

To the Church of Ephesus – Part Two

Sunday May 24, 2009

Adopted from Pastor John Herbert's notes – Read by Rodd Sacchi

Ephesians 1:1 **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 in his opening statement to the Ephesians draws attention to his apostleship, and more importantly that he is an apostle 'by the will of God' – he then goes on to address 'the saints who are in Ephesus, and those that are faithful in Christ Jesus'.
- Last week we had seen the context in which Paul, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, had written this letter.
- We will remember that it had been written some years after he had spent a substantial period of time in ministry in Asia, particularly focused on Ephesus.
- Acts 19:9 ***But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus¹⁰ And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jew and Greeks.***
- Acts 20:29 ***"For I know this that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 "Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. 31 "Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.***

Paul's final face to face admonition to the elders of the church in Ephesus, when he calls them to come to him at Miletus, recorded here in Acts 20, comes prior to his imprisonment in Rome – around 60-62AD. And it is of course during this imprisonment that he writes the letter to the Ephesians.

2). We also saw last week that we should see this letter against the background of not only the thorough teaching of Paul but also the ministry of Priscilla and Aquila, Appolos, and primarily Timothy – and the scriptural record we have of the letters of 1 and 2 Peter and The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which were also sent to the saints of this region.

3). And it is in John's record of the Revelation of Jesus Christ that we find Ephesus, the first of the 7 churches 'which are in Asia' coming under judgment following the resurrection/rapture of the Church.

Revelations 2:1 ***"To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, 'These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: 2 "I know your works,***

- Within the dispensational history of the Church, represented through the 7 churches and in relation to the judgment of all Christians, also represented through the 7 churches we see for both a beginning point of unfaithfulness, associated with the church of Ephesus: Revelation 2:4 ***"Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.***
- This beginning point of unfaithfulness presented through the church of Ephesus leads to a conclusion in the 7th of the 7 churches, Laodicea, where we witness a complete disregard for the promised inheritance, the first love, in favor of a present self-gratification through the things of this world – Revelation 3:16 ***"So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. 17 "Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing' --and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—***
- In this we could see, in microcosm, a parallel with any group of Kingdom believers at any time in the dispensation – with the potential danger for them individually of leaving their first love, coming eventually to a terminal point of exhibiting a complete disregard for their inheritance. This would be poignant for us to note.
- And as we saw last week, despite the teaching, despite the understanding, despite the encouragements and the warnings a most sad commentary is given on those in Asia : 2Timothy 1:15 ***This you know, that all those in Asia have turned away from me, among whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes.***

4). This somewhat shocking statement in 2 Timothy comes of course after Paul had written his letter to the Ephesians and would be completely in line with what the Holy Spirit had revealed to Paul about the savage wolves who would come in 'not sparing the flock', and those that would come from within the church in Ephesus who would speak 'perverse things' in order to draw away the disciples after themselves.

5). So then, with God knowing what was going to take place with regards to the believers in Asia, characterized in Ephesus where they would leave their first love, what would be the motivation behind the Holy Spirit's inspiration of the letter to the Ephesians?

- Well clearly on one level it would be for the purpose of trying to prevent those who turned away from doing so.
- But then knowing that the turning away was inevitable we could see this letter as an encouragement and an instruction for those, small though their numbers may have been, who would remain faithful and would resist in the midst of hostility the pressure to turn away.

- In this sense we could see it directed at those who would be overcomers: Revelation 2:7 **"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God."**
- Those who would overcome 'leaving their first love'.
- There is for every Christian striving for the prize a constant pressure from the world, the flesh and the devil to change our focus – to leave our first love – the love of His appearing, 2Timothy 4:8 **Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.**
- Here is the substance of our on-going struggle – whether it be through excessive business, fear of the economic situation or issues related to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes or the pride of life – the enemy of our soul is determined to distract us sufficiently that we would begin to drift, thereby leaving our first love with a view to our complete shipwreck as we would move towards a total disregard for our inheritance.
- Contained in the letter to the Ephesians then would be the Divinely inspired means, the Divine admonishment, the Divine command – by which, if followed, we will never drift from our mooring.

6). What we find in the opening verses of letter to the Ephesians is nothing that we don't already know – the same of course would be said for its original recipients – but we must see this repetition after the fashion in which Peter wrote to those in Asia - 2Peter 1:10 **Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; 11 for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. 12 For this reason I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth.**

- According to the Holy Spirit then, through the pen of Peter, even though we may know and be established in the present truth – we still need to be constantly reminded of it – for in that truth is the way to find the entrance that will be abundantly supplied into the everlasting Kingdom. Repetition is always good.

