

# Studies on Ephesians

## Study 2: Ephesians 1:11-23

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### Background

We continue our series of studies on the letter of Ephesians, from verses 11 to 23 which begins to look at God's purpose and power.

Verses 3 to 10 began to introduce something of God's divine purpose – the glory and headship of Christ and spiritual blessings in Christ. Paul's passion and enthusiasm for the message he brings in this section of the passage is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that "the Greek text of 1:3-14 is one unusually long sentence, presenting one cascade description of God's work in Christ after another...It's purpose is praise to God for binding us to himself by the grace he has shown in Christ<sup>1</sup>."

The literary flow begins with a blessing (vv3-14), and continues with a thanksgiving (vv15-16) and ends with an intercessory prayer (vv17-20).

The doxology lays a foundation to our faith as believers based on God's perfect plan for us accomplished through the work of the trinity and finding fulfillment 'in Christ' as a result of which we are "holy and blameless before him in love<sup>2</sup>." As the spiritual blessings are introduced in subsequent verses we catch a glimpse of God's eternal purpose which is working through the:

- **Past** – "election from the very beginning<sup>3</sup>", v4;
- **Present** – "sonship by adoption<sup>22</sup>", v5; and,
- **Future** – unity which is "to bring all things together under the headship of Christ<sup>4</sup>."

Within this framework believers experience "redemption through his blood<sup>5</sup>", knowledge of the divine mystery ("the mystery of his will<sup>6</sup>"), and the "sealing of the Spirit, which is the guarantee of the final inheritance<sup>7</sup>." This demonstrates how "Paul viewed God as intentional, purposeful, and working at great lengths to bring humanity to himself and to equip people for life<sup>8</sup>."

### The Message

#### Verses 11-14

Whilst easy upon first reading to miss one aspect of the significance of verses 12 and 13, they are important because they introduces the phrase "so that we" (v12) and "In him you also" (v13). These two expressions stand together. When Paul uses 'we' in v12, it is commonly understood that he is referring to himself and his fellow Jewish believers, and when he uses 'you also' he is referring to his believing Gentile readers. There is one

<sup>1</sup> Snodgrass, K. (1996), p45, *The NIV Application Commentary: Ephesians*, Zondervan

<sup>2</sup> Ephesians 1: 4, NRSV

<sup>3</sup> Foulkes, F. (1989), p53, *Ephesians (Revised Edition)*, Tyndale New Testament Commentary Series, Inter-Varsity Press

<sup>4</sup> Bruce, F.F. (1977) , p439, *Paul Apostle of the Free Spirit (Revised Edition)*, Paternoster Press

<sup>5</sup> Ephesians 1: 7, NRSV

<sup>6</sup> Ephesians 1: 9, NRSV

<sup>7</sup> Foulkes, F. (1989), p54, *Ephesians (Revised Edition)*, Tyndale New Testament Commentary Series, Inter-Varsity Press

<sup>8</sup> Snodgrass, K. (1996), p40, , *The NIV Application Commentary: Ephesians*, Zondervan

inheritance (v11) which both groups equally share and this anticipates the reconciliation or uniting of Jews and Gentiles.

- To what extent do you think that verse 11 speaks into predestination? Divine election is a constant theme in Paul's letters (cf Romans 8:29-33; 9:6-26; 11:5,7,28; 16:13; Colossians 3:12; 1 Thessalonians 1:4; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; Titus 1:1).
- What is the purpose and consequence of our receiving this inheritance (v12)? See also Romans 8:23.
- Why do you think the Holy Spirit is referred to as the "promised Holy Spirit" which other translations render "Holy Spirit of promise"?
- In verse 13, Paul writes of the "word of truth, the gospel of your salvation." What is the response that is required from us and what is the further consequence?
- Read 2 Corinthians 5:5. What do you think it means when it states that the Spirit is given as "a guarantee"? How does that impact on your understanding of these verses?

### Verses 15-23

Paul's prayer presented in these verses is one of the two great prayers in Ephesians, and is in the context of his overwhelming desire for believers to recognise in all fullness the extent of the spiritual blessings that they have in Christ and the strength and depth of their 'faith, hope and love' in God.

In verses 20-23, the whole focus is now on the things of God, and we shift from Paul's vision to God's much wider vision:

- 1) It was God's mighty strength that "worked in Christ in raising Him from the dead." (v20)
- 2) It was God's mighty strength that "seated Him at His right hand in heavenly regions." (v20)

This strength is emphasised by verse 19 which uses 4 different words for power 'μέγεθος' (greatness), 'δυνάμις' (power, strength, act of power), 'κράτος' (mighty, strong), 'ἰσχύς' (strength, might).

We see the significance of this in the remaining verses (v21-v23).

We are given a glimpse of heaven in which we see:

- 1) God's authority over ALL things.
  - 2) God's relationship with His church.
- Why does Paul "not cease to give thanks" (v16)? How does this speak into our ministry?
  - What do you think is meant here by the "eyes of your heart" (v18)?
  - Through a "spirit of wisdom and revelation" (v17), what understanding does Paul fervently hope and pray might be realised (vv18-19)?
  - Ultimately, this "spirit of wisdom and revelation" (v17) is achieved by some specific action. What do you think that might be (v17)?
  - Do we sometimes lose sight of God's bigger picture or much wider vision? How might we recapture that vision and perspective?