

The Apostle Paul was famous for stringing lots of sentences together in a way our English teachers told us never to do. In fact, verses 3 to 14 of Ephesians 1, are all one sentence in the Greek language, but have been broken up into sentences so we can understand them in English. Paul appears to be enjoying himself when he wrote this letter. As Paul writes about all that God has done for him in Christ, it seems as if his heart is bursting with joy.

Have you ever written a letter, or perhaps I should say an email or a text when you describe something that is so good that you want to share it with others. Well, that is what Paul is doing here. He has discovered a great joy and he wants others to know and to feel the same way. There are three main sections in this passage covering God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Each section ends in an expression of praise to God for what He has done for us in Christ. **V6: *Let us praise God for his glorious grace, for the free gift he gave us in his dear Son!*** **V12: *Let us, then, who were the first to hope in Christ, praise God's glory!*** **And V14: *Let us praise his glory.***

A young boy met an old man who was fishing in the Mississippi River. The boy asked the old man what he was doing and a conversation started. Suddenly their conversation was interrupted by the shrill whistle of the River Queen steamer paddling relentlessly down the river. The sight of the ship gleaming and slashing spray in the sunlight caused the two spectators to stare in awe and appreciation. Then, above the noise of the paddle wheel was heard a small boy's voice calling across the water; *Let me ride! Let me ride!* The old man turned to the boy and tried to calm him down, explaining that the River Queen was too important a ship to stop and give rides to little boys. The young boy shouted all the more, *Let me ride!* The old man's eyes bulged in disbelief as that great ship pulled for shore and a gangplank was lowered.

In a flash the young boys feet scampered up and onto the deck. The ship then began to pull back into the main stream and the old man continued to stare after it. Then the young boys head bobbed up above the rail. *Mister, I knew this ship would stop for me. The Captain is my Father.*

The God of the universe is our Father, and He has taken notice of us and blessed us by placing us in Christ. The phrases; *in Christ, with Christ or of Christ* appears at least ten times in Ephesians 1: 1 to 14. Sometimes I worry that we take our position in Christ for granted. Perhaps after sharing the words of Ephesians this morning we will be encouraged to the point of expressing praise to God for all He has done for us by placing us *in Christ*. The words of Ephesians 1:3 to 14 are a celebration of the relationship we have with Christ, and this passage of scripture gives us many reasons why we should celebrate this relationship.

The first reason I would like us to look at this morning is that in Christ we have been chosen. ***Verse 4: Even before the world was made, God had already chosen us to be his through our union with Christ, so that we would be holy and without fault before him.*** The only way we can be holy and blameless in the Father's eyes is to be with Christ. The phrase with or in Christ is used numerous times in Paul's writings to express the relationship a believer has with God. If we are in Christ, then we are also in the Father and in the Holy Spirit. It speaks of our standing with God. When God sees us He sees his Son Jesus because we are in Christ. And the reason we are in Christ is because we have been chosen by God.

Many of us have some childhood memory of teams being picked on the playground or in PE. Those more gifted with speed and co-ordination were picked first with others being left to the end, and then perhaps found themselves in a team that was not very happy to have them.

I can recall dreading the PE teacher bringing out the basketballs or volleyballs because I knew I would be last picked for a team, and then moaned at by my team mates for my poor performance. However God's team doesn't work that way. God doesn't just call those who are fit; He fits those who are called! He calls out our name, letting us know that He want us on His team, and if we respond and come to Him, then He places us in Christ and makes us fit to be a valuable part of His team. So because our ability comes from being in Christ, none of us can boast about being specially gifted or chosen first. All that we have and are is from the one who has called us and has chosen us. It's all about Him and not us. God the Father looks upon us with the same kind of love and favour that He looks upon His own Son, Jesus. Now that's something to celebrate, this is a real cause for praise!

Break –MP 1259 - Bless the Lord, O my soul

Secondly, in Christ we know he really is in control. *Eph 1 :9 to 10. God did what He had purposed, and made known to us the secret plan He had already decided to complete by means of Christ. This plan, which God will complete when the time is right, is to bring all creation together, everything in heaven and on earth, with Christ as head.* Assumptions can be quite dangerous. For example, a photographer for the National Geographic magazine was assigned to get photos of a great forest fire in Australia. Smoke at the scene hampered him and he asked his office to hire a plane. Arrangements were made and he was told to go at once to a nearby airport, where the plane would be waiting. When he arrived at the airport, a plane was warming up near the runway. He jumped in with his equipment and said *Let's go!* The pilot swung the plane into the wind and soon they were in the air. *Fly over the north side of the fire,* asked the photographer, *and make three or four low level passes.* The pilot asked why the photographer wanted him to do that? *Because I'm going to take pictures* replied the photographer. *I'm a photographer and photographers take pictures!* After a pause the pilot said, *You mean you're not the flying instructor?*

No matter how things look around us, we must always remember that God is in control. Again God has a plan and it has not failed, regardless of how bleak things look in our government, in our financial situation and around the world. Everyone and everything in Heaven and on earth will bow before Jesus the anointed one, our Messiah. For He is Lord of all!

There is nothing that threatens His ability to rule this world with absolute love and absolute authority. Yes, people may exercise their free will for a few years on this earth but ultimately nothing will stop the plans of God. Everything is under His control, and one day He will return to implement His government. As Isaiah prophesied: *For unto us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Might God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.*

The boy Jesus went to the temple to be in his Father's house. The adult Jesus went to the cross so that the Father's glory may be shown through the Son. One day Jesus will return to take control of all that He has made of, all that He has been placed at the Head of. It is not a matter of if but just a matter of when! We should rejoice and give praise and thanks that we in Christ, are part of God's plan. Therefore, if we are chosen by God, and if we are in Christ, then we are sealed by the Holy Spirit. ***VI3: And you also became God's people when you heard the true message, the Good News that brought your salvation. You believed in Christ, and God put his stamp of ownership on you by giving you the Holy Spirit he had promised.***

What is a stamp or seal of ownership? It's something that was affixed to a document to guarantee that it was genuine.

Sometimes it was attached to goods that were being shipped to show who they belonged to and to ensure protection. Everyone is in Christ has the Holy Spirit living in them, and the sign of the Holy Spirit is living in us, is seen through how we live, and this is the stamp of God that us on us. The fact that the Holy Spirit is in a person's life guarantees that they have truly encountered God. Paul tells us in Galatians how we know that the Holy Spirit is present: Galatians 5: *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, fruitfulness, gentleness and self-control.* The presence of the Holy Spirit shows who we belong to and ensures our protection from the enemy of our soul. This stamp is visible in the way we live. It should find expression in our lives and in the way we relate with others. If you are in Christ, you have been stamped with the Holy Spirit who now lives in you. What a reason to praise God!

In Christ we should be encouraged to express our praise to the One who gave his life for us, the One whose grace has provided every spiritual blessing we've talked about today and more. Let our lives be a celebration of the goodness of God! ***Amen***

(1769 words)