

THE SOVEREIGN GOD AND
THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL:
A STUDY OF EPHESIANS

(LESSON FOURTEEN)

“A TEST OF CHRISTIAN PROFESSION”

EPHESIANS 1:3-16 (KING JAMES VERSION)

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:

4 According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:

5 Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.

6 To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.

7 In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.

8 Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence;

9 Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself.

10 That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him:

11 In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:

12 That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.

13 In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise,

14 Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.

15 Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints,

16 Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers.

EPHESIANS 1:3-16 (THE PASSION TRANSLATION)

1 Dear friends, My name is Paul, and I was chosen by God to be an apostle of Jesus, the Messiah.

2 I'm writing this letter to all the devoted believers who have been made holy by being one with Jesus, the Anointed One. May God himself, the heavenly Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, release grace over you and impart total well-being into your lives.

3 Every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realm has already been lavished upon us as a love gift from our wonderful heavenly Father, the Father of our Lord Jesus — all because he sees us wrapped into Christ. This is why we celebrate him with all our hearts!

4 And he chose us to be his very own, joining us to himself even before he laid the foundation of the universe! Because of his great love, he ordained us, so that we would be seen as holy in his eyes with an unstained innocence.

5-6 For it was always in his perfect plan to adopt us as his delightful children, through our union with Jesus, the Anointed One, so that his tremendous love that cascades over us would glorify his grace — for the same love he has for his Beloved One, Jesus, he has for us. And this unfolding plan brings him great pleasure!

7 Since we are now joined to Christ, we have been given the treasures of redemption by his blood — the total cancellation of our sins — all because of the cascading riches of his grace.

8 This superabundant grace is already powerfully working in us, releasing within us all forms of wisdom and practical understanding.

9 And through the revelation of the Anointed One, he unveiled his secret desires to us — the hidden mystery of his long-range plan, which he was delighted to implement from the very beginning of time.

10 And because of God's unfailing purpose, this detailed plan will reign supreme through every period of time until the fulfillment of all the ages finally reaches its climax — when God makes all things new in all of heaven and earth through Jesus Christ.

11 Through our union with Christ we too have been claimed by God as his own inheritance. Before we were even born, he gave us our destiny; that we would fulfill the plan of God who always accomplishes every purpose and plan in his heart.

12 God's purpose was that we Jews, who were the first to long for the messianic hope, would be the first to believe in the Anointed One and bring great praise and glory to God!

13 And because of him, when you who are not Jews heard the revelation of truth, you believed in the wonderful news of salvation. Now we have been stamped with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit.

14 He is given to us like an engagement ring is given to a bride, as the first installment of what's coming! He is our hope - promise of a future inheritance which seals us until we have all of redemption's promises and experience complete freedom — all for the supreme glory and honor of God!

15 Because of this, since I first heard about your strong faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and your tender love toward all his devoted ones,

16 my heart is always full and overflowing with thanks to God for you as I constantly remember you in my prayers.

In **Lesson 13**, we completed our study of Paul's grand and exhaustive statement which began at verse **3** and ended at verse **14**. Having completed his statement, the Apostle now turns to the application of the great truths contained in the statement.

It is not enough for us to be informed of the fact that God has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ. We must grow in our understanding of these blessings and as we do so, we must ensure that these blessings are lived out in our lives in practical ways. This is a necessity in the nature of the case if we are ever going to use these blessings for the glory of God. Too many of us live our entire Christian lives in ignorance of the vast spiritual wealth that God has put to our account through Jesus Christ. We are like the late newspaper publisher, William Randolph Hearst, who invested a fortune collecting art treasures from around the world. One day, Mr. Hearst found a description of some valuable items that he desired to purchase for himself. He sent his agent abroad to find them. After months of searching, the agent reported that he had finally found the treasures. They were in Mr. Hearst's warehouse. Hearst had been searching frantically for treasures he already owned! If he had only read the catalog of his treasures, he would have discovered that the ones he was seeking were already his, and he would have saved himself a great deal of time, trouble and money. Paul desired the Ephesian Christians to understand what great wealth they had in Christ, and how this wealth could be of practical benefit to them.

As we examine this letter, we must bear in mind that it is a pastoral letter and that Paul's purpose in writing it was for the practical benefit of the saints. His intention was not to compose a beautiful theological essay which would be of no practical value to those who read it. His overwhelming desire was to help Christians to live out their Christianity as richly as possible, so that their lives would glorify the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul was acutely aware that the most effective way to assist them to do so was to teach them the great doctrines of the Faith and then inform them how to apply these great doctrines in a practical manner.

He begins a new section of his letter in verse **15**, with the word "*wherefore*", thereby connecting what he had written in his grand opening statement with what is now to follow. He writes, "*Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers*" (verses **15-16**).