7). Ephesians 1:3 **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 has made us accepted in the Beloved.**

- After the introductory statements and greeting the letter then moves to the spiritual blessings that we have in the heavenly places, in Christ – blessings that would have to do with a future salvation and the reward of the inheritance 1Peter 1:4 ***to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,***
- And it is ‘the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ’ who has blessed us with these blessings – they come to us by the goodness, the grace and the mercy of God. In this He may choose to give these blessings to whomever He wishes, and He has chosen to give them to those who would be faithfully obedient, those who would be overcomers.
- And in v4 we see that these blessings are given to us - *4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world* – after the same fashion, in the same way, as we were chosen by God, in Christ, before the foundation of the world – before a Man had ever been created, so God had also prepared these blessings for us.
- The thought then continues in *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 has made us accepted in the Beloved.*
- From before the foundation of the world we were chosen in Christ and predestined to adoption as firstborn sons to exercise the rights of primogeniture with Him – and this was done ‘according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace’, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved.
- Accepted = Greek – ‘charitoo’ = to grace, i.e. indue with special honor; make accepted, be highly favored.
- So what are we seeing here in all these references to what God has done for us in Christ from before the foundation of the world?
- Simply, and astoundingly, that it has always been God’s plan and purpose that individuals from the human race, which He created for this very reason, would have positions as firstborn sons with His only begotten Son.
- This is God’s purpose – Isaiah 46:10 ***Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things that are not yet done, Saying, 'My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure,'***
- What God has purposed will come to pass, He will do all His pleasure –individuals from the human race will be adopted as firstborn sons and will exercise the rights of primogeniture with the only begotten Son – nothing can stop this from happening. The only question that remains is whether you and I will qualify to participate in it or not. This is how we should understand being ‘predestined’.

8). To continue - Ephesians 1:7 ***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.***

- The letter continues with a reminder concerning the redemption we have through 'His blood' and how He has made known to us 'the mystery of His will', which he did, 'according to His good pleasure which he purposed in Himself'.
- The mystery of His will is then made clear in v10 - *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.*
- And here we see the gathering together in one of 'all things in Christ' with regards to both realms of the Kingdom – 'which are in heaven and which are on earth'.
- And these statements would specifically have to do with rulership – Colosians 1:16 ***For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. 17 And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.***
- We are looking at rulership over the earth from the heavens with regards to the impending change that will occur when Christ and His co-heirs take the Kingdom – Christ and His co-heirs ruling from the heavens following the overthrow of Satan and his fallen angels and Christ and Israel ruling on the earth following the overthrow of Gentile world power. All rulership then with regards to the earth gathered together in Christ.
- And this establishment of a new order of rulers takes place within a specific period of time – 'the dispensation of the fullness of the times' – in other words the 7th Day, the Millennial Kingdom.
- And once again we see the emphasis that all this is because of Christ, is for Christ and is in Christ – and has been God's purpose from unspecified ages past.

9). Also within this same timeframe, 'the dispensation of the fullness of the times' we will obtain an inheritance that is in Christ - Eph 1:11 *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.*

- Again here we see that we have been ‘predestined’ to obtain this inheritance, and again we would understand predestined as used here in the same way as we saw it in v5. The reward of the inheritance will be given to redeemed Man, that is unalterable, but whether we will be numbered amongst those who receive the inheritance is subject to alteration.
- We see those who have exercised faith in the inheritance, the adoption, all that is promised in Christ because of having heard ‘the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation’ – having as a result been ‘sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise’
- John 16:13 *"However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.*
- It is the work of the Holy Spirit that is the guarantee of our inheritance, turning promise into absolute certainty – 2 Corinthians 1:20 ***For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us. 21 Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, 22 who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.***
- And this guarantee we have as we wait patiently for the day when ‘the purchased possession’ – the earth, is redeemed.
- The redemption of the earth, our inheritance, takes place in a time that we know as the Tribulation, the final 7 years of Daniel’s 70th week - Revelation 5:1 ***And I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals. 2 Then I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?" 3 And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look at it. 4 So I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll, or to look at it. 5 But one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals."***
- The redemption of the inheritance with regards to the earth, about to be set in motion here in Revelation Chapter 5, is the antitype to the redemption of the inheritance that we see in the Book of Ruth in respect to Ruth and Boaz and that which had been lost.
- The redemption of the inheritance is in Christ, the promises are in Christ and the guarantee of their veracity is witnessed by the Holy Spirit - Ro 4:13 *For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.* Galatians 3:29 ***And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.***

10). These first 14 verses of Ephesians Chapter 1 encapsulate, in summary form,

the 'gospel' entrusted to Paul - Romans 16:25 **Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began.**

