

The Body Formed in Eternity Past, Part 2

Scripture: Ephesians 1:4–6

Code: 1903

INTRODUCTION

A. The Partnership of the Body

Christians have a common source of life. We entered into the Body the same way--through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. We possess the same divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). We are moving toward the same destiny--the kingdom of God and eternal glory in heaven with Christ. We are one in a marvelous and unique way.

The central theme of Ephesians is our oneness in Christ. The ramifications of that truth are discussed in every chapter of this book. We are called the body of Christ to emphasize our unity. As the body responds to the brain, so the church is to respond to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The unity of the church is based on the common life of its members. The life of God pulses through the soul of every believer. According to 1 Corinthians 6:17, "He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit." Therefore all who are joined to the Lord are one with another.

Paul focused on theological matters in the first three chapters of Ephesians and on practical matters in the last three chapters. He began the theological section with a look into the past to view the divine plan of the church. There we find that God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit all had a part in the planning of the church.

B. The Purpose for the Body

The best one-verse definition of the church is in Ephesians 4:13: Coming together "in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." We enter the Body of Christ by believing the same basic truths (i.e., "the unity of the faith," and "the knowledge of the Son of God"). And we are progressing toward "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

God's purpose for the Body is that it manifest Christ to the world. God manifested Himself through the incarnation of His Son (Body I) and the establishment of the church (Body II).

C. The Problem with the Body

The Body depends on the proper functioning of each of its parts. Therefore, when just one Christian sins, the corporate testimony of the Body is hindered. When someone doesn't function in the area of his spiritual giftedness, or follow through on his responsibilities of fellowship, he cripples the body. Consequently, the world will get a distorted picture of what Christ is like.

It's essential that we understand that we are one in Christ. Only when we understand the theology of the first half of Ephesians will we be prepared to apply the principles of Christian living in the second half of the book.

REVIEW

I. THE ELEMENTS OF THE BLESSING (v. 3)

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ."

II. THE ETERNAL FORMATION OF THE BODY (vv. 4-14)

A. In the Past--Election (vv. 4-6a)

Some of God's ways we will never understand as fully as others, for "the secret things belong unto the Lord" (Deut. 29:29). Isaiah 55:9 tells us that God's ways are higher than man's ways.

1. The method--sovereign selection (v. 4a)

"According as he hath chosen."

a) Its concept

LESSON

God formed the Body in eternity past by independent, sovereign choice. He chose who would become the members of His Body--totally apart from any human consideration and purely on the basis of His own will. Paul wrote that we were chosen "according to the good pleasure of his will" (Eph. 1:5), "according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself" (v. 9), and "according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will" (v. 11). God freely and independently chose us to be included in His Body--the church.

John spoke of Israel's rejection of the Messiah: "He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the children of God, even to them that believe on his name; who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (1:11-13). Salvation is of God. Paul emphasizes that point in Ephesians 2:8-9, "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." Second Timothy 1:9 tells us that God "saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ before the world began."

Yet the Bible also teaches that man is responsible for his decisions. Jesus said, "Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life" (John 5:40). Isaiah said, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come to the waters, and he that hath no money; come, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price" (55:1). In the book of Revelation, John says, "The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (22:17). Likewise, Paul claims that "whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Rom. 10:13).

So while the Bible holds out salvation to "whosoever will," it teaches also that salvation is a sovereign act of God. Only God can completely resolve that.

Sovereignty: An Essential Christian Doctrine

1. God is the giver of all good things in general

We pray to God because we believe that He is the source of all good things. James says, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (1:17). In prayer the Christian humbly acknowledges his dependence on God. Our health and daily provisions are a gift from God. That's why Jesus told us to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matt. 6:11).

2. God is the giver of salvation in particular

We do not save ourselves--God saved us. Therefore we do not boast of our own merit, as though that resulted in our salvation. We thank God for saving us because we know He alone caused it. We also bring our loved ones before Him in prayer because we realize that He alone saves them. Our prayers are a reminder that God is sovereign.

J. I. Packer said, "What is true is that all Christians believe in divine sovereignty, but some are not aware that they do, and mistakenly imagine and insist that they reject it. What causes this odd state of affairs? The root cause is the same as in most cases of error in the Church--the intruding of rationalistic speculations, the passion for systematic consistency, and reluctance to recognize the existence of mystery and to let God be wiser than men, and a consequent subjecting of Scripture to

the supposed demands of human logic" (Evangelism & the Sovereignty of God [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1961], p. 16).

Packer says that people basically can't tolerate tension in their thinking. Men simply don't like to entertain the possibility of paradoxes or antinomy. So, they contrive a scheme to harmonize two truths and in effect destroy both by oversimplification.

