

Text: Ephesians 1

Theme: Series- Jesus Christ and His Church (Ephesians): Know God's Eternal Plan
Sermon delivered by Reverend Dele Agbelusi during the Healing and Anointing Service
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Verses 1-2

Paul's letter to the Ephesians is different compared to many of the other New Testament letters he wrote. Like Romans, Ephesians was not written so much to address problems in a particular church; more so, it was written to explain some of the great themes and doctrines of Christianity, and Paul expected it to be read in the other churches too.

Let us consider the first two verses of the book. Paul introduced himself as an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God. This is a loaded introduction. Paul knows who he is; that he is an apostle of Christ. *Apostolos* is a word used to describe people who are sent out. They are men and women with a mission - the mission of serving Christ within this world. Any power he possessed was a delegated power. Secondly, he states that he was an apostle by the will of God - not by popular election, or the decision of a Committee, or the will of anybody but by the will of Christ Jesus. The emphasis here is not of pride but of sheer amazement - that God would have chosen someone like him.

To the Saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus; Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

We see not only a double-barrelled authority of Paul but we see a double designation of believers. It says at the end of verse 1 - "The saints who are at Ephesus and to the faithful in Christ Jesus." **He calls Christians by two terms, the saints and the faithful. And that covers both sides. From God's side, He's made us holy, from our side we exercise faith.**

We are the saints - divine definition; the faithful - human definition. And it is by virtue of being full of faith that we have been made saints. Now, when we say we are saints do we mean those canonized Catholic? A saint is not a sanctimonious individual. A saint is anybody who is a Christian.

Every one of us has been made *hagios*, holy. Every one of us has been set apart unto God in Christ. Every one of us has been made righteous in the righteousness of Christ. We are all saints. From God's side we are saints. So, God chose Christians that they should be different from other people. The early Christians who lived under the sentence of death for their faith knew this. But nowadays, we say "as long as you live a decent, respectable life, you don't have to be different from the world around you". It is the simple matter that if enough Christians become "holy", *hagios*, *different*, *they would revolutionise society*.

And the reason from our side why we are called Saints is that we acted in faith toward Christ. So a double designation of believers. We are the saints, we are the faithful. We have believed in Christ and He has made us holy. Boy, isn't that a great beginning? We've been made holy in Christ. We will see more of that as we go through the book.

So, double authority for Paul, double designation of believers and then a double blessing in verse 2; you knew that would happen, didn't you?

He then goes on to his usual greeting: **Grace to you and peace from God our Father:** The word grace could mean charm. *A Christianity which is unattractive is no real Christianity. Grace always describes a gift which would have been impossible to gain for ourselves, which we never earned and which we do not deserve. It makes us think of the sheer generosity of God.* (Barclays). Grace to you and peace - there's the double blessing. Now this first one -

grace to you - what a great statement. **Grace means the kindness of God toward undeserving people.**

The apostle knew the essential place of **grace** and **peace** from God in the life of the believer, and the believer who does not appreciate the grace and peace of and from God will leave forever as a pauper.

John McArthur in one of his sermons gave the following illustrations: *The Los Angeles Times reported several years ago the story of a man and wife who died in their fifties. They were found dead in their apartment and the autopsy revealed they both died of malnutrition. What was interesting was that when the police found their bodies, which had already begun to decay by the time they were discovered, they searched the apartment and found in the closet a whole pile of little paper bags and they opened the little paper bags and found a total of \$40,000. It's a little ridiculous to die of malnutrition, and have \$40,000 in paper bags in your closet.*

There was also a lady known in American history known as Hetty Green. Hetty Green was called "America's Greatest Miser." When she died in 1916, this is a long time ago, she left an estate valued at \$100 million. That's a lot of money in 1916. But Hetty Green was so miserly that she said she ate cold oatmeal because it was too expensive to heat the water to warm it. Her son had a severe leg injury and it was so severe that she was delaying trying to find a free clinic where it could be treated and she delayed so long it had to be amputated. In fact she got apoplexy one time and hastened her own death by arguing the merits of skim milk because it was cheaper than whole milk. Now that's a strange lady, folks. To die with \$100 million in your estate and your son loses his leg and you actually encourage your own death and eat cold oatmeal all your life - that's really not understanding how to use your resources.

