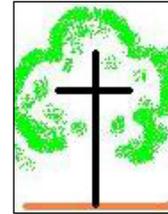


so that they will *know the hope to which you are called* (v. 18) and *the exceeding greatness of his power to us who believe* (v. 19).

Reflect:

- What is God's plan for us, his people?
- Why do we need to *know him, the hope to which you have been called, and the exceeding greatness of his power?*



Alive in Christ!

Six Studies in Paul's Letter to the Ephesians
by Peter J. Blackburn

1. God's Open Secret

Reading: Ephesians 1

Who? When? Where? Why?

Ephesians was written by **Paul** during his two-year imprisonment in Rome (**about 60AD**). It is curious that a number of early manuscripts do not have the words *in Ephesus* in verse 1. It has been speculated that the original letter may have had a blank at that point and that, when it was being read to several of **the churches near Ephesus**, Tychicus (who was evidently taking the letter 6.21) was to insert the name when he read it in a particular church.



Ephesus was an important city in Asia Minor. Paul stopped briefly in Ephesus towards the end of his second missionary journey, but much of the initial work of establishing the church was undertaken by Priscilla, Aquila and Apollos (Acts 18.18-28). Paul returned to Ephesus on his third missionary journey and spent some time there (Acts 19). His work had a considerable impact as witnessed by the riot stirred by the silversmiths whose trade in silver shrines of Artemis was seriously affected.

The letter is not addressed to specific needs within the church, but contains much important teaching on the gospel, the church as the Body of Christ, relationships and the Christian's warfare.

Chapter 1

¹*Paul – sent out by Christ Jesus through God's will – to those in Ephesus who are saints and believers in Christ Jesus;* ²*may you know grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

³*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ,*

2. Alive in Christ! Bible Reading: Ephesians 2.

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⁴just as he picked us out in him before the world was established, to be holy and unblemished in his sight in love.

⁵He chose us beforehand to be adopted as his children through Jesus Christ as it pleased him to decide, ⁶for the praise of his glorious grace freely bestowed on us in the Beloved one. ⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our transgressions, according to the wealth of his grace, ⁸which he has caused to overflow on us in all wisdom and understanding. ⁹For he has made known to us the secret of his will, according to his pleasure which he purposed in Christ, ¹²to be put into effect when the times are ready, to sum up all things in Christ as head – the things in heaven and the things on earth. In Christ, ¹¹we were also made heirs having been chosen beforehand according to the purpose of the one who carries out all things according to the intention of his will, ¹²so that we might be for the praise of his glory, we who were the first to have put our hope in Christ. ¹³In him you were chosen too, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. In him also, when you believed, you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴who is a pledge guaranteeing our inheritance, until the redemption of those who belong to God, to the praise of his glory.

¹⁵That is why, having heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, ¹⁶I keep on giving thanks to God, remembering you in my prayers, ¹⁷praying that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation so that you will know him. ¹⁸Then, when the eyes of your hearts have been enlightened so that you know the hope to which you are called, the fulness of his inheritance in his own people, ¹⁹and the exceeding greatness of his power to us who believe - a power which is released by the might of his strength ²⁰and which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him on his right hand in the heavenlies ²¹far above every rule authority, power and dominion, and every name being named not only in this age, but also in the coming one! ²²And “he has put all things under his feet” (Ps. 8.6), and has made him head over all things to the church, ²³which is his body, the fulness of the one filling all things in every respect.

The Divine Secret

Verses 3-14 express Paul's praise to God for the spiritual blessings he has poured out on us in Christ. In v. 9 he calls God's plan a *mystery* or *secret*. There were at that time a group of people known as the “Gnostics” who promised special secret knowledge to the initiated. In contrast, God's plan, though largely hidden until the coming of Christ, is now an “open secret”. This divine secret has to do with all that God purposed in Christ.

Notice *his glorious grace freely bestowed on us in the Beloved one*. *Grace* is God's favour towards us, totally undeserved for our part, expressed particularly in the *redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our transgressions* (vv. 6,7). This is *the gospel of your salvation* (v. 13). Jesus has paid the penalty for our transgressions. In him we are forgiven, saved.

But there's more to come! God is going to *sum up all things in Christ as head* (v. 10) – at the end of history – and those who believe in Christ have been *adopted as his children* (v. 5) and will then fully receive their inheritance (vv. 11, 14). The Holy Spirit is the *seal* marking us belonging to God and the *pledge* or down-payment on what we will receive in fulness (vv. 13-14).

Reflect:

- The secret is out! Paul is excited! What excites you most about God's plan?

Praying for You

It's fine knowing the grand plan, but where do we go in the meantime? In vv. 15-23, Paul tells them of his prayer for them. Christ's people are part of his plan! Where he had spoken about everything being summed up in Christ as head, he now speaks of Christ as having been made *head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of the one filling all things in every respect* (vv. 22,23). That is why they need *a spirit of wisdom and revelation so that you will know him* (v. 17),