

“Why Worship?”  
 Sermon for 28 May 2017  
 Text: Ephesians 1:1-14

There are two things that Paul expresses in verse two of Ephesians that are worth highlighting: First, taken generically, that we are among the *saints* and second, that we are the *faithful*. Ephesians is a general letter, to a group of churches so this inclusivity is more appropriate. The first, saints, refers to our personal condition of holiness—we are the “holy ones of God,” people who have been searched, scoured and cleansed by the Holy Spirit! I got to thinking about this and I found the phrasing of our being those who live a life-style of repentance. We are the repenting ones, or we are in continual repentance from sin, always turning back to God—we are in renewal, in reformation. Because we desire to be useful to God, we undergo examination of our hearts, and the purification of our whole being. We know that by faith in Jesus Christ, we have been declared righteous—that is saved. We know that this “status” is the gracious activity of God. We cannot earn it, or merit it, we can only receive it as a gift. The ascription of *faithful*” is very much connected to holiness because it means “full of faith” here as contrasted with “dependable.” **Faithful in Christ Jesus** presses the text in that direction.

I spoke of fourteen headings in Ephesians in my introductory sermon last week. Our first practical heading is, as I noted then: Why worship? Now, follow this, *the importance of being saints*, and faithful, is relevant because we were **made for praise**, created to *express, or to embody* the glory of His Great Name. Paul models this in that the first 14 verses of this letter are literally praise! Thus, we live for praise, to worship the One true God, Creator of heaven and earth and of all that lives on the face of the earth and our Redeemer as well. The praising piece comes easy apparently. We praise other people easily and we look for praise from others (parents, friends and employers) regularly. One dilemma is that we are apt to praise the wrong object(s). God has declared His jealousy for our worship in saying, **You shall have no other gods before Me! You shall love the Lord Your God and Him only shall you serve.** This is recognizable as the first of the ten commandments given to Moses by God Himself and it is prefaced with a reminder of God’s mighty works of deliverance and rescue from bondage in Egypt. (See Exodus 20)

There are lots of functional idols, unworthy objects of worship, out there. Rock stars, sports heroes, actors and actresses—and perhaps a few politicians—as well as Starbucks and video games. *This is the essence of sin—wrong worship—if we get the worship right, everything tends to go right.*

Worship. The spirit, or tone of the opening verses (v. 3-v.14) of Ephesians is notable. The *language* used here is the *language of praise*. This praise has as its object the supremely proper object of praise, God, the God revealed in Scripture. Saying this entails denying that we are to worship God as we might imagine Him, or hope Him to be. **What the Bible says is true is what matters.** We must guard against the temptation to make the Bible say what we want it to say. Nowhere is this more crucial than in answering the question “Whom do I worship?” Everyone worships something. If we hope to get this right we need what the Bible says about who He is and about what He has done—which is what the Bible reveals!

Speaking of which, we note that the passage is triune in structure (Paul speaks of the Father (vv.3-6), the Son (vv.7-12) as well as the work of the Holy Spirit, (vv.13-14)). This is no coincidence; rather it is the result of Paul having internalized the truth of the triune God! And his teacher in this regard was the risen Lord Himself. Paul's early usage of these categories demonstrates that they were original, original to Jesus in His teaching ministry. (This may have been formulated as the doctrine of the Trinity subsequently, but the three-persons of the Godhead appear to have been there since before the beginning of Creation.

We spoke initially of our being **faithful in Christ**, Paul moves out from this premise to designate all of our spiritual blessings as **being in Christ**. *In Christ occurs eleven times in these eleven verses!* Our great salvation is centered in the work of, in the person of Jesus the Christ—and it is through Him that the spiritual blessings are communicated to us! *Therefore He is to be exalted by believers!* God is glorifying Himself in saving us; He saves us in order that He might be glorified. That is His purpose, or His intent. He rescued the people from bondage in Egypt in order to have a people of His Name! A people who belonged to Him, who would praise and exalt Him. *It truly isn't that complicated.* Because Paul alludes to election and predestination in these verses, the doctrinal tends to obscure, or hide the praise language—we miss the spirit of praise in the pursuit of precision. *Try reading it in one breath, as an outburst!* It is, I remind you, a single, long Greek sentence.