Packer continues, "People see that the Bible teaches man's responsibility for his actions; they do not see ... how this is consistent with the sovereign Lordship of God over those actions. They are not content to let the two truths live side by side, as they do in the Scriptures, but jump to the conclusion that, in order to uphold the biblical truth of human responsibility, they are bound to reject the equally biblical and equally true doctrine of divine sovereignty, and to explain away the great number of texts that teach it. The desire to over-simplify the Bible by cutting out the mysteries is natural to our perverse minds, and it is not surprising that even good men should fall victim to it. Hence this persistent and troublesome dispute. The irony of the situation, however, is that when we ask how the two sides pray, it becomes apparent that those who profess to deny God's sovereignty really believe in it just as strongly as those who affirm it" (pp. 16-17).

The Bible teaches that God chose everyone who is saved and that man is responsible for his decisions.

b) Its categories(1) Theocratic electionIsrael was once a theocracy--a nation ruled by God.

Deuteronomy 7:6 says, "Thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God; the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people who are upon the face of the earth." God didn't choose the biggest or the best--He chose freely out of love and grace. However, just because a person was Jewish didn't mean that he was one of the elect. Paul said, "They are not all Israel, who are of Israel" (Rom. 9:6). As the biblical history of Israel demonstrates, being a part of the nation of Israel didn't guarantee that any individual experienced personal salvation.(2) Vocational electionSometimes God chooses certain people to do specific tasks. For instance in Deuteronomy 18 God chose the Levites to do a specific task--to be the priestly tribe of Israel. Yet, being a Levite did not automatically mean the the person was saved. In the New Testament Jesus chose the twelve apostles to perform a task. However Judas was not a believer. Jesus said to the apostles, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you" (John 15:16). The choosing in that verse was not for salvation but for the special task of being an apostle.(3) Salvational electionGod has chosen some to salvation. In Romans 16:13 Paul writes, "Salute Rufus, chosen in the Lord." God ordained that Rufus should be one of His children. Peter wrote his epistle "to the sojourners scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of God" (1:1-2). God chooses individuals to salvation.

c) Its compelling forceIn John 6:44 Jesus says, "No man can come to me, except the Father, who hath sent me, draw him." No one is saved unless he is drawn (Gk., helkuo). That term is used in non-biblical writings to speak of an irresistible force. For example, it is used of a hungry man being drawn to food and of the power of love that draws two people together.

The force of God is like an electromagnet that draws iron while leaving nonferrous metal unmoved. God's election is irresistible to those upon whom He has set His love. The elect of God inevitably respond in faith to the divine magnet. Jesus said, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me, and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37). Romans 9 tells us that Jacob and Esau were chosen before they were born, so they obviously had nothing to do with their salvation. But in Romans 10 Paul says, "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (v. 13). The hymn entitled "The Inner Life," penned anonymously in 1904, begins, I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew He moved my soul to seek Him, seeking me; It was not I that found, O Savior true; No, I was found of Thee.

d) Its confusionSome are quick to point out that God's election was based on foreknowledge (cf. Rom. 8:28-29). Yet they incorrectly define foreknowledge as God's looking ahead in time to see how people would respond to the gospel and electing the ones who

would react favorably. But that isn't what the Bible teaches.

The Biblical Definition of Foreknowledge

In Scripture foreknowledge (Gk. proginosko) implies an intimate love relationship.

1. Genesis 4:17--"Cain knew his wife; and she conceived, and bore Enoch" (cf. vv. 1, 25). That does not refer to Cain's knowledge of his wife's existence; it refers to their intimate, physical relationship that resulted in the conception of a child.
 2. Luke 1:34--After an angel told Mary she would have a child, she replied, "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" She meant that she had never had a sexual relationship with a man (cf. Matt. 1:25).
 3. John 10:27--Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them." Jesus doesn't just know who His sheep are; He has an intimate relationship with them.
 4. Matthew 7:22a, 23a--Jesus said, "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord.... Then I will profess unto them, I never knew you." Jesus never had an intimate relationship with them.
 5. Amos 3:2--God looked at Israel and said, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth." Israel was the only nation God carried on an intimate relationship with.
- Foreknowledge simply is God's love relationship for us established before the world began.
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2. The object: the elect (v. 4b)

"He hath chosen us in him."

From a human perspective no one enters heaven except those who willfully and consciously submit to God. Jesus said, "Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life" (John 5:40). In Luke 22 we see God's sovereignty and the will of man placed side by side: "Truly the son of man goeth, as it was determined; but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed!" (v. 22). God was sovereign, but Judas was responsible for each of his deeds. The sovereignty of God does not nullify man's responsibility.

3. The time: eternity past (v. 4c)

"Before the foundation of the world."

That is known as predestination: We were chosen by God before the creation of the universe.

a) Matthew 25:34--A day is coming when Christ will proclaim, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." b) First Peter 1:19-20--Peter said we were redeemed "with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world." Christ crucifixion was planned out before the world began. c) Ephesians 2:10--"We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."

4. The purpose: holiness (v. 4d)

"That we should be holy and without blame [Gk., amomos, "without blemish"] before him."

