To maintain today's rapid growth [of the worldwide Christian Church], *the Lord is raising up a new breed of disciples-liberated, empowered, responsible Kingdom builders. They aren't spectators. They're unstoppables.*
James Rutz

Prayer Study #463
EPHESIANS CHAPTER ONE
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The Church at Ephesus

EPHESUS

The Church at Ephesus was the first congregation of Christianity in Asia. It was started by Paul with the help of Aquila and Priscilla. Ephesus was a prosperous city and contained the largest temple of Artemis (Diana), which was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It also had a manmade harbor and saw people arrive from all over the known world. Some came for jobs, for Ephesus was the biggest business center in that part of the world. In Biblical times Ephesus was the fourth greatest city in the world. (Only Rome, Alexandria and Antioch were considered greater.) Ephesus was called "The Light of Asia" because of its tolerance to new ideas. It also was known for its large prostitution business and for its large slave community. There were 300,000 people living in Ephesus at the time of the writing of Ephesians.

In 57 AD, around 24 years from the death of Jesus on the Cross, Paul was arrested in Jerusalem. He spent AD 60 to 62 under house arrest in guarded rental quarters in Rome, but was later transferred to prison. In 61 AD he wrote Colossians and Ephesians, in 62 AD 1st Timothy, and in 66 AD 2nd Timothy. His other prison epistles include Philemon and Philippians. His letter to both the Ephesians and Colossians was carried by Tychicus, whom Paul noted would tell the believers in both Colossae and Ephesus about his situation. He was martyred in Rome in 66 AD. Paul refers to himself as

the author of Ephesians in two places (1:1 & 3:1). Many regard this book as the best of Paul's writings. Some consider it among the best writings in the Bible.

Ephesians was written partly to answer concerns of Epaphras concerning threats to Christianity. Another purpose was to teach the Jews and Gentile believes to walk in *agape* with each other. He uses the noun or verb form of *agape* 19 times in this letter. Ephesians begins with love (1:4-6) and ends with love (6:23-24).

Paul also addresses redemption (1:7), the divine intention of the human race (1:3-14), grace (1:2), predestination (1:4-5), reconciliation and union with Christ (2:1-21), the five fold ministry gifts Christ gave to the Church (4:11-13), and spiritual warfare and the armor of God (6), and the importance of love in relationships (husband and wives, children and parents, masters and slaves (5 & 6). Paul preaches that the distinction between Jew and Gentile was abolished at Christ's sacrificial death. Therefore, all human kind should reunite as the people of God, with Christ as the head (1:22-23).

Unlike many of Paul's letters, there were few mentions of personal names. The reason for this, I believe, is Ephesians was meant to be a *circular* letter. In other words, it was not just written for the Ephesians but for all the churches in that area. The Church at Ephesus had members and visitors who were a *who's who* in Christian circles of that time. John lived on a hillside overlooking Ephesus and had many visitors of the faith. It is thought that here he cared for Mary, the Mother of Jesus, until she died. John himself after he returned from Patmos lived in this area until he died around 100 AD when he was around 94 years old. (He is thought to have been the youngest of the disciples and was the last one to die.) Timothy became the Bishop of Ephesus and was the church leader there until he was martyred, when he was 80 years old in AD 97. He was grieved by a procession in honor of the false, mythological god Diana and started preaching the Gospel to the people. They became angry and drug him through the streets, finally stoning him to death.

Ephesus was the capital of Asia in what is now Turkey. Paul had ministered in this city for three years. It was a prosperous city and very pagan. The Ephesians had been heavily influenced by Greek culture, and the city had many statues of naked men and women made from white marble, but at the time of Paul and John these statues were painted flesh colored and were ideal, perfect physiques because the human body had become an object of worship. This really offended the Jews who were taught that the human body was holy, and that public nudity was an offense to God.

Ephesus, like most Roman controlled cities, had a large stadium. Here the Ephesians watched gladiators fight it out or watched criminals, which often included Christians, thrown to savage beasts where they faced a horrible death. This provided entertainment to the people and was a cheap way to execute criminals. Chariot races also often took place in the stadium.

Paul wrote in 1st Corinthians 15:32 that he fought with wild beast at Ephesus. Most scholars believe this should not be interpreted literally. For one thing, Roman citizens, of which, Paul was one, by law could not be put in an arena with wild beast. For another, there is no historical record of this nor is such an event recorded in Acts. Obviously, Paul was writing symbolically and was referring to betrayers, deceivers, and Judiazers.

