participate in Christ's
death,

resurrection,
ascension,
and session at the right hand of the Father,

so also we participate in the once-for-all baptism of the church
with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

Some people read the Old Testament and see the cycles of revival and declension,
and then they look, and see the church acting in a similar fashion.

They conclude that the same thing must be happening;
but this does not do justice to the testimony of scripture.

We live in a new age--the Age of the Spirit.

To say that we must pray for God to do a new work in our midst

is to deny the work that he has already done.

When Jesus was about to ascend to the right hand of the Father,
he did not say,
"I'll stop by and visit you occasionally",
he said,
"I will be with you always, even to the end of the age."
The "Emmanuel" principle--"God with us"--
has come true in the coming of the Holy Spirit.

What can you do?

Pray--and gather with one another to pray.

Seek to know Christ--through his Word.

And love one another.

when you are at work, seek ways to encourage others.

when you are at home, ask how you can love your family.

when you are with the church, ask you can love one another.

(Pray Eph 1)