

Bible Basics Conference 2009: "Walk Worthy of the Calling!"

Part 1

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[00:00:00] And welcome to Bible Basics 2009.

The subject is Walk Worthy of the Calling.

The epistle we'd like to study, Epistle to the Ephesians, is a wonderful epistle. It touches on some very practical topics like family, marriage, work, and so on.

But it shows how these instructions are founded on God's thoughts, on his counsels.

In this first session, we'd like to say something about the first 14 verses of the epistle. But let me start with some background notes first.

But perhaps as a motto for this first section and the whole epistle and the whole conference, we could choose this verse from chapter 1, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[00:01:06] And we'll come back to this a little later. Just by way of background, the city of Ephesus, as most of you will know, was situated in what today we know as Turkey.

Paul visited this on his journeys.

It was a city that was renowned for commerce, but also, sadly, for idolatry.

As you can see from this picture here, showing the famous Temple of Artemis.

Perhaps you remember what happened when Paul first arrived in Ephesus. As you can read, actually, first he arrived there on his second journey. But when this happened, as you find in Acts, it was, you might say, a very successful gospel crusade.

[00:02:07] People turned to Christ.

But what happened is that people abandoned idolatry. And there was this man, Demetrius, the silver beater.

And you know, his job was to make and trade in silver models of this Temple of Artemis.

And he said, these words you find here, Our well-living arises from this work.

And this Paul has persuaded and turned away a great crowd, saying that they are no gods which are made with hands. Apparently, he got very angry. And what happened is that a little later, the whole city was congregated in this theater. And they were shouting there, for hours, great is the Artemis of the Ephesians. [00:03:03] Basically saying, our goddess and our temple, that is what counts. And later on, Paul referred to this event, and he says, I have fought with beasts in Ephesus.

Now, that's just by way of background. That was the start of this meeting in Ephesus.

Now, Paul actually went back there, as I mentioned initially, on his third missionary journey. And actually lived in Ephesus for three years. And when he had to say farewell to those from Ephesus, he had to warn them of dangers, of false teachers who would come, as indeed we know they did. Now, one thing we should bear in mind is that when this epistle was written, the believers in Ephesus were in a very good condition. [00:04:01] You find that right in the way they are addressed. Paul was able to occupy them with God's purpose, with God's thoughts. But that's no guarantee that it will always stay this way. You remember from Revelation that the assembly in Ephesus features again. And it is rebuked for having lost its first love. So that's perhaps something to bear in mind for us on this conference as well. May the Lord really help us to enjoy and to stay in the enjoyment of the wonderful things that we can find in this epistle.

Now, just quickly one word on the structure of the epistle to the Ephesians as a whole. If you want to build a good building, you need to have a good foundation. Now, good practice builds on the foundation of sound doctrine.

And this is why the epistle is organized as it is, [00:05:01] as in fact you find in other doctrinal epistles as well. You first have a presentation of the doctrine.

And then you have a presentation of the conclusions from that for the practical life of Christians.

The first part I should just mention covers the first three chapters. They are doctrinal.

They deal with the subject of what is God's counsel? What is his purpose? What is his will?

And what is the Christian calling? And then the last three chapters, they still present some doctrine, but they largely build on the first three and show, well, what does this mean for the Christian in the assembly, for the Christian in the world, in marriage, in family, and in spiritual warfare or combat?

Now, in this first part, first three chapters, there's still a very nice structure. [00:06:02] And I think once we have this structure in our minds, you will find it a lot easier to follow the presentations we'll hear. Chapter one tells us what is God's counsel.

Chapter two tells us about the execution of God's counsel. What did he do to actually execute his great plan?

And chapter three tells us about the communication of God's counsel.

God chose Paul to execute this special task of communicating the mystery and of speaking about the unsearchable riches of Christ. So God's counsel, it's execution, it's communication.

Now, with that in mind, let's look at the first few verses of this epistle.

Starts off by saying, Paul, apostle of Jesus Christ. [00:07:03] So you find that he writes here with all the authority of an apostle when he presents the truth to the Ephesians. And this is by God's will, not by any man's choice that he has received this office. But by the way, he writes not only as apostle, he also writes as prisoner. And he says in chapter three, for you, the Gentiles. And we can actually take this for us. Paul was a prisoner for us.

