

Election in Christ (Eph 1:1-6)

We'll begin a new series which is the letter of Ephesians. Today we'll look at v.1 to v.6 of the first chapter. In the original letter written in Greek, from v.3 to v.14 is one sentence. So I was a little hesitant to cut it in the middle. But in order to understand and enjoy reading the rich content, I cut it once after v. 6. Today we will look at the first six verses.

1. From an apostle of Christ to church

1

¹ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus:

Paul introduces himself as "an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God." He was originally a very fervent Jew. He used to persecute followers of Jesus. But, the great change had taken place. It became very clear to him that he was made an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God in his life. At first he was not easily accepted by other disciples and apostles (Acts 9:26). But before long, they also started to have assurance about his calling and began to receive him.

And here, we can see he was in the situation where he had to show it again by writing "I am an apostle of Christ Jesus." He was in the situation where people wonder, "We received a letter from Paul. But who is he really? Why should we respect his word so much?"

Where was Paul when he wrote this letter? He was chained in prison (Eph 6:20). So people might had wondered, "Why should we listen to a guy who is chained in prison?" "Actually he was originally a persecutor of Christ, right?" "Isn't he chained in prison because he is going against God's will?"

There were some who criticize Paul while he was in prison (cf. Phi 1:14-17). Here, as he wrote this letter, once again he reminded the church that he was "an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God." While he was chained in prison, Paul wrote this letter, thinking of the church.

2

² Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

He himself had this grace and peace. While he was chained, misunderstood, and criticized because of his past and now, he surely had this grace and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. He declares in the other letter, "Indeed, I used to be a persecutor of Jesus, but now by the grace of Lord Jesus, I became who I am now. (1 Cor 15:9-10)" And he hopes his reader will also receive this grace and peace from above.

Now he talks about blessings.

2. Blessing in Christ

3

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

"God" and "Father" comes side by side as the center of the sentence. This can be interpreted as "The God of our Lord Jesus Christ, indeed, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." We can see the same concept in v.17, "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory."

Paul could have just said "God", but he use the term "Father," "God," "Lord Jesus Christ." He is writing to a church, not to the people who don't know Jesus, so he could have just said "God." But he clearly states those words, "God", "Father", "Lord", "Christ."

Why? That was because even in church there were people who have several different ideas about God and about Jesus. There were some people who don't care about the Lordship of Jesus.

There may have been some Jewish Christians who still had difficulty in regarding Jesus as God. And this letter is not just written for Jews, but also for gentiles. There may have been some gentile Christians who thought any god will do, if they just hear the word "God".

At the beginning of this letter, Paul called his God "God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." He made it clear whom he was talking about. And he says this God is our God, not just Jewish God, not the goddess Artemis, not unknown gods. But He is our God. Both Jewish Christians and gentile Christians

call this God “our God.” He is the one Jesus called “Father” and had fellowship with as his father. And this God made Jesus Christ and Lord (Acts 2:36). He is not just someone’s lord, but he is our Lord. Both Jewish Christians and gentile Christians call Jesus “our Lord,” “our Christ.” That is who we are the church. Paul reminds us of that.

And he continues “[God] has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.” We have been blessed in Christ.

Through Christ, we are made those who receive God’s blessing. By being united with Christ, the blessing becomes ours. Indeed, being united with Christ, that itself is a blessing. Think about this. “The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. (Heb 1:3)” Now you are connected with him! After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God for intercession. (Heb 1:3; Rom 8:34) Now it’s all for you! In church, in the body of Christ, through the fellowship with one another, we will practically experience that blessing and know that it is true. If we come out of Christ, there is no other way for us to receive blessing.

We have been blessed in Christ. The blessing given in Christ: That is every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms. It is not just God’s partial work to bless us. It is the work of God the Father, Son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit to bless us. The blessing God bless us is not stingy, small blessing. God of the Trinity all together bless us, without sparing, with every blessing in the heavenly realms.

That is spiritual blessing. In order to understand the blessing and receive it, we need the help from the Holy Spirit. If our spiritual eyes are closed, we cannot understand what kind of blessing we have received. We cannot understand it no matter how much blessing we have. And we cannot measure it materially.

That is blessing. That is not a prize, nor a reward, nor a return. “As I have done this, I should be blessed more.” “To be blessed, I must achieve this.” “In exchange for the blessing, I will offer this.” It doesn’t work that way.

