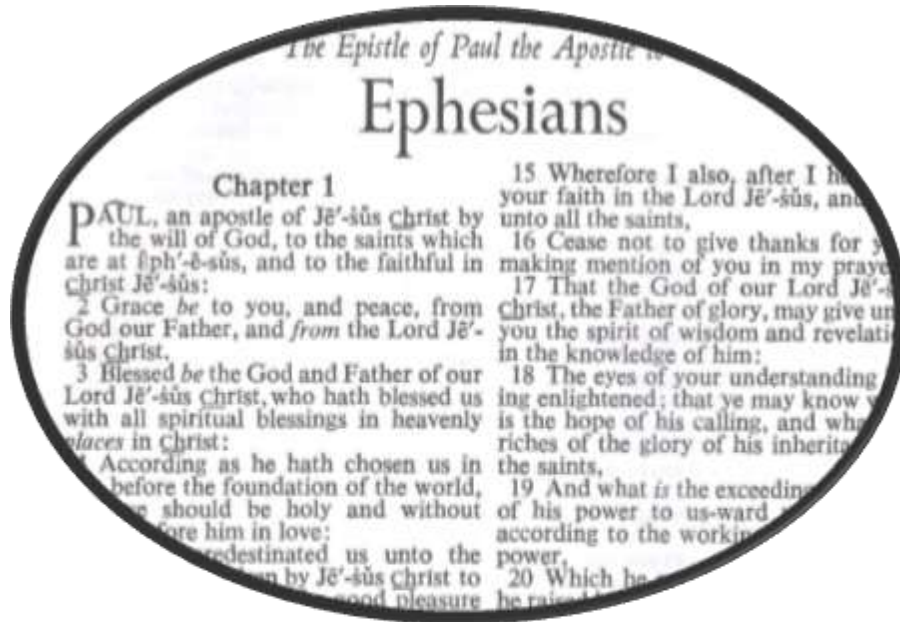


# EPHESIANS – WEEK 1

## THE PLAN AND THE PURPOSE



F. Michael Slay

*A DEEP Study*

**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

## *Ephesians 1:1–2:3 – The Plan and the Purpose*

Paul begins his letter to the Ephesians with an overview of the plan of salvation. He details how we were hopelessly lost, unable to save ourselves, and how God delivered us from this in a way that gives all glory to Himself and none to us

It's all about Him.

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1 Ephesians 1:1–6 (NKJV)

*Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God,*

*To the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus:*

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

*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, 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, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.*

Welcome to Reformed Theology 101. All the saints are saints because *he chose us in Him before the foundation of the world*. In Titus 1:2 and 2 Timothy 1:9, Paul describes this choice as being made before the beginning of time. And why is it this way?

*To the praise of his glorious grace.*

Consider the opposite. If we worked our way up to salvation, who would get the glory?

We would. Imagine what we'd do with that.

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Physicists say that the universe wouldn't work if any of the key parameters (such as the strength of gravity) were just a bit different. Here's how Stephen Hawking explains it in *A Brief History of Time*.

*The laws of Science, as we know them at present, contain many fundamental numbers, like the size of the electric charge of the electron and the ratio of the masses of the proton and the electron. ... The remarkable fact is that the values of these numbers seem to have been very finely adjusted to make possible the development of life. ... One can take this either as evidence of a divine purpose in Creation and the choice of the laws of science or as support for the strong anthropic principle.*

In the same way, the universe wouldn't work if the plan of salvation were even slightly different. The gospel also seems to be *very finely adjusted* for life – eternal life. Only salvation by grace alone glorifies God. Any other method would glorify us, and that would ruin the whole thing.

Praise God for the way He works – not because we make out great in the end, but because the ending is great.

He alone is worthy of praise.

2 Ephesians 1:7–10 (NKJV)

*In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, 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.*

To understand this, we need to resolve one question. What is *the mystery of His will* that He made known to us? That needs some Greek details.

First, the word that's translated as "will" is THA-lay-ma. This does not mean "will" in the sense of God's immutable willing of what comes to pass. (That word in Greek is boo-LAY.) THA-lay-ma, in this context, means, "that which pleases God."

Second, the word that's translated as "mystery" is "moo-STAY-ree-ahn." Not surprisingly, most people translate it as "mystery," but that's not really what it means. A better fit would be "secret." (JB Phillips translates it that way.) It literally means "that which was concealed."

So, the point is God is letting us know what he likes *according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself*. (Purposed does mean his immutable will.) That purpose is to *gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him*.

That's where it's all headed.

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Yesterday's Stephen Hawking quote leads to an interesting generalization. God didn't just create the parts of the universe; He created the rules that govern it too. So, how far does that extend?

Titus 1:2 and 2 Timothy 1:9 imply that God created time. OK, how about  $2+2=4$ ? Is that some transcendent truth that extends beyond our world – that even God is subject to – or did God create that too?

What about the concept of truth? How about the rules of logic? Where does it all end?

Note that Jesus claimed to be truth itself.

*Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. – John 14:6 (NKJV)*

So, even truth is not a cosmically universal concept that rules over God. While the details are obviously way over our heads, scripture supports the idea that God created all of it – everything you can think of.

So, God's purpose in His plan of salvation is entirely His own creation.

He didn't just choose us; He created the concept of choosing.