He had this task of communicating this mystery, this counsel, this truth about Christ and the church. And he got in trouble for it. And a major part of his message had to do with the role of Gentiles. And he got into prison for it. And that's why he says, a prisoner of Jesus Christ for you.

[00:08:01] But here he is presented as apostle. And he writes to the saints and faithful in Christ Jesus.

Now, that's another challenge for us. Can we be described in this way? Are we certainly, as far as our position goes, we are saints. But are we faithful?

And are we, therefore, in a position to really enjoy this epistle?

It was written around 61 or 62 from Rome to Ephesus.

And perhaps as the main theme, we could summarize it as the mystery of Christ. Now, he wishes them in verse two. He says, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, when he speaks about grace and peace, it's a wonderful Christian greeting. But what he has in mind is not the saving grace. [00:09:02] And it's not peace with God. But what he means is the Ephesians would need grace. And they would need peace every day. And also, they would need grace to appreciate what he is going to present to them.

It's an interesting title here. He speaks of God our Father. You find that really we are on Christian ground here. God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

And the rest of our section, starting in verse three, is really a doxology.

It's an outburst of praise where you don't even find a full stop. He just goes on and on and on from verse three to verse 14 in one sentence, setting out what God has done. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ.

[00:10:07] Now, just on the matter of blessings, if you remember in the Old Testament, God had given blessings to Israel. And it actually says in Deuteronomy 8, I think, thy God bringeth thee into a good land, a land of water brooks, of springs, and of deep waters that gush forth in the valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, vines, fig trees, pomegranates, olive trees, honey, and a land where thou shalt lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose mountains thou will dig copper. All these riches God had in store for his people.

Now, what has he given us? What he has given us is far better than all these wonderful things [00:11:05] we just read about.

What he's given us is firstly spiritual and not simply material. It's also on a higher plane.

It is heavenly and not earthly.

If I can dare to give just some examples, one subject here is adoption, the matter of sonship.

Then the gift of a new nature that makes us fit before God to be in his presence.

And then the gift of the Holy Spirit dwelling in believers. These are just some of the fruits of the land that we can enjoy.

Now, one thing we need to realize is that this epistle here starts with God. It says, blessed be God. And it says, God has blessed us. Typically, we always start with ourselves. [00:12:04] We start with our needs. We start with our sins.

When we think about the relationship between man and God, first thought is the sins. And that's an important subject, and it needs to be dealt with. But that's Romans.

Now, if you know that your sins are forgiven, and if you know that you've been saved, that's wonderful. But it means you've just come out of Egypt, and you've just crossed the Red Sea, and that's as far as you got. What we want to talk about today is a lot further. We want you to move on. We want you to have crossed the Jordan, and to see a beautiful land in front of you, and to go in, and to see the fruits, and to enjoy what's there.

Now, when I said, in the heavenly places, or in the heavenlies, that's actually a key phrase in this epistle. Now, where exactly is this, and what is there? First of all, our blessings, 1 verse 3.

[00:13:03] Later in the chapter, you find Christ is there, seated at the right hand of God. Then you find in chapter 2 that we are there, seated in Christ. Then in chapter 3, that there are principalities and powers, angels.

And then in chapter 6, and that's perhaps the big surprise, you find that in these heavenly places, there are spiritual powers of wickedness, and that's why there is a battle.

Now, if we want to enjoy what God has for us in these heavenly places, there'll be conflict, there'll be opposition, but it's well worthwhile.

Verse 4 says, according as he has chosen us in him.

Now, we found in verse 3 that there were two names.

[00:14:02] There was the name of God, and the name of Father.

Now, we come back to this now in verses 4 and 5. Verse 4 is about what God has done.

God has chosen.

This is a sovereign act of God, and he has chosen us as individuals. It's not the church that is chosen, but persons. Now, why has God chosen me?

I can't tell.

It will be something that will be a theme of worship for me and for all of us throughout eternity, that God should choose us. And when did he do it? Before the foundation of the world. That's before we were there. That's before any man had a say, before any man had a voice. God acted by choosing us.

And for what?

Well, first of all, if we were to be brought near to God in any sense, [00:15:05] the first thing that has to happen is, well, we can't get there as we are. We must be holy and blameless.

And that means God has given us a divine nature, a new nature that is suitable for his presence.

But, you know, the next thing he wanted was, he wanted you and me to be near to him, proximity. He wanted us to be before him.

