

Clear About the Gospel Bible Study
Ephesians 1.1-14
BYF 9-13-26 - Dr. Clay Brown, MDPC Adult Discipleship Pastor

TEACHING OUTLINE

1. Start with announcements and prayer. (5 minutes)

2. Read aloud Ephesians 1.1-14. (5 minutes)

3. Discuss the introduction to Ephesians in Ephesians 1.1-2. (10 minutes)

- Paul identified as author of letter and apostle of Christ; much early church witness to Pauline authority and influence
- Some scholarly discussion over authorship, location, and identification of recipients
 - Disagreements with Paul's authorship often related to letter's lack of personal references to Paul's time in Ephesus, where he spent more than 2 years (Acts 19-20)
 - Earliest manuscripts do not say "in Ephesus"; many say added later
 - Reasonable response: circular letter read in several churches, with Ephesus one of locales
 - Much in common with Colossians, similar to relationship between Romans and Galatians
- Recipients are "holy people" (NLT, NIV) or "saints" (ESV)
 - Common designation of Christians by Paul
 - Without overtones of "super Christians" often assumed by use of "saints" in our day
- Blessings of "grace and peace" given to disciples by Father and Son

4. Discuss Paul's comments on God choosing and adopting us in Christ in Ephesians 1.3-8. (15 minutes)

- Eph 1.3-14 one long sentence in Greek with three main participles: "blessed" (ESV, NIV, NLT); "predestined" (ESV, NIV) or "decided in advance" (NLT); "made known to us" (ESV, NIV) or "revealed" (NLT)
- Heavenly realms or places? Most likely a spiritual reality rather than a physical location
- Blessing comes from being united with Christ and chosen in him "even before he made the world" (NLT v. 4)
- Adoption (see vv. 5-8) especially strong concept in Greco-Roman world: cannot be undone once it is done; no returns or changes on adoptions; speaks to steadfastness of God through Christ
- Election key component of passage: doctrine much debated in Christian communities
- Reformed tradition puts great emphasis on election as God's initiative and choosing of humans for salvation and service (re: ECO *Essential Tenets*, III.B., "Election for Salvation and Service")
- Klyne Snodgrass: "Election means that God chooses people, and this teaching cannot be turned around to the thought that people choose God. Election means that the existence of a people of God can be explained only on the basis of God's character, plan, and action, not on some quality of the people who are chosen." (*Ephesians: NIV Application Commentary*, 48-49)

5. Discuss Paul's comments on God choosing both Jews and Gentiles and marking them with his Spirit in Ephesians 1.9-14. (10 minutes)

- In Eph 1.9-11, Paul elaborates on God's "mysterious will" (NLT) being revealed in Christ and through Christ, as God brings the world together under Christ's authority; our lives "work out" (NIV, NLT) in Christ
- Gospel first received by Jews, but now available and open for Gentiles, bringing together those formerly separated by race, religion, etc., and linking them in Christ
- Linkage of Jews and Gentiles also part of God's election of them in Jesus Christ, noting that ordinarily we might not choose to be linked with those of different races, histories, and stories
- The Holy Spirit connects you not just with others, but with God the Father and God the Son for a spiritual inheritance (v. 13 ESV, NIV, NLT)
- The guarantee of God's promise? The presence and power of the Holy Spirit for all who believe (v. 14), connecting with Jesus's comments about the Holy Spirit in John 14-16

6. Close with prayer.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

- As you read aloud Ephesians 1.1-14, what is the first thing that jumps out at you about it? Why?
- "Holy people" or "saints" are the recipients of the letter from Paul in Ephesians 1.1. What does it mean to be a truly holy person? How is holiness developed in the followers of Jesus Christ?
- Describe the holiest person you personally know. What characteristics does this person show in their life? What makes this person that way?
- Talk about the comment from Klyne Snodgrass in the *NIV Application Commentary* on Ephesians on election in Ephesians 1.3-8: "Election means that God chooses people, and this teaching cannot be turned around to the thought that people choose God. Election means that the existence of a people of God can be explained only on the basis of God's character, plan, and action, not on some quality of the people who are chosen." (48-49). Discuss your appreciation of the quotation or your concerns with it. Why is the theological doctrine of election such a debated point in Christian communities?
- How has being adopted by God at His choosing, as noted in Ephesians 1.5-8, changed your life? How is it changing your life even today? What about your life is forever different?
- Christians use the term "mystery" to describe doctrines or practices hard to fully understand, like the Trinity. But what mystery is being revealed, according to Ephesians 1.9-11? How is it being revealed?
- Paul says that God's guarantee to us is the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1.13-14). As you look back on your life, how do you see God's promises being upheld and honored in you? What promises are yet to be fulfilled?