Next, we note, in Paul's exaltation, he speaks of the **glorious grace of God with which he has blessed us in the Beloved**, in our salvation in verses 6, 7. And he expressed the eternal scope of this salvation from **before the foundation of the world** (v.4) to the **days of fulfillment** (v.10)—in other words from eternity to eternity—echoing the truth from **everlasting to everlasting Thou art God** (Psalm 90:2). We also get some measure of Paul's excitement in the connection of **things in the heaven(s) and things on earth**—and as this is the only occurrence of **in the heavens** in the New Testament, we should perhaps suggest that it is based on our relationship with God—that we have some benefits of salvation in the here and now and that Paul is anticipating the further extension of those benefits into our future existence with Him.

Finally we note the *scope* of this praiseworthy salvation: both Jews and Gentiles, included together in the bracket of “the people of God.” The ancient barriers, including the wall of hostility, have, in Paul's understanding at least been torn down. This was the plan of God all along, but it was a mystery until the time of its revealing in Christ Jesus. This is not to say that God's plan to include these ancient adversaries was happily met on other side—representatives of each side hated it passionately. They preferred enmity to getting along. Some are perverse that way and both parties are wrong—no matter how contagious the hatred. Loving to hate others is obscene to God; it is not His will for us.

As our passage proceeds to explain, there are good reasons for our praise. There appear to be three: 1. we praise because we are chosen by the Father; 2. we praise because we have been redeemed by the Son; and 3. we praise because we are sealed and assured by the Holy Spirit *who calls, or recalls us to thing we were created for, praise.* Worship is indigenous to man.

We shall examine briefly these three reasons. God has graciously chosen to regenerate, justify, sanctify and glorify sinners. God has sovereignly chosen to do this and

who, and how and when are entirely up to Him. God will love whom He chooses to love. These truths are laid out in vv. 3-6. God **chose us** (v. 4) and **He predestined us** (v.5). Think of it as if you were a young woman who has just been proposed to by the young man she loves. These biblical truths should make us glad, not sad; they should inspire awe, wonder and joy. These affections are the wellsprings of worship!

It has infrequently occurred to me that envy and jealousy might play into the tension these words provoke in some people. Why him, and not me? Why did he get her? . . . I wanted her to be mine.” However, this intimately human picture has its limits. I mean, God **chose us** is broader than “God chose me.” God was choosing a people who, as a whole, would display the glory of God; or, God chose a people, namely the church, who would in their life together (through inward and outward living) manifest the glory of God. At this point it might be helpful to remind ourselves that the whole of creation was created for His glory, to display His person, His godhead. Setting election in that wider context might mute the discontent of the more thoughtful—it doesn’t work for everyone.

Internationalism began with the call of Abraham. God called Israel *that they might be a light to the nations* (Deut. 7:6-8, 14:2; Isa. 42:6-8)—**that through you all the nations of the world might be blessed** (Gen. 22:18). This is not the same thing as globalization (that is the secular humanists’ agenda), but it is “missional” (this word is what we use to describe the purpose for witnessing and outreach, we are gathered in to be sent forth as light, as God’s blessing bearers, as examples of faithful service and worship). Jesus repeated this procedure in the calling of His twelve disciples, the called out and sent ones. They were to **bear fruit and to multiply** (John 15:16)—the reiteration of Gen. 1:20 is impossible to miss! So, yes, God chooses individuals and, yes, those individuals are called into the church (gathered) and they gather like harvesters, like migrant workers, who are getting ready to go forth to the fields. The God they serve is the God of the harvest. So, although they are free agents as harvesters, the work they do advances the purposes of God—for the glory of God, mind you, not self-advancement, mere prosperity or sordid gain. Each harvester is redeemed, forgiven, sealed by the Holy Spirit and believing individually as well as being incorporated into the body of Christ, His bride, the church. It is both/and; not either/or.