But then he goes a step further, and he says, I don't only want you to be near. You could be in the queen's palace serving the dinners. You'd be very close to the queen, but there wouldn't be any relationship of love. And that's what God wanted, that we should be before him in love. And then verse five says, having marked us out beforehand for adoption through Jesus Christ to himself.

[00:16:08] Now here we come back to the character of the father. God chooses the father one's sons.

Adoption is a subject close to my heart. It's a wonderful thing. It means that somebody who isn't a son is placed into the position of a son. And that's exactly what God has done with us. We were far, as we learn later.

He wanted us to be near, but not only near. You could be in someone's house. But that doesn't make you the son or the daughter. But he wanted to have that relationship. Now why the relationship of a son? Well, there's a very deep reason behind this. And that really should make us marvel about the mind of God. What he says, essentially, is what is most important to me in the universe, the most important thing overall, is my son. [00:17:02] And here I have found a set of people, and I want to give them the highest blessing possible. Now what I'll do to them is, I'll make them as conformed as possible to my son. I'll make them sons. He has marked us out for adoption.

Now, of course, in him, and that's another key phrase, through or in Jesus Christ. And again, you find here that all starts with God. It's to himself.

And it's not about us getting saved. It's not about us not getting punished. But it's about the good pleasure of his will.

He did not need to do this, but he pleased to. To the praise, verse six, of the glory of his grace,

wherein he has taken us into favor in the beloved.

The ultimate aim of all is God's glory.

And what happens is that we become, you might say, vessels of display. [00:18:05] God says, I want the glory of my grace to be seen. Now, how can it be seen? Well, he has chosen you and me, and he has done something to us, that we become the vessels of display, if you like, to marvel at the glory of his grace.

And so we have been taken into favor. It's not merely accepted. But it means that as God looks on his own son with favor, he now looks onto us with that favor.

As someone said, he could not do more, and he will not do less. Now, just very quickly, a little story about this phrase, taken us into favor in the beloved. And apologies to any who have heard this before. But there was an auction of an important arts collection, [00:19:02] a hotel room packed full of people who wanted to bid for these valuable pieces of art. And to everyone's disappointment, the auctioneer starts by saying, well, the first item on the auction is this little portrait here. And it was one that didn't look very nice. He says, you know, it's the son of the owner. I mean, it was drawn by a comrade on a battlefield somewhere.

And who would like to bid for this? And nobody wanted to bid, and they were all waiting for the Rembrandt and the Picassos and all these valuable pieces. And then finally, the gardener said, I have \$50. I take the portrait of the son.

And he got this portrait, and then the auctioneer said, thank you very much. The auction is over.

And everybody was so disappointed and said, how is that possible? We've come here to buy all these pieces of art. And the auctioneer said, well, it all goes to the gardener. It's part of the testament that the owner made.

[00:20:02] He or whoever buys the portrait of my son, he receives the whole collection of these valuable pieces of art. So the gardener was taken into favor because he had the son.

And that's what God has done to us. However, although that's not the main theme and subject, God does not forget that actually we had offended and that we were sinners.

And so it says about Christ, the beloved, in whom, verse seven, we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of offenses according to the riches of his grace.

Now, we needed this redemption from our condition of bondage.

Redemption means to be bought free. And we also needed forgiveness because of the actions that we had committed. [00:21:05] But you see a slight difference here. It now speaks about the riches of his grace. You just cast your eye back to verse six.

It spoke about the glory of his grace.

Now, what's the difference? When it's a question of our needs, of our sins, of the forgiveness we

need, what it shows is the riches of God's grace. It's sufficient for that need. But when you want to see the glory of God's grace, you need to go further. You need to see what God has actually done, how he has taken us into favor in the beloved.

Verse eight says, this grace, which he has caused to abound towards us in all wisdom and intelligence. I was looking for a picture to convey the idea of abounding, and I found a picture of the Niagara Falls, [00:22:02] where you have these masses of water falling down.

And there just seems to be no limit. Of course, that's not infinite, but it's the best I could get as an illustration.

There seems to be no limit to these abounding masses of water. And so God's grace is boundless, overflowing, and limitless towards us.

And it has been manifested, as it says here, in all wisdom and intelligence. Actually, a wisdom that we can only marvel at, that God takes culprits, people who are guilty, and turns them into vessels that show his character, his grace, and display these beautiful things.

But God does more.