- And should be seen within the context of the ministry he had amongst the Ephesians detailed for us in the meeting he had with the elders of the church of Ephesus at Miletus - Acts 20:20 **"how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, 1"testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.....25 "And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more. 26"Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. 27"For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.**
- So why does the Holy Spirit see fit to set out again that which those in Ephesus already knew? And why would He see fit to draw our attention to these very same things?
- Well we would begin to see the answer in what Paul says next to the elders in - Acts 20:28 **"Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.**
- And what He writes to Timothy within the context of Ephesus – 2Timothy1:13 **Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. 14 That good thing which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us.**
- 'Take heed', 'hold fast' – all with regards to the gospel of the glories of Christ. So why is there a need to take heed and hold fast? Because if we don't we are in grave danger of leaving our first love. And we may only conclude that the majority of those in Ephesus and in Asia failed to put into practice the Holy Spirit's charge; resulting in all having 'turned away' and the consequent judgment seen in Revelation.

11). This direction given by the Holy Spirit and the attendant warning we also find within the context of the 5 warnings of the Book of Hebrews – the first warning dealing with our attitude to the same subject matter. In order to set this warning in its proper context we are going to read the whole of Hebrews Chapter 1 and go straight into the warning at the beginning of Hebrews Chapter 2 –

Hebrews 1:1

God who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, 2 has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; 3 who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power,

when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, 4 having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. 5 For to which of the angels did He ever say: "You are My Son, Today I have begotten You"? And again: "I will be to Him a Father, And He shall be to Me a Son"? 6 But when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says: "Let all the angels of God worship Him." 7 And of the angels He says: "Who makes His angels spirits And His ministers a flame of fire." 8 But to the Son He says: "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your Kingdom. 9 You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You With the oil of gladness more than Your companions." 10 And: "You, LORD, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, And the heavens are the work of Your hands. 11 They will perish, but You remain; And they will all grow old like a garment; 12 Like a cloak You will fold them up, And they will be changed. But You are the same, And Your years will not fail." 13 But to which of the angels has He ever said: "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool"? 14 Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation? 2:1 Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. 2 For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, 3 how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, 4 God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?

- 'We must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard' – The things detailed in Chapter 1 – things concerning the King and his coming Kingdom, things concerning angels, things concerning God's plans and purposes from ages past at first spoken of by the prophets and in these last days spoken of by the Son – that very thing that we saw in the first 14 verses of Ephesians. Because if we don't we will drift away, we will leave our first love, causing us to neglect, to disregard the 'so great a salvation' – the salvation of our soul – which through the use of the phrase itself denotes the greatest thing that God could devise for redeemed Man – Which, if we do so, will result in us receiving a 'just reward' – receiving exactly what we deserve at the Judgment Seat for our unfaithfulness.
- This is why the Holy Spirit has Paul begin his letter to the Ephesians in the way he does. His focus is on Christ, just as ours should be - Hebrews 2:6 ***But one testified in a certain place, saying: "What is man that You are mindful of him, Or the son of man that You take care of him? 7 You have made him a little lower than the angels; You have crowned him with glory and honor, And set him over the works of Your hands. 8 You have put all things in subjection under his feet." For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing that is not put under him. But now we do not yet see all things put under him. 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, might taste death for everyone.***

- Hebrews 12:2 **looking** (from the distractions of this world) **unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.**
- At the risk of being repetitive if we don't keep God's purpose with respect to the 7th Day, witnessed in Christ, ever before us there is every likelihood that we will drift, and if we drift without a change of direction we will eventually and inevitably come to a point where we will no longer have regard for our high calling and our inheritance. And at that point we will be the embodiment of the Laodicean church
- God has not provided the warnings and repeated the details of His purpose just to fill the pages of the Book, but for us to realize that this is an ever present danger for us unless we take note of the admonishment of scripture.
- If we ever come to a point where we feel we know enough about the Kingdom that we don't need to hear it again but want something else instead, or are no longer in awe of what God has made possible then our mooring is already loose. And we have probably started to drift.

12). It is at the point in the letter to the Ephesians where, having laid out again in summary form that which had already been taught over years of ministry, that the Holy Spirit directs Paul to pray for the saints there – a prayer that has as its focus the desire that all in Ephesus and implicitly all those who are seeking the Kingdom would be settled and steadfast in a continuing manner with regards to the promises of God with respect to the age to come - Ephesians 1:15 **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.**

- This is not just a prayer for understanding [which it certainly can be for those who know nothing and those who want to know more] but also a prayer for those who know the truth and are established in it that we may ever be filled with the awesome wonder of God's promises, that we would never grow tired of them so as to set every fiber of our being towards the acquisition of them as we continue in patient endurance.