

THE APOSTLE'S DOXOLOGY

Ephesians 1:3-6

Intro: For those of you who are visiting with us today, let me say that in our Sunday morning services we are just starting the study of the Apostle Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus, which some students of the NT believe may have been intended as a letter to be circulated among other churches in the same area as Ephesus. This is because in some of the Greek MSS of this epistle the words "at Ephesus" are missing. If you have marginal notes in your Bible, it probably gives you this information. But this detail does not change the meaning of the epistle at all. It was written by Paul under the direction of the Holy Spirit. In fact, this might help us to understand that the Lord intended for this letter, like all of the other books of the Bible to be for all believers in all generations. This means that the Lord meant this epistle to be for our edification just as it was meant for churches in the first century. So when you are reading this epistle, and come to the words "at Ephesus" (because they are probably there in most of our Bible, just think "at Portland, or at wherever the Lord's people are gathered together.

This reminds me that I want to remind you to be reading this epistle each week, and several times during the week if possible. We don't read our Bibles enough. I can't remember that I have ever re-read any book of the Bible that I haven't noticed something that I had not noticed before. Yesterday as I was reading Ephesians, I noticed in particular how many times Paul spoke of the will of God. We need to pray briefly before we read that the Lord will help us understand what He wants us to note in particular. Just a brief prayer as we start can help to make our reading both enjoyable and profitable.

Now let me ask you, How many of you remember the three main points in the outline of Ephesians that I gave to you? Let me give them to you again so we will all be brought up-to-date in our study.

In the first three chapters we have THE WEALTH OF A CHRISTIAN. In chapters 4, 5, and 6 down through 6:9 we have THE WALK OF A CHRISTIAN. The word "walk" in the Bible (and it is used in both the OT and the NT) means *the way we live*. In reading this epistle we come to another word which means the same as "walk," and that is the word "conversation." You will see it in Ephesians 2:3 and in 4:22. To us today the word means our talk, but it used to mean *one's manner of living* or *conduct*. Now, of course, a big part of the way we live is made up of how we talk, so our walk includes our talk. But we need to notice as we read through Ephesians that the Apostle Paul was saying that if you claim that Jesus Christ is your Savior, it is going to be seen in the way you live, the way you talk, and even the way you think. This is emphasized in all of Scripture. If Jesus Christ is our Savior, it is going to be seen in every aspect of our lives.

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But now I have given you two of the three points in the general outline of Ephesians – the wealth of the Christian, and the walk of the Christian. When you come to chapter 6, verse 10, and going down especially through verse 20, you are going to learn about THE WARFARE OF A CHRISTIAN.

So when you think of Ephesians, think about THE WEALTH, THE WALK, AND THE WARFARE OF A CHRISTIAN. This outline is not original with me. Many who have written on this epistle have pointed out these distinctive divisions.

I asked Kelly Spafford to read the first fourteen verses of chapter 1 because in these verses we have Paul's statement of the wealth of a Christian. Now he was not talking about what is being taught today as Prosperity Theology. Christian radio and Christian TV can be an excellent means of ministry, but, unfortunately, it can also be a special means of spreading error. And one of those errors is Prosperity Theology. I am sure that most of you have heard about it although you may not have heard it called what it is. I am not going to give it special time this morning, but just enough to say that Prosperity Theology is error. It is not what the Bible teaches about the Christian life, that if you are a Christian, you need to know that the Lord wants you to have money, and this is how you can measure the blessing of God in your life. What it does is cause people to be very disappointed and it produces people who are guilty of one of the worst of all sins, the sins of covetousness.

God meets our needs in a most wonderful way, but there are countless numbers of the Lord's people today, genuine Christians, people who really love the Lord and His Word, who don't know where their next meal is coming from. Prosperity Theology makes them feel that there is some-thing wrong with them.