When we are blessed, we might feel proud. We might think as if it was because we were worthy. We might start thinking we are better, greater than others. “It is because I have done this much. I am worthy to receive this because I am so and so.” God’s blessing for us doesn’t work that way. It is in Christ. It is

not by our achievement, nor productivity. We receive blessing in Christ. We are blessed because we are united with Christ.

3. The election in Christ

4-6

⁴ For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵ he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

God created this world from nothing. We were also created as works of his hands. God created human in His own image. God blessed human and said, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground” (Gen 1:27-28).

God lets us join his work for creation as his partners. Through us, God will advance and carry on His plan of creation. We are called for God’s great work and made agents to carry out His plan. God chose us, humans and blessed us before the creation of the world so that we will be the ones who bring blessing, spread it all over the earth and fill this world with God’s blessing (cf. Gen 12:3; Gal 3:29).

And in every period, every generation, God chose a particular person, called and used the person and advanced the plan of God’s blessing. Noah was chosen. Abraham was called. Israel was chosen. Moses was called. David was chosen. Prophets were used. Mary was chosen. Paul was used. And God has chosen us, called us and will use us in this period in this generation.

It is God’s choice. Not our choice. Not our convenience. It is God who chose us. Why were they chosen? Why were we chosen? Only God knows why. The reason rests in the sovereignty of God. This is not something we can argue about. Even if we know the reason why, it doesn’t make any difference. What is important for us is how we respond to God’s calling, and how we live as a chosen person, His redeemed.

God looks at us as person, not as tools. He will not just use us and abandon us when we are no longer useful.

God knows each one of our personality and character very well because he created us. And he called us as ones who are precious in His eyes. It is not how we look at us. God says, "You are precious and honored in my sight. I love you. For you, I'm well pleased." This relationship will remain forever.

There is a purpose for election. It is not that God happened to see us and called us without any particular purpose. God doesn't choose at random. God designed each one of us uniquely. There was already a purpose when God created us. And when he calls us there is a purpose. When he chooses us, he has a clear intention.

So God chose us for what purpose? V.4 says, to make us "holy and blameless in his sight." God didn't choose us because we are holy, nor because we are mature, nor because we are great nor because we can do certain things very well, nor because we have many facebook friends. No.

God chose us who are full of shortcomings, flaws, weaknesses and sins. Why? That is because we can see all the more clearly how great, powerful and real God's love, healing, recovery, grace and blessings are for us. God's works will be very clear to us, and also to those who see God's works in and through our lives (2 Cor 4:7).

We are holy in His eyes for we are in Christ. The point is how God sees us, and who we are in His eyes.

When we try to live according to God's will, sometimes people in the society see us strange. Sometimes the standard of the society and the standard of God do not match."In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim 3:12). God is not making us someone popular in the society, but He will make us holy for him. He separates us, set aside us for him.

Holy in his eyes. It is not how people see us. We may be able to deceive others. We can make ourselves look fine before people. But what God prepared for us is far more than that. He will make us holy before Him. He will make us stand as holy before Him, who is completely righteous and blameless. He will bring us into such maturity. We cannot reach such holiness by abstaining from something, or by ascetic training like being hit by water fall, being burned by fire, or walking on nails. It is only by the work of God, the Holy Spirit.

Phi1:6

⁶ being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

God will carry it on to completion. *He* will do it. He is not asking us to reach His holiness by our own effort. God will make us holy (1 Thess 5:23-24). God will do it. We don't have to think of reasons why it cannot be done. We don't have to prepare excuses for why it cannot be completed, because it is God who chose us. Because he says he will do it. And it's his will (1 Thess 4:3).

Father God totally loves His Son Jesus with His perfect love. In Christ, we are also totally loved by God with this same love. Jesus also said, "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you" (John15:9).

We are chosen and loved by God who can and will make us holy and blameless. Who are we then? We are received as children of God. How can we know it? We know it through the baptism of the Holy Spirit, communion with the Spirit, adoration of the Spirit (Rom 8:15). The assurance is that we are in Christ.