Verse nine says, having made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he has purposed in himself. [00:23:03] Now God really didn't need to do that. He could just do what we have been speaking about to us, but he didn't need to reveal to us the secrets of his heart about what he is going to do going forward. Now, what is he going to do? What is this will that he has made known? We'll see this perhaps very shortly in the next verse, but just as a first hint, the most important thing in God's heart is his son. And when he talks to us about his counsel, and about his will, his purpose, it is all about what he has in mind for his son. And that is verse ten, for the dispensation of the fullness of times to head up all things in Christ.

The things in the heavens, and the things upon the earth in him.

[00:24:03] You know there have been successive dispensations. We spoke about this at the Bible Basics last year. Man has been tested in various ways, but there is a dispensation still to come, which is called the dispensation of the fullness of times. And that's the millennium. And the people in Copenhagen and elsewhere, they are worrying about where this world is heading. And what is going to happen to everything around us?

Well, in a way, we are the only ones who know. God has told us.

He has said, all things one day will be headed up by Christ his son, the whole universe. Christ will reign. Now, perhaps you say, well, why is that a mystery? We know that from the Old Testament that Messiah will reign. We know that the Son of Man will be in charge of the universe. [00:25:01] So why is it a mystery that God has told us now? Well, the mystery is that Christ will not take this reign alone, but he will share it with his bride, with the church. As it actually says in the next verse, in whom we have also obtained an inheritance, being marked out beforehand according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his own will. In verse five, we are marked out for sonship. In verse 11, we are marked out for inheritance. As it says, if children, then heirs.

And so we will share this inheritance that is given to Christ. That we should be, verse 12, to the praise of his glory, we who have pre-trusted in the Christ.

[00:26:05] Again, you find that everything is according to God's will and to his praise, the praise of his glory. Now, when Paul says we here, strictly speaking, these are Christians who used to be Jews.

And that's why he says they had pre-trusted, they had believed first. But then he speaks about the Gentiles as well. In verse 13, he says, in whom ye also have trusted.

And that's part of this great mystery that Jews and Gentiles have both trusted and have been joined together. But here he says how this happened. You know, I mentioned earlier that Paul came to Ephesus, Acts 19. When he went there, he found disciples there who had not yet received the Holy Spirit. Now, Paul spoke to them, and [00:27:02] he told them the word of truth, the gospel of their salvation. And here in this letter, he comes back to this, and he says, you know, when you heard the word of truth and the glad tidings of your salvation, then having believed, you have been sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.

Now, that's another wonderful blessing from this land, which God gives us, the blessing of having the Holy Spirit dwelling in us as a divine person. Now, just on this matter of the seal, this is one of several pictures of the Holy Spirit. And in particular, in closing, I'd just like to mention three by way of comparison. With the seal, well, let me first say this.

[00:28:02] The three pictures, the seal, and the earnest, and the anointing, or unction.

All three speak of the same blessing, namely the Holy Spirit indwelling the believer. But they are different pictures, and they show a different aspect of that blessing. When it's a matter of the seal, the point is ownership and authenticity. If a letter has the seal of the king, it is genuine, it is authentic.

And here it says, God has sealed us. That means he has given us the stamp which says, you are mine forever. With the earnest, it's more like a down payment.

If you make the down payment for a house, you're a serious buyer, you will also pay the rest. And this is mentioned here, the second picture in the last verse of this section, [00:29:02] who is the earnest of our inheritance to the redemption of the acquired possession to the praise of the glory. Now, this redemption here is future. We already own the inheritance, but it's not yet redeemed. We've not yet taken possession of it, but what we have is the earnest. We have the down payment. God has given us his spirit. And if he's given us his spirit, he'll also give us the inheritance. And then the third one, which is not mentioned here just for completeness, the anointing and unction we can connect with enlightenment and also with preparation for service. Now this takes us to the end of this introductory section. It's very difficult to do it justice in this time. But if we can just take away, it starts with God. It's about his purpose, how he has blessed us, [00:30:02] how he has chosen us, marked out for sonship. He's made us fit to be in his presence. He wanted there to be the relationship of love between us.

He has dealt with what would have disturbed the offenses.

But also he has communicated his mind to us about what he's going to do in the future to head up everything in Christ. And as a guarantee, he has already given us the Holy Spirit. But now we need to enjoy this, and that's the subject of the second session.