3 Ephesians 1:11–12 (NIV)

*In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.*

*Everything.* God works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will. In Greek it's the *BOO-LAY* of His *THA-lay-ma* (the immutable willing of what He wants). This passage is perfectly unambiguous. Everything is predestined – the fall of every sparrow, the vibration of every atom.

This leads to a number of tough questions about things like free will and responsibility. They're important, but this is not the place. Paul tackles them in his epistle to the Romans. Chapter 3 of the Westminster Confession of Faith is also a good reference. For now, just know that God does this.

And then we're told why – *in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.* This doesn't sound right in English. Is this so that, "*we might be for the praise of his glory,*" as opposed to being, "*against the praise of his glory*"? That can't be right.

If not that, then it sounds like it's missing a word. Shouldn't it say something like, "*we might be strong for the praise of his glory.*"? Or maybe, "active," or, "diligent," "*for the praise of his glory*"?

No, the verb is "to be." It could be translated as, "*in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might exist for the praise of his glory.*" The first believers needed to be "present and accounted for" *for the praise of his glory.*

The first believers were essential. They were the eyewitnesses, the ones whose bulletproof faith gave the early church a backbone of steel.

And there's a wondrous twist to this. It's not exactly right to say that they simply had the gift of faith. They were just as skeptical as the next guy. They had the gift of being in the right place at the right time.

After Jesus was crucified, His followers were apparently sitting around stone-faced mumbling things like, "But He raised ..." or, "But, but He said ..." Then Jesus showed up, not just alive but walking around healthy. After that they would walk through fire if they had to. No amount of torture could get them to change their testimony.

And so many of them got the gift of martyrdom.

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What would you give to have faith like that? Would you be willing to walk the road the first Christians walked? God didn't give them the gift of being eyewitnesses so they could just put it in their pocket.

That principle applies generally. Spiritual blessings are given for a reason. They aren't to be wasted.

God always has a purpose and a plan – for you, particularly for the gifts He has given you.

4 Ephesians 1:13–14 (NKJV)

*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, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.*

Instead of, “*guarantee*,” the NIV says, “*deposit*.” The New American Standard Bible (NASB) says “*pledge*.” The point is that we are meant to have assurance of salvation. We know who we are and where we’re going. That issue is settled, *to the praise of His glory*.

This stands in stark contrast to motivating people by coercion. We’re not “threatened” with the loss of our salvation.

This makes perfect sense. If the charity we do affects our eternal destiny, then it isn’t really charity. We’re not doing it just for others; we’re accumulating points in our own account. That wouldn’t be all that different from someone doing charity to show off or, like the Pharisees, praying on a street corner for everyone to see.

So, without this *guarantee* virtually all our charity would have selfish benefits. It wouldn’t glorify God at all.

The plan of salvation is pure genius.

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Of course, it’s doing charity that makes this soar, but that’s not as easy as it sounds. There are lots of ways to do charity badly.

Remember that the purpose of charity, and everything else for that matter, is God’s glory. Glorifying God is the compass point that everything else is referenced by. Make all your decisions with that in mind.

So, take your time figuring out your callings; there are lots of choices. Look for the leading of the Holy Spirit. Don’t jump at the first opportunity, and definitely don’t let anyone pressure you.

When choosing a charity to get involved in, pay special attention to two factors: love and excellence. If you’re considering charity work that ministers to people who you have trouble loving, find something else. There’s too much potential for burnout or other kinds of harm. Learning to love some folks can be a wonderful form of growth, but it’s an advanced one.

Excellence in all things is glorifying, and charity work is no exception. That normally comes from experience, but when you’re starting something new you obviously won’t have any experience.

That’s why the best charity programs are those with good training. The ones with lots of study, and even homework, before they send you “into the field” are the ones to join, or at least start with.

Everyone begins as a beginner.

5 Ephesians 1:15–23 (NKJV)

*Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: 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, 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, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, 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.*

*And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.*

This entire passage is a single sentence in the Greek; it's all one thought. Paul has been praying for them constantly, and what he's been praying for is amazing.

It's long, so let me abbreviate it to highlight the keys. Paul asks the Father to give them *the spirit of wisdom and revelation ... that you may know what is the hope of His calling ... and what is the exceeding greatness of His power.*

The tricky bit is that this is clearly written to Christians. Obviously, Paul isn't asking for them to receive the Holy Spirit; they already have that. So, what's Paul asking for?

Paul must be saying that you can have more of the Spirit. This makes sense in light of passages such as Ephesians 3:16-17, and Philippians 1:6.

The full ask is for God to, "*give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding [literally, heart] being enlightened.*"

So, God can give you more of the Holy Spirit. We can pray the same thing Paul prayed for – for ourselves and for others.

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This is a normal prayer. We can ask God for more of *the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him*, with the full expectation that God will grant our request

And look at the result. We get this so *that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power.*

This is nothing less than kicking your walk with the Lord into a higher gear. That sounds like a no-brainer, but it shouldn't be taken lightly.

It's a commitment.

*Questions for reflection or discussion*

1. Does the universe feel random?
2. What did Jesus mean by, "I am the truth."?
3. Can you see God's plan for your gifts?
4. Are you satisfied with your service work?
5. Have you ever had an experience where you felt especially empowered by the Holy Spirit? Have you seen it happen to someone else?

*Items for prayer:*