We are holy before God because Christ's holiness has been imputed to us. That is why we say that Christians have positional holiness--their position being in Christ. Paul addressed such holiness in its application to the church: "A glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:27). The death of Christ covers our sin, and His righteousness is reckoned to our account. So we have been reconciled to God by the substitutionary death of Christ.

Before God we are as holy as Jesus--that's our position. But we know that's not our practice. We are far from the holy standard and far from being blameless. Yet in Colossians 2:9-10 Paul says, "In him [Christ] dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him." All that God is we become in Jesus Christ. That's why salvation is secure. We have Christ's perfect righteousness. Our practice can and does fall short, but our position can never fall short, because it is the same holy and blameless position Christ has before God. We are as secure as our Savior because we are in Him. And because God has declared us to be holy and blameless, we should strive to reflect that in our lives.

5. The motive: love (vv. 4e)

"In love."

God chose us to be His children because of His love (John 3:16). Love is what motivated God to extend mercy to unworthy man. Love is not an emotion; it's an act of self sacrifice on behalf of others. The preeminent expression of God's love is the death of His Son: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). And God set His love upon us before the world began.

Love is an attribute of God--"God is love" (1 John 4:8). His love for men precedes their love for God (1 John 4:19). Ephesians 2:4-5 says, "God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love with which he loved us ... hath made us alive together with Christ."

6. The result: sonship (v. 5a)

"Having predestinated us unto the adoption of sons by Jesus Christ himself."

We have been adopted by God because we are in Christ. In Christ we became subjects of His kingdom, and because He is our Lord we are His servants. He even calls us friends (John 15:15). But in His great love He makes us more than citizens and servants, and even more than friends. He makes us children, lovingly drawing us into the intimacy of His own family.

We became His children the same instant we were saved (John 1:12). In fact, as His children, we can now address God in an intimate way--"Abba," the Aramaic equivalent of "Daddy" (Gal. 4:6). Our adoption means that the life of God dwells in us. Human parents can adopt children and love them as much they do their natural children. But no human parent could impart his own distinct nature to an adopted child. Yet that is exactly what God has done for us. We are "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:4) in that the Spirit of God dwells in us (Gal. 4:6).

7. The reason: glory (vv. 5b-6a)

"According to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace."

All creation exists to bring glory to God. In Isaiah 43 God says, "The beasts of the field will glorify me" (v. 20, NASB). Psalm 19 says, "The heavens declare the glory of God" (v. 1). The only rebels in the universe are fallen angels and fallen men. Everything else glorifies its Creator. The fallen angels have already been eternally removed from God's presence, and so will the fallen men who refuse to be saved by Jesus Christ. In fact, Paul says that everything we do is to be "to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31).

God chose certain people to be in the Body of Christ that He might be glorified. Salvation is all from God and therefore all the glory goes to Him. To guarantee that, every provision of salvation was accomplished before any human being was ever born. Jesus told His disciples, "It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Lk. 12:32). He fit us into the Body of Christ to be the praise of His glory.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What is God's purpose for the Body of Christ?
2. When we fail to exercise our spiritual gifts, how does it affect the testimony of the church?
3. Chapters 1-3 of Ephesians discuss the _____ of the Body and chapters 4-6 discuss the _____.
4. When did God form the Body of Christ (Eph. 1:4)?
5. On what basis did God choose us to become members of the Body of Christ?
6. What is the "gift of God" referred to in Ephesians 2:8-9?
7. Give three passages from the Bible that show all men are responsible to make their own choice.
8. Why can it be said that our prayers acknowledge the sovereignty of God?
9. According to J.I. Packer, why do people have such a difficult time accepting both truths of man's responsibility and God's sovereignty?
10. Name and define the three kinds of election mentioned in the Bible.

11. How does John 6:44 shed light on the paradox of divine sovereignty and human choice?
12. What is foreknowledge as defined in Scripture?
13. According to Ephesians 1:4, what is the purpose of our election?
14. What does 1 John 4:19 tell us about our love of God?
15. What does it mean that we are adopted by God (1 Pet. 1:4; Gal. 4:6)?
15. What does Isaiah 43:20 tell us about the created universe?

Pondering the Principles

1. As members of the Body of Christ we all have certain responsibilities to one another. Look up the following verses and write down the "one anothers" we are to be practicing: Galatians 5:13; 6:1-2; Ephesians 4:32; 5:21; Colossians 3:16; 1 Thessalonians 4:18; 5:11; Hebrews 3:13; James 5:16; 1 Peter 1:22; 4:9-10. List the "one anothers" on a sheet of paper beginning with the one that you believe is the least evident in your life. Share that list with your spouse or a close friend. Have that individual evaluate your order, giving you counsel of what they perceive to be your strengths and weaknesses.
2. Ephesians 1:4 tells us we are holy by virtue of our position in Christ. According to 1 Peter 1:15-16, 2 Peter 3:14; and 1 John 3:7, how are we to live in light of our position? What are the specific areas you need to work on to make you more set apart (holy) from sin unto God?

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