

Fact Sheet for **“How Great a Salvation”**
Ephesians 1:1-14, Part I

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When the young people came up a little while ago I showed them a yellow die and a red die. I asked them, “How many times on the average would you have to roll these dice to get snake eyes. It was 36. To get snake eyes twice in a row it would be over 1,000 times. To get snake eyes four times in a row it would be over 1½ million times. To get snake eyes seven times in a row it’s even more astounding. If every person alive on earth today were given seven rolls there would be less than a 10% chance that anyone would roll snake eyes all seven times. When you begin calculating the probability of God’s 100% accuracy in hundreds of prophecies you find that this would quickly make the Bible an impossible book if God’s fingerprints weren’t on it. It absolutely could not have been written by humans guessing. The Bible is the only book ever to exist that can do this. We can trust that it is God’s Word in everything it says!

Now let’s begin to look at Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. What he wrote there can be absolutely trusted to be true to reality. *I will have a couple of parts to this sermon because these verses are so important to understand well.*

ESV 1 ¶ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus: 2 ¶ Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

But then he jumps right into it. Verses 3-14 translate one of the longest and most complicated sentences in the Greek New Testament. They rank among the premier verses in the Bible that speak of our salvation. They are also often battleground verses in the theological tussle between Calvinism and Arminianism... “Have Christians been specifically chosen for salvation or is it entirely up to us whether we are saved or not? Can we lose our salvation or is it eternally secure?” I have thought long and hard as to how to best approach these verses and here is my direction...

1. I will try to carefully say what these verses say. That sounds simple and straightforward enough but let me explain theology. Theology is a discussion of *everything* that the Bible has to say on particular subjects. To adequately cover a theological issue you have to look at each verse of that discussion in its own context. That takes time, especially for some tough subjects in theology. Although Ephesians 1:3-14 are critical in any discussion of Calvinism and Arminianism they do not contain the entirety of the biblical thoughts for that discussion. I don’t want to jump into a huge theological series of sermons on this issue. I have a definite theological position on this tussle and you are welcome to ask me about it, but I don’t want to delve into that broader discussion in these sermons.

2. This theological tussle can also so often overshadow *why* the apostle Paul wrote these words to the Ephesian believers. This is what I am after because the “why” can speak volumes to us today.

3a ¶ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

“blessed” – worthy of praise

“the God and Father” – the 1st person of the Trinity – All three persons of the Trinity will be spoken of in these verses.

“our Lord Jesus Christ” – Compare “God our Father” in verse 2. The 1st person of the Trinity is our Father. The 2nd person of the Trinity is our Lord Jesus Christ.

Pay close attention to something else. The words referring to people in these verses are all plural (“our”, “we”, “us”, “you”). This may sound insignificant but it is not, especially as you try to integrate these verses into a broader theological discussion.

who has blessed us in Christ

“has blessed” – This is the verbal form of the adjective “blessed”. Here it has a different shade of

meaning. God the Father has conferred favor on us in Christ. Notice too that the Father's blessing of us is put in the past tense. It is referring to something that he has done.

with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,

This favor that the Father has conferred on us is spiritual, not physical. The rest of these verses also make it clear that these spiritual blessings relate to our salvation in Christ.

⁴ even as he chose us in him

"chose" – This could also be translated "selected". The Father chose us in Christ. (This is also the word we get "elected" from.)

I'll tell you what this does not mean. It does not mean that the Father foresaw what we would decide about Christ then chose us because we would one day choose Christ. That would be my like treating you to lunch at a restaurant and waiting to see what you would order. Say you ordered pot roast. After you ordered then I would say, "I chose that you would order pot roast." In reality I chose nothing. You did the choosing. When it says here that that he (the Father) chose us in him (Christ) this is the Father's choice and his alone. Another way to put it is that this was his sovereign choice of us. It did not depend on what he foresaw we would do with Christ.

before the foundation of the world,

The Father sovereignly chose us before this earth even existed.

that we should be holy and blameless before him.

This was the purpose of the Father's choice.

"holy" – Another translation of this word is "saints". It is the same root word as in 1:1, "To the saints who are in Ephesus".

"blameless" – "without blemish" – In the Septuagint this word is used of the animals that were to be used to sacrifice. They should be without blemish.

Now each of us has a sin nature and we are not in and of ourselves holy and blameless. We are only holy and blameless in Christ. That is why Paul refers to them as "saints" in verse 1. We are in process.

In love

These two words can be difficult to place within the broader sentence of verses 3-14. Should they be placed with verse 5 (ESV, NASB, NIV, NLT)? If so God's love would be seen in predestination. Or should they be placed with verse 4 (KJV, NKJV, NET)? If so we should respond in love because of the great salvation God has given us. Both of these thoughts have merit, but which did Paul mean? I'm not entirely certain.

I'm going to stop Part I of this sermon right here. Let me delve into the "why" of these verses for a moment. Paul is presenting these ideas in part to encourage them in their faith. God has done some great and marvelous things for them and he wants them to know this.

Take a look for a moment of what this world has to offer to people about our origins. We have randomly evolved from apes, who ultimately evolved from nothing. There is no God. It is all by chance. We vanish from existence when we die. We are not special. This sure changes what we choose to live or die for. Why should we be moral? Why should we not be greedy? Why should we not live for the moment? Why not suicide?

But for the Christian the Bible gives us a very different outlook on life. God the Father has blessed us in Christ. He chose us before the foundation of the world. He saved us in Christ. And he desires our holiness. This is a wonderful reason to tell people about the Gospel. This week there were decisions for Christ at the CEF day camp. There were decisions for Christ at Bohemia Mining Days. Was and is all the effort worth it? Absolutely!