The word "*wherefore*" is the translation of a Greek word which means, "on this account." On account of all that is true of the Christians in Ephesus, which is stated in verses **3-14**, and in particular, because of what is said of them in verse **13**, Paul thanks God for them and prays for them.

Because of the fact that the Ephesian saints had received every spiritual blessing — including election, predestination, adoption, grace, redemption, forgiveness, wisdom, understanding, knowledge of the mystery of His will, the sealing of the Holy Spirit, and inheritance — Paul now prayed that his readers might know God personally and intimately. Verses **15–23** form one sentence in the Greek, as was the case with verses **3–14**.

Paul's gratitude of heart was called forth by the report that had reached him concerning the faith of the Ephesian Christians in the Lord Jesus Christ, and for their love expressed toward other Christians. When Paul refers to the faith of the Ephesian saints, he is not speaking merely about their initial act of believing on the Lord Jesus Christ when they were saved. He is speaking more particularly of the day by day faith that they exercised in the Lord Jesus for daily living. Paul is referring to the fact that the Ephesian Christians had put their whole weight on Jesus Christ, they had handed themselves over to Him completely, not only in their initial conversion experience, but also in their daily walk with Him.

This faith resulted in a love which was exhibited toward all the saints. The word "love" here is a translation of the Greek word **agape**, which refers to the love resident in the heart of every true Christian and which is manifested when we yield to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

Brothers and sisters, the Christian life has two dimensions: faith toward God and love toward men, and the two cannot be separated. The phrase, "*your faith in the Lord Jesus,*" emphasizes the vertical relationship of the saints; the phrase, "*and love unto all the saints,*" emphasizes their horizontal relationship. A proper relationship with God should lead to a proper relationship with other Christians. If our faith is indeed genuine, it will inevitably result in us loving other Christians. This must be so, for the magnet that draws sinners to Jesus Christ, also draws them to each other, in the same way that the spokes of a wheel, as they come closer to the hub of the wheel to which they are attached, automatically come closer to each other! One of the tests of the genuine character of our Christian profession is whether or not we sincerely love each other.

Let us consider this matter in the light of the Holy Scriptures:

JOHN 34-35 (NEW LIVING TRANSLATION)

"So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples."

ROMANS 13:8-10 (NEW LIVING TRANSLATION)

"Owe nothing to anyone — except for your obligation to love one another. If you love your neighbor, you will fulfill the requirements of God's law. For the commandments say, 'You must not commit adultery. You must not murder. You must not steal. You must not covet.' These — and other such commandments — are summed up in this one commandment: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no wrong to others, so love fulfills the requirements of God's law."

1 PETER 4:7-8 (NEW LIVING TRANSLATION)

“The end of the world is coming soon. Therefore, be earnest and disciplined in your prayers. Most important of all, continue to show deep love for each other, for love covers a multitude of sins.”

1 JOHN 3:9-18 (NEW LIVING TRANSLATION)

9 Those who have been born into God’s family do not make a practice of sinning, because God’s life is in them. So they can’t keep on sinning, because they are children of God.

10 So now we can tell who are children of God and who are children of the devil. Anyone who does not live righteously and does not love other believers does not belong to God.

11 This is the message you have heard from the beginning: We should love one another.

12 We must not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and killed his brother. And why did he kill him? Because Cain had been doing what was evil, and his brother had been doing what was righteous.

13 So don’t be surprised, dear brothers and sisters, if the world hates you.

14 If we love our brothers and sisters who are believers, it proves that we have passed from death to life. But a person who has no love is still dead.

15 Anyone who hates another brother or sister is really a murderer at heart. And you know that murderers don’t have eternal life within them.

16 We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters.

17 If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no compassion — how can God’s love be in that person?

18 Dear children, let’s not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions.

1 JOHN 4:7-12, 20-21 (NEW LIVING TRANSLATION)

7 Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God.

8 But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

9 God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him.

10 This is real love — not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.

11 Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other.

12 No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us.

20 If someone says, "I love God," but hates a fellow believer, that person is a liar; for if we don't love people we can see, how can we love God, whom we cannot see?

21 And he has given us this command: Those who love God must also love their fellow believers.

Brothers and sisters, based on the passages of Scripture that we have just considered, it is clear that our love for our fellow Christians is an authenticating sign of our Christianity. A strong evidence of a saved condition is that the person is habitually loving Christians with a love that impels him or her to deny himself or herself for the benefit of his or her fellow-Christian. John says very clearly in **1 John 3:14**, that the individual who does not love other Christians is abiding in death. This is that condition of the unsaved spoken of in **Ephesians 2:1**, as "dead in trespasses and sins." How is it with us?

As we conclude this **Lesson**, let us reflect on Paul's exhortation in **2 Corinthians 13:5**: *"Examine yourselves to see if your faith is genuine. Test yourselves. Surely you know that Jesus Christ is among you; if not, you have failed the test of genuine faith"* (**New Living Translation**).