Also in Ephesus there was a huge theatre or amphitheater where very vulgar plays and comedies were performed, giving further indication of how the Ephesians had sunk into immorality. The plays were full of cursing and sexual innuendo. In Paul and John's time believers were forced on stage with crude costumes and then were subjected to lewd acts design to humiliate the Ephesian Christians. Perhaps that is why Paul wrote from Ephesus the verse in 1st Corinthians 4:9 "...*We are made a spectacle unto the world..."* The word *spectacle* is from *theatron*, which can be translated *a performance carried out on stage.*

Having written all of this about Ephesus, I am reluctant to admit that there are those who believe that this letter was not written to the Ephesians but to the Laodiceans. Marcion

was the first to make a collection of Paul's letters, and he actually called this letter the Letter to the Laodiceans. The reason many scholars have trouble with saying this is a letter to the Ephesians is because Paul was so close to the Ephesian believers. When he left them, after three years, they all wept and fell on his neck and kissed him (Acts 20:37). They believe that Paul would have been more personal and mentioned names in his letter in a letter to the Ephesians, as he was accustomed to do in other epistles. Whether this was written specifically to the Ephesians or not, what has remained as the Book of Ephesians in the canonized record is some of the most important writing in the entire Bible.

Ephesians 1 New King James Version (NKJV)

Greeting

1 *Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God,*
To the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus:
2 *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Paul claims two things in this introduction or greeting. He says he is an apostle of Jesus Christ, and he is one through the will of God. An apostle is one sent out by Christ. He belonged to Christ and the only power he possessed was from Christ. Additionally, many believe that a person cannot walk in the office of an apostle unless they have seen Jesus. Since we will learn from Ephesians 4, there are STILL apostles today, we can surmise that Jesus is still revealing Himself to believers today.

Also note that Paul writes this to saints. Neil Anderson found 340 places where unsaved people are called *sinners*. He found 240 places where saved

people are called *saints*. He found exactly *zero* places where saved people are called *sinners.* James Rutz says this, “We do sin, it’s true, and we need to confess, repent, and make amends whenever we do. But ‘sinner’ is not our main identity anymore, and you need to reverse your self-image and free yourself from this crippling distortion. The apostle Paul had no problem with this. Did he ever address a letter to the “sinners” in Rome or Ephesus or Philippi? If the Bible calls you a saint, why would you demean yourself by denying it? The Lord Jesus paid a steep price to make you a saint, so smile and accept it and get on with a higher life.”

Redemption in Christ

3 *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,* ***4*** *just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love,* ***5*** *having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,* ***6*** *to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.*

7 *In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace* ***8*** *which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence,* ***9*** *having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself,* ***10*** *that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him.* ***11*** *In*

Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, ***12*** *that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.*
13 *In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise,* ***14*** *who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.*

In the Greek this passage from verse 3 to 14 is one sentence. Paul is not trying to make a logical argument here. He is poetically recalling all the gifts and wonders that the Lord has given us and is forming a song of praise. This in scripture is called a doxology because it tells us what God has done and is an expression of praise and worship, glory and honor to the Lord.

In verse 3 Paul encourages us to bless or praise the Lord. The wonderful thing about praise is the Lord inhabits the praises of His people (Psalm 22:3). In His presence is fullness of joy (Psalm 16:11), and the joy of the Lord is our strength (Nehemiah 8:10). Therefore, our strength is grounded in praise. The more we live a life of praise, the stronger we are against the powers of darkness. Paul is talking about something that is ours right now: the Blessings of God. We praise Him because He has blessed us.

The remaining verses in this section are highly controversial. To understand the different views of this passage, we need to recall three specific groups who address salvation, although there are many

different groups within these three groups. The Universalists believe that God is going to save everyone, regardless of what they have done or what they believe. Calvinists, named for the French church reformer of the 1500s, believe that we are predestined for heaven or hell. Arminians, named for Jacobe Arminius, a Dutchman of the 1500s) believe that we have a free will to choose or reject Christ as savior. Those who do accept Him go to heaven and those who don't go to hell.

I hope none of you are Universalists, because there is no scriptural basis for this belief. Some of you here are Calvinists. The Calvinist camp includes Dr. D. James Kennedy, John MacArthur, John Piper, R.G. Sproul, Charles Spurgeon, Jonathan Edwards, Martin Luther, and Matthew Henry. Those who lean toward Arminialism include Billy Graham, Bill Bright, Charles Finny, Dwight L. Moody, Chuck Colson, and Chuck Smith. Many Baptist seminaries teach the Calvinist approach, and Presbyterians are full fledged Calvinist. The Salvation Army, Methodist, and Church of the Nazarene lean toward Arminalism. There is a wide range of believe on a spectrum between Arminalist and Calvinist. Some, for example, embrace 3 points of Calvinism but reject the other two.

The Calvinists stand on five points (TULIP):

1. Total Depravity of Man: Every person is a slave to sin. We are born into sin. Jeremiah 17:9 supports this position: *The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.* **(I believe that we all can agree on this first point. Indeed humankind is full of sin and wickedness.)**

2. Unconditional Election: God has chosen from eternity to extend mercy to those he has chosen and withhold from those not chosen. **(Yet 2nd Peter 3:9 tells us that He is *not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance*.)**

3. Limited Atonement: Christ died only for the elect, therefore only the sins of the elect were atoned by Jesus' death. Atonement-the reconciliation of God and man through the sacrificial death of Jesus-is limited to only those God chose to save. A lost sinner cannot come to Jesus and trust Him as savior, unless he has been foreordained to come to Christ. No man has the ability to come to Chirst unless he is predestined to do so. **(Scripture repeatedly tells us that Jesus is the savior of the world, not the savior of the chosen few. John 4:42-*…now we* [the Samaritans] *believe, not because of thy* [the Samaritan woman] *saying: for we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.* Hebrews 2:9-*But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man.* John 3:16-17-*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be***

saved.

