

Ephesians 1:1-14
The People of His Image

What do you think of when you think of this word: Church? Do you think about a building, an experience, a group? Do you think of a gathering of people? Or, is the first thought that consumes your mind when you think of church God? Some of you may say well of course and if that is your case, I want to challenge you to ensure that you have not given God the assuming position of an afterthought.

A.W. Tozer, in *Knowledge of the Holy* said, "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us." I am so afraid that too often we miss God in our thoughts of Church. We are far too consumed with our preferences or our opinions of things that we miss what Church is all about. When I say all about I am talking in terms of what is essential. What does that mean? The term essential is a foundational term. By essential I mean that apart from this thing other things are not true. For example: It is impossible for me to wear shoes without shoes. Another example: air is essential for you to live. The body cannot survive without air. Now people do all sorts of things to breath, how they breathe is not as essential as breathing itself. In terms of church, we need to concentrate on the what first over the how. We are quick to answer the how question

If we are to understand the church we must begin with what is absolutely essential to the church. This is a better way for us to begin than for us to begin with what the church does. We need to answer who we are before we get to what we do. We need to ask what, if removed from the church, causes the church to no longer be the church? You and I know the answer. The answer is God, but I am afraid that we are too quickly satisfied with that answer when instead we should worship at such an answer. If we are all about God then our minds should desire to know more about what it means to know this God as well as to worship this God.

We are starting a wonderful new series here at Oxford called *The Church: God's Glory on Display*. There is so much that is in that title and I look forward to learning these great truths about our identity.

Today we are going to read Ephesians 1:1-14 and as we do, we approach one of the summits of Scripture. To attempt to get all that we can out of this text is like trying to breathe in every particle of air. As we look into Ephesians we are going to approach a mirror that gives us a glimpse of eternity and you will be surprised at what you see. Not only will we see God, but some of us will in some way that we cannot fully comprehend, see ourselves as well.

Ephesus was written to Gentile believers and Paul's point is to assure them that they are a part of God's cosmic plan and not an afterthought in the purpose and plan of God. He writes to assure them that they are the apple of God's eye!

But as we are reading this text together today I want to put this thought before you:

The Church is the people of God, formed by the will of God, to bear the image of God.

Read Text

1. The Church is the People of God (1-10)

When you think about "the people of God", how do you think? Do you think about some ethnic group such as the Jews or do you think as a Christian and think about those who by faith have received Jesus? Peter was very clear in his message before the religious leaders of the Jews when he said, *There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12)*. John says, *The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of*

God (John 1:9-13). Those who believe in Jesus are the people of God. There are not multiple ways to salvation, there is one way to salvation.

I want you to notice the language of Ephesians. *Before the foundation of the world (1:4); Created in Christ Jesus (2:10); That he might create (2:15); Put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness (4:24)*. Do you hear anything repeated? This is creation language. What on earth does creation have to do with our understanding of the Church? Everything! Ephesians summons us back to Genesis.

We open the pages of Genesis and what do we see? We see a God preparing a world fit for a people. Water and land are separate, time is established by having a greater light to rule the day and a lesser light to rule the night. Man is created and then placed in a Garden filled with fruit trees. The man and woman are then instructed to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth with their kind - worshipers and obeyers. We learn from this that God was creating a people for himself, a people who were to bear his image, and a people who were to be with him.

This story is the story that the pages of Scripture tells in every twist and turn. From Adam and Eve we see Seth, and then Noah, and then Abraham, and then David. The people of God are the people of his own choosing. We, for reason that we don't fully understand, are the chosen people of God, the elect. Now, don't get in a tizzy as some are so prone to do when they hear the term elect. The doctrine of election is perhaps one of the most difficult for some, but in reality it is one of the most glorious! The doctrine of election tells this great story of a gracious God of salvation who saves! Election was not the idea of some theologian, it is right here in black and white print. Look at verses 3-10. How can it be another way?

Isn't this good news? Have you ever been not included in something or felt left out? Election says that God chose you before he painted the sky with blue and covered the tops of the mountains with snow. Before you knew of him, he had your days numbered and knew your every thought!

See how connected we are in the story of creation. This is not just some story separated from us, this is our story. Just as it was God's will to create so it was his plan to form the church, to choose a people that he would save? Why did God choose you? Why did he create? Just as creation is dependent upon Him so too is the Church.

2. The Church is Formed by the Will of God (11-14)

As we continue in the Genesis story to understand the church, we know that God made man in a Garden to worship and obey him. But we also know that something went terribly wrong. It is not long after we get a glimpse of the garden of Genesis 2 that Genesis 3 occurs and mankind is thrust into darkness, but God faithfully carries out his plan to have a people and even sets out a way for the greatest enemy to be defeated by the seed of a woman who would crush the head of the serpent. The rest of the Bible tells the story of God preparing the world for the coming salvation, the day when this promised one would come.