Now the book of Ephesians is written to Christians like that. You say - well, what do you mean? What kind of Christian is like that? The kind of Christian who doesn't understand the riches he has in Christ. The kind of Christian who wanders through life with a case of spiritual malnutrition, who doesn't know where the feast is. The kind of Christian who doesn't know how to tap his resources maybe because he doesn't know what they are and so he never really finds out how rich he is. If you rightly read the book of Ephesians you will discover that it is the believer's bank. This is your spiritual cheque book and every time you write a check out of this bank your funds are non-diminished. In other words, you can write cheques on all the riches of God as often as you want, for as much as you want and never diminish the account. Isn't that nice? That's the book of Ephesians. It's a book about riches. It's a book talking about fullness. It's a book about being filled with things. It's a book about inheritance. It's a book that just tells us what we own in Christ and what we are in him. Some have called it the treasure house of the Bible. The first three chapters talk about these riches while the latter three chapters talk about how to use them.

All His riches are at our disposal. Peter calls it an inheritance that is laid away, incorruptible and undefiled, reserved in heaven for us. That's Ephesians. Now it's all in Christ. It's all because we're in Christ. And if you're not in Christ you're poor, you're destitute, you're a pauper, a beggar. If you're in Christ you're rich beyond all wild imagination. It's all based on Him. It's not anything we did. Not anything we earned. It's all His. For example, in Ephesians all of our riches are based on these things- **His will, chapter 1 verse 5; His grace, chapter 1 verse 6 and 7; His glory, chapter 1 verse 12 and 14; His power, 1:19; His love, 2:4; His good pleasure, 1:9; His purpose, 1:11; His calling, 1:18; His inheritance, again 1:18; and His workmanship, 2:10. It's all because of Him. It's all that we are in Christ and thus these things become ours.**

So, this is your bank book. This is the treasure house. This is where you check out your resources. It not only talks about our riches but it talks about the whole idea that all this is ours because we are in the Church. Okay? It's all ours because we're in the church. Now by that I

don't mean that we're Anglicans, Baptists, Pentecostals Presbyterians, Methodists, or anything else. What I mean is simply that we are in the Body of Christ, that we are saved people, we are born again. Because we are in Christ and in His Church, all these things accrue to us. That's a key.

Verses 3-4

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. In the Greek, the long passage from verses 3-14 is one sentence! It is an outburst of praise from Paul by the Holy Spirit as gift after gift and wonder after wonder pass through his eyes and mind. Paul called for praises to the Father (in the sense of recognizing His glory and honor and goodness), because the Father has *already* blessed the believer with every spiritual blessing.

Paul thinks of the fact of God's choice (Paul never forgets how God chose him to do his work). He thinks of the generosity of God's choice (we are blessed with blessings which are to be found in heaven). He thinks of the purpose of God's choice (that we should be holy, set apart). "We are not sitting here, and groaning, and crying, and fretting, and worrying, and questioning our own salvation. He has blessed us; and therefore we will praise Him. If you think little of what God has done for you, you will do very little for him; but if you have a great notion of his great mercy to you, you will be greatly grateful to your gracious God." (Spurgeon)

"Our thanks are due to God for all temporal blessings; they are more than we deserve. But our thanks ought to go to God in thunders of hallelujahs for spiritual blessings. A new heart is better than a new coat. To feed on Christ is better than to have the best earthly food. To be an heir of God is better than being the heir of the greatest nobleman. To have God for our portion is blessed, infinitely more blessed than to own broad acres of land. God hath blessed us with spiritual blessings. These are the rarest, the richest, the most enduring of all blessings; they are priceless in value." (Spurgeon)

If we have no appreciation for spiritual blessing, then we live at the level of *animals*. Animals live only to eat, sleep, entertain themselves, and to reproduce. We are made in the image of God and He has something much higher for us, yet many choose to live at the level of *animals*. Any understanding of God's sovereign choosing that diminishes our personal responsibility for personal holiness and sanctification falls far short of the whole counsel of God.