4. Irresistible Grace: The Calvinists reason that the elect cannot resist the grace of God, no matter how wicked they are, and the Holy Spirit overcomes their resistance so that they must and will come to Christ. In other words, the saving grace of God is applied to those whom He has determined to save. **(God does not force people to be saved. Acts 7:51-*You stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, you do always resisted the Holy Spirit: as your fathers did, so do you.* John 1:12-*But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name.*)**
5. Perseverance of the Saints: Since God is sovereign, His will cannot be frustrated by humans or anything else. Therefore, those chosen will continue in the faith until the end. Those who fall away never were chosen and never had really been saved in the first place. (

Armenians believe that every person has a choice or free will to accept Jesus or not accept Him. They ask, "Would it be real love if we were predestined to come to Him and did not a choice in the matter?" They point out that the Bible never hints that people are lost because they have no ability to come to Christ. The only thing that stands between the sinner and salvation is the sinner's will. Men go to hell, not because of their inability to come to Christ, but because they *will not* come to Christ.

God is love and loves every person and says, "Whosoever will may come." The Bible is full of *whosoever's.* Not everyone will, but salvation is

open to whosoever will. Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost and said, "*And it shall come to pass, that **whosoever** shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved."* John 3:16 says, "*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that **whosoever** believeth in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life."* To me it is a personal choice whether you come to Christ or not.

The Arminian position on this passage is that election and predestination and foreordination are not speaking of the individual but a *group* is meant here. The key to understanding this is verse 4, where it says *in Him.* Those who are in Christ are predestined. Only if you are in Christ are you predestined. Paul gives specific examples of what Christians are predestined to receive. These include a Christian's election to holiness, adoption or a Christian's predestination to sonship, acceptance, a Christian's redemption, understanding of His will, unity with Him and the Body of Christ, inheritance, etc. These blessings are accessible only through Christ to believers. We who are Christians are also sealed by the Holy Spirit.

William Barclay speaks to this last point, *being sealed with the Holy Spirit.* He says, "In the ancient world-it is a custom still followed-when a sack or a crate or a package was dispatched, it was sealed with a seal, in order to indicate from where it had come and to whom it belonged. The possession of the Holy Spirit is the seal which shows that a person belongs to God. The Holy Spirit both shows us God's will and enables us to do it."

In summary, Calvinists believe that these blessings don't originate through accepting Christ but from a

predetermined arrangement with the Father as to who is going to be saved or not. Arminians believe that we are predestine to walk in all of these things because we have accepted Christ. We share our election only by being in Christ.

Prayer for Spiritual Wisdom

15 *Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints,* ***16*** *do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers:* ***17*** *that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him,* ***18*** *the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,* ***19*** *and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power* ***20*** *which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places,* ***21*** *far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.*

22 *And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church,* ***23*** *which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.*

Here Paul gives us a pattern of what any true church or ministry should do. It must have faith in the Lord Jesus, and it must have love for all the saints.

Paul's prays for this church he loves. He asks that they have the spirit of wisdom. The word used here,

sophia, in Greek is referring to the wisdom of the deeper things of God and His eternal truths. He also prays for a fuller revelation and knowledge of God Himself. This will come about when we start seeing things through our spiritual eyes instead of our natural eyes. He prays for a new realization of the hope of God's calling in our lives and for a new realization of the power of God, which God proved to mankind by causing the resurrection of His Son. God's purpose cannot be stopped by mankind, and He is still in control. His extraordinary power which raised Christ from the dead is alive and working in and through believers all over the world. Not only did God raise Jesus from the dead, but He also seated Him in the place of authority at His right hand where Jesus rules and reigns.

Paul ends this chapter by calling the Church its greatest title, *the Body of Christ*. Christ is the head, and the Church is His body on the earth. Rick Joyner says, "Knowing and living by the truth of this one chapter would result in a life that would have major impact in this world and help to prepare it for the kingdom that is surely coming."

Praying God's Word

There is great power in praying God's Word. This chapter contains a passage that lends itself to practicing praying the Word. I challenge you to pray this passage this week:

Ephesians 1:16-19

I pray the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, will given to me the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, will open the

eyes of my understanding so that I may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward me because I believe. JKV

I ask the God of my Master, Jesus Christ, the God of Glory, to make me intelligent and discerning in knowing Him personally, focusing my eyes so that I can clearly see exactly what it is He is calling me to do, so that I can grasp the immensity of the glorious way of life He has for me, His follower, the utter extravagance of His work in me because I trust Him, and I pray for endless energy and boundless strength! The Message