What I have just expressed is both obvious and **the mystery of His will**. We know this retrospectively, but there was a moment in time when this was not known, or commonly understood. What God was doing before **the foundation of the world** may be *revealed* to us, but it was not revealed to anyone before there was someone to whom it could be revealed. That which is timeless has come to be discussed by those who are bound by time—this is marvelous. God’s **eternal, secret purposes** (vv. 5, 10) and **the decision of His will** (v.11) are, prior to revelation privy to God Himself. *But it doesn’t stop with purposes and decisions, this mystery extends to the attributes of God Himself*. God is perfect. He is perfectly loving (vv.4-5). He is eternally sovereign (v.5). He is gloriously gracious (vv.6-8) and infinitely wise (v.8). So when He does as He pleases (Ps. 115:3), *it is perfectly fine—what He does fits perfectly with who He is*. And we, not being perfect, remain, as it were, strangers to all this; we are not God. (Although some of us forget.) These things should awe us. God is **worshipful** in all that He does and in all that He is! He is the only suitable object of worship out there.

Let’s parse the word *predestination* together. It means “sovereign control over all things.” It expresses God’s love and favor; good pleasure (vv.5,9), God’s will (vv. 5,9,11);

and God's administrations (v. 10) are all these are alloyed together in His divine purpose! (v.11) God is **gracious** in that we are not worthy, and cannot earn, achieve, or deserve His favor. He came *freely* to save lost sinners—the saved ones go in the saint bin! There is no recycling bin at the judgment seat of Christ.

God is infinitely wise—His choosing is an expression of that wisdom. Therefore election and faith are necessary to each other! Here's verse 13: **In Him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in Him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.** The when is election, the heard and believed is faith. For God, man's responsibility and God's sovereignty resolve happily here. *All may come, not all do*—and those who do come come at His beckoning on purpose. There are no accidents involved, no happy chance, luck or coincidence involved. God is Lord of all, so we are not *predisposed* by culture, geography, or even family ties and upbringing—they truly are all the same to Him—circumstantial. Salvation depends on Him choosing solely and on nothing else contingent.

“Come to Jesus! And when you come, remember to thank Him for drawing you to Himself.”

We preach because the Lord tells us to: some will believe if we preach. The Word says, if they do not hear, they cannot come. Or, better, if they see the power of God, in demonstration of His might in our preaching, they will be turned by Him and saved. We are placed where we are placed *for the sake of His harvest!* Besides these inducements to evangelize, we have the direct command to **go and make disciples**—it does not appear to an elective service. This said, what we must come to is this: this passage is about praising God, and the reasons for worship. It is not about the fine tuning of our theology or skills of argumentation—these being practical uses we might make of these verses.

Our salvation is “in Christ.” There is a clear sense that we are chosen in the Chosen One (Luke 9:35, 23:35). Jesus is the foundation, original and executor of our election. To paraphrase F. F. Bruce. “God accepts us because He chose to put us in union with Christ.” (Christ-centered Exposition, Ephesians, T. Merida, Holman, 2014, p. 25) This truth is a healthy chunk of humble pie. Let none of us be presumptuous, or arrogant. Not only is there no self-salvation, there is no self-reliance or independence involved.

The goal of election is that we be **holy and blameless in His sight** (v.4) In Christ we are holy, and this is true positionally. God sees us as holy if He sees us in Christ. Our status as “holy” is borrowed, or imputed. And, furthermore, His holiness is something for us to align with, live up to, approximate in our walk—it is our magnetic North.

Another way to view our standing with God is by “adoption.” God the Father has taken out adoption papers on us, *for the Son's sake as the Bride He seeks*, making us legally and formally His children—this is the crucial part that's missing when kindly folk declare, “we are all God's children.” No, we are all His creatures no doubt, but apart from adoption as His children, we are not “His children”—the other category is “children of the Devil.” This adoption piece magnifies the adopter—we are very much in touch with this when we express admiration for the willingness of any of our friends to adopt as their own a child that did not used to be their own.

Our standing as saints/His children comes about through faith in Jesus Christ. This is our vertical understanding, we are God's children, but it has its horizontal significance, too. We, the elect, are brothers and sisters together in the family of God known as the church. It is truly as if the love of the Father has caught us up in its strong current and swept us in! Praise God.

So, election is a privilege indeed, but it is a privilege with a purpose: that we raise up a host of harvesters. We are "saved" so that we will go forth and rescue the perishing. We don't just save them from drowning, however, we save them into the church. If the rescue mission is what brings people to safe harbor and to shore, the church is what takes the rescued on from there! It is their spiritual home with their brothers and sisters in Christ. God desires those who worship Him in Spirit and in truth.

**Amen.**