The sin of the creatures did not mean that the purpose of the Creator was finished. The final word would be said from him, only this time from a cross. He would redeem, and the way that he would redeem was nothing short of miraculous! God came to us in the sent Son to bring about salvation. Again, we must understand that this was his choice from before the foundation of the world. This was not some second thought from God but the choice to create was a choice to redeem. Before the all wise God laid the foundation of the world he chose to redeem it. Mind blowing, I know, but this is just taking Scripture at its word. Look at the text in verses 7-10.

Let's think back to Genesis. Do you remember what God told Adam and Eve to do? He told them, *be fruitful and multiply (Genesis 1:28)*. What is God's mandate for the church? *Go therefore and make disciples (Matthew 28:18-20)*. The Church, as God's humanity formed in Christ, is to seek to multiply. How do we do this? By not being self focused but turning our attention to understand our purpose as those who bear the marks of redemption. We who have received this gift of the love of God respond to this love by seeking to

multiply. We are his chosen people whom he has redeemed and we tell the world that they too can respond to this God of grace in faith. Our existence stands for this purpose - to serve as the ambassadors of reconciliation, of salvation available in the name of Jesus in the power of the Spirit, to the Glory of the Father.

It is good news that God will to save those who call upon his name. It is not only good news, it is the greatest news for all who have been wrecked by sin. What a message that God would use us to bear witness to his salvation. Some of us may think that this is the long way around, but this is the plan of God from the beginning and we get to be a part of his plan to redeem the world.

I want us to really grasp this biblical truth this AM. Before we understand what we do it is so important for us to understand who we are. Who are we? We are his, we belong to him. We are the people of his image.

3. The Church Bears the Image of God (3-14)

Some of you are saying, wait a minute what do you mean that the church bears the image of God? What about everyone else, I thought that every person was made in the image of God? To that we say, every person bears the image of God and is thereby has the capacity of having a relationship with him, but everyone is not in relationship with him. Humanity bears the image of God but the image is defaced by sin, not erased but defaced. God, through sending the Son is the way by which God is reversing disobedience and removing the defacing of an image with his own image.

This is why Ephesians 2:8-10 says that it says. Look over at it. This is why all the creation language of Ephesians. This is also why Romans 8:29 says, *For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be informed into the image of his Son....* Through the redeeming ministry of Jesus, we are made to bear the image of God in its fullest sense. We get a foretaste of that image now through the Spirit and fully when we are resurrected.

We are formed in the image of God but we need to ask, who is this God whose image we are formed into? Genesis again helps us. In Genesis as God is creating man, he says, *Let us create man in our image, after our likeness...* (Genesis 1:26). Who is this God? God is One and in that oneness there are three persons - Father, Son, and Spirit. Christians are Trinitarian and if you reject the Trinity then you are not Christian. I did not say that you have to fully understand the Trinity to be a Christian, thank God for that, but a Christian is one who worships God as he has revealed himself in the text, as he is - God in three persons, blessed Trinity.

But we don't have to just go to Genesis to see the Trinity, look at our text from Ephesians. Let's do an exercise and see if we can learn the Trinity together from Ephesians 1. Look at the personal pronouns in the text (he, him). Who is the antecedent to these pronouns? The Father or the Son, or the Spirit? Let's see if we can get it right:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he (F) chose us in him (S) before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him (F). In love he (F) predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his (F) will, to the praise of his (F) glorious grace, with which he (F) has blessed us in the Beloved (S). In him (F) we have redemption through his (S) blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his (F) grace, which he (F) lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his (F) will, according to his (F) purpose, which he (F) set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him (S), things in heaven and things on earth.

In him (S) we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him (F) who works all things according to the counsel of his (F) will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his (F) glory. In him (F) you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him (S), were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his (F) glory. (Ephesians 1:3-14 ESV)

The God who existed from all eternity in Love in perfect communion, expressed his Love in Creation, in calling a people to himself to bear his own image - the Church.

This is why we dwell in community - He has never existed without community, a community of 3 persons. Each time we gather as a body to worship, the visible who are gathered, attest to the invisible reality of the Trinity.

This is why we love - He is love. We love him, we love each other, and we love others.

This is why we spread the message of redemption - He has redeemed us and called us his very own.

Don't you love Him? Aren't you glad that he has set you apart to enjoy his presence forever? Hopefully when you think of church your first thoughts will be of him just as he is. Do you see why this takes constant reflection from us to understand how great this God is?

If you are here today and want to be a part of the church, want to bear the image of Christ, then you do so by faith in the Son. We are going to participate in the Lord's Supper and as we take the bread and the crushed fruit of the vine we are going to remember, but this can be a memory for you too, but you have to trust in the God of creation who is also the God of redemption.

Let's pray.