Verses 5- 6

Here Paul speaks to us about the plan of God and one of the pictures that he used is that of adoption. (cf. Romans 8:23; Galatians 4:5) This would be a more meaningful picture in Roman times. Then a father had absolute power over his children as long as he and they lived. He could sell his children as slaves or even kill them. When the lengthy process of adoption was complete, in the eyes of the law, the person who had been adopted had all the rights of a legitimate son in his new family, and lost absolute rights in his old family. So new that even all debts and obligations connected with his previous family were abolished as if they never existed. This is what Paul said God has done for us. We were absolutely under the power of sin and of the world; God, through Jesus took us out of that power into his and that adoption wipes out the past and makes us new.

Verses 7-8

(7-8) The work of God the Son.

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.

In Him we have redemption through His blood: There is no possible redemption outside of Jesus and His redeeming **blood** because **Redemption** always implies a price being paid for the freedom that is purchased. It uses the ancient Greek word *lootruo*, which means, "to

liberate on the receipt of a ransom.” (Gaebelien) Here the price is **His blood**, showing that the blessing from the Father and the Son comes not only from a divine decree, but it also comes according to His righteousness and holiness. He cannot bless in opposition to His righteousness and holiness.

Jesus does not redeem us by His sinless life or His moral example, but only by His death in our place – by **His blood**. “Observe, it is not redemption through his power, it is *through his blood*. It is not redemption through his love, it is through his blood.” (Spurgeon). And we should not take a superstitious or mystical view of “the blood.” It was not Jesus’ physical blood that saved anyone, but His real and total payment for the sins of man in His whole person on the cross. This is what the New Testament means when it talks about “the **blood**.”

You see, in every other religion in the world that holds to the idea of a supreme deity, that deity’s mercy is always exercised at the expense of justice. For example, in Islam, Allah may grant mercy to an individual, but it’s done by dismissing the penalties of whatever law has been broken. In other words, the offender’s punishment that was properly due him is brushed aside so that mercy can be extended. Islam’s Allah and every other deity in the non-Christian religions set aside the requirements of moral law in order to be merciful. Mercy is seen as at odds with justice. In a sense, in these religions, crime can indeed pay.

If any human judge acted in such a fashion, most people would lodge a major complaint. It is a judge’s responsibility to see that the law is followed and that justice is provided. A judge who ignores the law is betraying his office.

Christianity is unique in that God’s mercy is shown through His justice. There is no setting aside of justice to make room for mercy. The Christian doctrine of penal substitution states that sin and injustice were punished at the cross of Christ, and that only because the penalty of sin was satisfied through Christ’s sacrifice does God extend His mercy to undeserving sinners who look to Him for salvation.

(9-12) The mystery of His will- The goal of history

He made known to us the mystery of His will... “In the New Testament sense a mystery is something which is hidden to the heathen but clear to the Christian.” (Barclay) Take the Lord’s Supper for example. If a heathen who knows nothing about Christianity comes in when we are taking the bread and the wine, he will be lost. To him, it is a mystery, but to us, we are remembering the death of Jesus Christ for our sins. To the heathen it is a mystery but to us the mystery has been revealed.

So, Paul is introducing the mystery that is been revealed; that in Christ Jesus the Gentiles and the Jews will enjoy His favour. Grace and mercy are meant not for the Jews alone but for the entire world. Up till now, people were living in a divided world. *There was division between the animals and human beings. There was division between Jews and Gentiles, Greeks and barbarians. All over the world there was strife and tension. Jesus came into the world to wipe out all divisions. That for Paul, was the secret of God and all things be gathered into one in Jesus Christ. (Barclay)*

Part of what belongs to us under the *riches of His grace* is the knowledge of **the mystery of His will**, God’s great plan and purpose which was once hidden but is now revealed to us in Jesus. Through the Apostle Paul, God called us to consider the greatness of God’s great plan for the ages and our place in that plan.