Let me point out to you from these opening verses of Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus point out that we are as Christians wealthy, very wealthy. But not necessarily financially wealthy. *What Paul teaches us here in Ephesians 1 is that we are spiritually wealthy. And he has expressed it beautifully in verse 3. But we had a taste of it last Sunday in verses 1 and 2.*

We saw in verse 1 that this letter was written by a former Jewish Pharisee, a promising young rabbi who would have become a very wealthy man if he had remained a Pharisee. And he was very happy doing what he had been doing, hunting out Christians, seeing many of them die for their faith, while others were put in prison for just one reason. They had turned to Jesus Christ for the salvation of their souls, which included the forgive-ness of their sins, and the certainty that some day they would be in heaven. The first time we see Paul in Scripture, or Saul of Tarsus as he was originally known, was when he was watching the coats of the men who were throwing stones at Stephen, and Saul stood there approving of what was being done as he watched Stephen die.

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But why did Saul of Tarsus change? He didn't change himself. The Lord Jesus Christ spoke to him from heaven as he was on his way to Damascus to arrest more Christians. The Lord Jesus changed him. And from that point on he began to preach the Gospel which formerly he had tried to destroy.

Why was Saul of Tarsus, who became the Apostle Paul "by the will of God" as we learned in verse 1 last week – why was he saved in such a spectacular way? The Lord Jesus had gone back to heaven, but He, the Lord Jesus, spoke from heaven, stopped him from doing what he intended to do, and completely transformed his life.

Well, we are going to find out here in chapter 1 why the Lord intervened in Paul's life, but for now let me tell you a theory I have. This is not in the Bible, but I believe that Saul was so feared, and was looked upon by the early church as enemy #1, that I doubt if anyone was praying for his salvation. Do you know of a single instance in the book of Acts or in any of the epistles, where anyone came to Paul after he was saved and told him that he had been praying that Saul would come under the convicting work of the Holy Spirit and be saved? Did Paul ever mention a single person that he knew who had been praying that he would be saved? I don't know of anybody who was praying that way. We can't say that nobody was praying for him, but if there was someone, nothing is said about it in the Bible. There is a special meaning to Paul's words, "by the will of God," when he tells us how he became "an apostle of Jesus Christ."

Now let me mention another fact about Paul's circumstances when he wrote this letter that adds to the wonder of this letter. In chapter 3, verse 1, and in chapter 4, verse 1, note how Paul identified himself as he wrote this epistle. It is a well established fact that he was a prisoner of Rome in Rome. It was at this same time that Paul wrote Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. So his situation was anything but what he desired, or what any of us would have desired. And yet, as he began writing from his confinement in Rome, his message began with a word of praise.

I. PAUL'S DOXOLOGY (Eph. 1:3).

"Blessed"! It is a word of worship, a word of adoration. It is a word of love. It is a word expressing the fear of God in Paul's heart, his deep reverence for God. It is a word in which Paul was ascribing to God all of the glory for all that Paul was and all that Paul had in Christ.

When you think of all that Paul could have written about, particularly at the beginning of this letter, doesn't it strike you as nothing short of amazing that Paul's heart was overflowing with gratitude to God *in spite of his circumstances!* He had plenty to think about in connection with his own personal problems, but he was so filled with a love for God and Christ as he

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wrote that it was almost like his circumstances were just what he wanted them to be! This is a major point for us to consider. We are inclined to want our circumstances changed before we have time to think of praising God for the invisible, intangible spiritual blessings that we have in Christ.