I've read a story like this long time ago. In the battlefield, soldiers were fighting with guns. One young man was fatally injured. He realized his life would come to an end soon, so he wrote to his parents. And he asked his closest friend, "Thank you for helping me until today. When the war ends and you go back to the country, please pass this letter to my parents." He told him his address and gave him the letter and a pendant, which was a gift from his parents and which he always carried around his neck. A little later, he breathed his last.

Before long, the war ended, and that man returned from the battlefield. But as he had no family or relatives, he didn't know where to go. So, first he decided to go to his friend's parents' to deliver the letter and the pendant.

He reached the house at the address, stood up at the door, and rang the bell. After a while, a couple who were about the same age as his own parents if they lived came out. He explained to them what had happened, and gave them the letter and the pendant. "Oh, surely this is the pendant we have given to our son." "Surely this is my son's hand-writing." They had been reading the letter for a while.

"What are you doing from now?" They asked.

"I have no particular plan and don't know where to go. I've just come back from the battlefield, and haven't thought about what to do yet."

"Would you like to stay with us? We would love you to stay with us."

“Well, that would be very nice, for I didn’t know where to go. I would appreciate if I can stay with you for a few days.”

“No, what I mean is, please live together with us.”

“Oh, we have just met now. How can you be so kind to me?”

The old couple looked at each other, and they said “Our son wrote in his letter, ‘Please receive my friend who would bring this letter as if he were I.’”

We are chosen in Christ, received as a child of God in Christ and blessed in Christ.

4. Praising the glory of His grace

We are chosen in Christ, and blessed in Christ so that this grace of God will be praised in Christ (v.6). We are not chosen or blessed so that we can boast or brag about ourselves. But we are chosen and blessed so that the wonders and greatness of God’s grace will be shown clearly and concretely. For this reason, God chooses us, calls us, blesses us, shows his glory through our lives.

We ourselves also praise this grace of God. No matter how weak and foolish we ourselves may be, no matter how hard and full of problems our circumstances may be, no matter how hopeless we may feel in persecutions and struggles of faith, our God still reminds us how reliable, great and mighty He is. As we praise Him, we will come to understand how real God is, and how He is so close to us. As we praise Him, our faith will be deepened, strengthened, renewed, and made living and active.

And as others observe us praising Him and growing in understanding and faith, they will come to understand how great God is. As we praise the glory of his grace, faith once weakened will be strengthened, faith once asleep will be awoken, and other Christians who once lost hope will be encouraged. As we praise His glorious grace, people who didn’t know that grace will come to see the glorious grace and start praising that glorious grace. "Experiencing the Life, Changing lives."

To praise doesn’t just mean to sing. In our small fellowship, in our daily life, we can testify for God’s work. We can share our experiences of how God encouraged us over coffee. They are also the acts of praising God’s grace. Actually there is no power in just empty singing without those testimonies and sharing of lives.

We are not always full of praise, thanks-giving, and living faith. Sometimes we are down. There are times we want to give it up. You may feel even Jesus cannot do anything in your situation. But in a moment like this, when we see a person who is praising God's grace with all his strength, we will be reminded, "Oh, yes, I also trust in the same God. Yes, I am also loved by the same God. I also receive the same grace from the same God." Then our eyes which were downcast will look up to Jesus. That is the beauty of the fellowship in church.

We are blessed in Christ. Through Christ, we are made ones who receive God's blessings. When we are united with Christ, the blessings will be ours. In the body of Christ, church, through the fellowship with one another, we will actually experience the blessing and know how true that blessing is. And his glorious grace will be praised.

Today was the first study of the letter to Ephesians. We learned about "Election in Christ." One thing we studied about was "Blessing in Christ." God blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. Another thing was "Election in Christ". God chose us. It doesn't matter how we see ourselves. God will make us holy and blameless before Him in Christ. And we also looked at "Praising his glorious grace." We will praise His glorious grace. God's grace that is at work in us will be testified and his glory will be praised.

For LifeNet groups and personal reflection

- 1) If you didn't know Jesus, how would your life be like now? List up the things in you or in your life that have been changed by God's grace.
- 2) To be united with Christ, that itself is a blessing. Why? How?
- 3) In Christ, we are added into the loving relationship with the Triune God, and are blessed with every spiritual blessing. Why can't we recognize the fact sometimes? When can we experience/recognize it? How can we share it?
- 4) Give the reasons why you can praise God. How would you practice to praise him this week?