To bring all things in heaven and on earth under one head... (v.11)

God's ultimate plan is to bring together – to ultimately resolve – all things in Christ, either through Jesus as a Savior or Jesus as a Judge; this will happen in the **fullness of the times**.

15-17

For this reason, I have not stopped giving thanks for you remembering you in my prayers. Paul not only gave thanks for God's work among the Ephesians; he also prayed that it would continue with greater strength, as the prayer in Ephesians 1:17-23 makes clear. Paul shows us here that preachers must do more than preach to their audience – they must also *pray* for them.

(17) Paul prays for a fuller revelation and a fuller knowledge of God. For Christians, growth in knowledge and in grace is essential. Anyone who belongs to a profession knows that it is a mistake to stop studying.

Paul prayed that the Father would grant the Ephesians **the spirit of wisdom** and that He would give them **revelation**. But these are not so that they may see into the lives of others, have the ability to predict events, or do what we commonly think of as “prophet stuff.” He wanted them to have **the spirit of wisdom** and **revelation** simply so that they would have a better **knowledge of Him** (God).

(18-19a) Paul prays that they would understand everything God gave them in Jesus Christ. If the Ephesians will know all God has given them in Jesus, it will take a supernatural work. It will require that **the eyes of your heart be enlightened** by God. Too many Christian *hearts* have no eyes (places where they gain real knowledge and understanding), and too many Christian eyes have no heart – God wants both to be combined in us.

Paul prays for a new realization of the Christian hope

Paul finishes by speaking of the conquest of Christ.

Paul could testify to this truth. Jesus identifies with His Followers. Now Saul did not believe that Jesus was alive. He thought the whole thing was a delusion. As far as he was concerned, he was persecuting deluded Jewish fanatics that thought a dead criminal was the Son of God. But that was not the way the Son of God saw it. When the Son of God spoke, he said, "Why do you persecute me?" So not only is this crucified criminal alive, but he is so identified with his followers that to persecute them is to persecute him.

This is the link between suffering and the body of Christ. When Christ was on the earth, Christ had one kind of body, a physical body like ours. And with it he suffered and died that we might live. Now he is raised from the dead and sits at the right hand of God; but on the earth he has another kind of body, namely, the church. Christ was united to his body then, and felt the blows of his enemies. And he is united to his body now, the church, and he feels the blows of his enemies still.

(19b-21) A description of the great power of God that Paul wants the Ephesians to know.

That power is like the working of his mighty strength which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand...

The power that works in us is the **mighty power** that raised Jesus **from the dead**. With this **mighty power** available to us, there never needs to be a “power shortage” in the Christian life. “If the death of Christ is the supreme demonstration of the love of God . . . the resurrection of Christ is the supreme demonstration of his power.” (Bruce)

b. **And seated Him at His right hand:** It is the **mighty power** that raised Jesus to heaven after His resurrection, raising Him above all demonic foes and every potential enemy of all

time – this *same* power is at work in Christians. “The *right hand* is the place of friendship, honour, confidence, and authority.” (Clarke)

(22-23) This great resurrection power placed Jesus above all things. Now all things are **under His feet**. It set Jesus as the **head over all things**, including the church.

The Body of Christ

The purpose of God was to bring all things under Christ. In the very last phrase of this chapter, Paul has two tremendous thoughts. The church, he says is the essential element in the work of Christ. Jesus is through his church fulfilling bit by bit the work of bringing all things together under His fold.

There is a legend that sums up this truth. Jesus went back to heaven after his time on earth. Even in heaven He bore upon him the marks of the cross. The angels were talking...