But there is something else here that I don't want to miss, and I don't want you to miss it. This is what I am thinking about. When you read on and see what Paul was grateful for *it all had to do with doctrine! He felt completely satisfied! He was not looking for more blessings; he was reveling in what he had, and he earnestly believed that God, in saving him, had left nothing out! What he obviously had sought in Judaism and had not found, He had in Christ. And they were not to be found among the things of earth, but in the heavenlies!*

We live in a generation of the Lord's people who are inclined to want to set aside doctrine. Even a lot of church people are not interested in being taught. They want to feel good, to feel good about themselves. They are looking for entertainment, not for edification. But I want to remind you of something that most of you already know. In Ephesians, as well as in his other epistles, Paul always lays a foundation of doctrine first, and then he goes on to practical matters. If you try to begin with the "how to" of the Christian life, you soon learn that you don't have the power to do what we are told to do in the Word. We start by learning what God has done for us, and what we have in Christ, and then we are in a position to know what we are to do with what we have. The truths that we find in Ephesians 1, especially in the first 14 verses, are truths that are ours through the Gospel, truths that we need to know, truths that give us the power that we need to live lives that are pleasing to God. *We don't need to look for more; we just need to learn what we already have and what God has already done for our salvation.*

Let me say that we never get away from our need for the great doctrines of Scripture. Pray that the truth of verse 3 will get into your heart. Note how Paul expressed his concern for the people of God beginning with verse 11 of chapter 4, and how God in His infinite wisdom has established the church where the people of God can learn the truths of Scripture and learn to walk in fellowship with the Lord.

Now speaking of doctrine, where is the starting place?

II. THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION (Eph. 1:4).

It seems like whenever the doctrine of election is brought up, it starts an argument. And so many Christians are inclined to want to jump over verse 4 and go on to other doctrines that are not so controversial. But who has made them controversial? God didn't. Neither did the Apostle Paul. Nor did any of the other writers of Scripture. In fact, I want you to notice that Paul brought up

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this doctrine to the Ephesians and all other believers who read this epistle in the context of that for which he was worshiping God, praising God, thanking Him. So this doctrine ought to bring forth from our hearts the greatest praise to God for what He has done for all of us or we would not be saved at all.

What is election? It is God choosing those whom He is going to save. When did He do it? “Before the foundation of the world.” So you weren’t there when the choice was made, and neither was I. So we had nothing to do with it. Therefore, we have to say that salvation began, was ordained, and is being carried out according to His will not ours. Further-more, when you consider what the Bible has to say about what sin has done to us, we know, or should know, that no man would ever seek God. The Bible says just that. “There is none that seeketh after God.” We were “dead in trespasses and our sins.” The reason that a lot of people don’t want to believe in election, is because they don’t really believe in depravity.

Take Paul’s salvation, for example, since we are studying his epistle. Would you say that Paul was seeking God, that he was seeking Christ when the Lord struck him down on the road to Damascus? And look at what he wrote in chapter 2 of this epistle, verses 8 through 10. Nobody deserves to be saved. We all deserve to be sent to hell. But God in His grace, for the great love that He has for those whom He has chosen, sent His Son to die for their sins. God would have been perfectly righteous if He had determined that He would save no one. He also would have been perfectly righteous if He had decided to save everyone. Obviously He did not choose to do that. But we also have to admit that being God, He is perfectly righteous if He decided to save some, but not all. **Illus:** Am I to be criticized if I buy a pair of shoes for a little girl who has not shoes if I don’t buy shoes for every child who is without shoes? Obviously not! God is God, and He is not accountable to us for anything that He does. We know that being God He cannot sin, so we must accept whatever He does as right. His ways are not only different from ours, but infinitely higher and greater.

(Read what Paul wrote about salvation in 2 Thessalonians 2:13, 14.)

Why has the Lord chosen us for salvation? I know it is because of His love for us. It is not because we are worthy. It is not even because we sought Him for our salvation. The object of election in salvation is a purpose that no human being would ever choose for himself: “that we should be holy and without blame before Him.”

Concl: I haven’t answered all of the questions that people have regarding election in salvation, but let me ask those of you who are inclined to reject it, to remember that it is clearly taught in Scripture. And if it is taught in Scripture, then our arguments are not against each other, but against God and

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the reliability of His Word. If we begin by accepting what the Scriptures teach, taking it by faith because it is God's Word, then we will see and understand and love the amazing truth of salvation. Start with the sovereignty of God and the dependability of His Word, and your doubts will soon vanish away.