

The Book of Ephesians

Week 2: Introductory Doxology (1:3-14)

Overview

After his standard greeting (1:1-2), Paul begins the letter with a doxology, that is, a hymn of praise to the Triune God. As Ephesians is arguably Paul's final letter before his martyrdom, it is fitting that he would preface it with a sort of swan song, containing a cumulative summary of his theology: the revelation of YHWH in the incarnate Son, Jesus Christ, and his saving person and work. The words "in Christ" are a frequent refrain throughout these verses and undoubtedly indicate Paul's Christological theme and focus. And, like the ancient song of praise, the *Te Deum*, this song of Paul talks about the object of our faith—Jesus Christ—not our faith itself.

The doxology itself can be divided into three distinct sections, each corresponding to a person of the Trinity, namely, Father (1:3-6), Son (1:7-12), and Holy Spirit (1:13-14), and these references coincide with another threefold division, that of the history of our salvation: the foundation of salvation before the creation of the world, the Old Testament preparation of salvation among Israel, and the calling of all into the church, both Jews and Gentiles alike.

"[In Ephesians] Paul ... gives artistic expression to three really great thoughts that comprehend everything that has existence: eternity before the foundation of the world, the history of things on earth, and the eternal destiny in glory with God."

Election by grace (1:3-6)

The first verse of this section, verse 3, begins the doxology with the word "Blessed," announcing the intent and direction of the succeeding verses. *"When we 'say the blessing' at mealtime, [it] is man's dutiful response for good things received."* (Koehler 190)

Similar to his expressed intent to the Corinthian church to "know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2), Paul hones in on what he deems important to the life of the Church: the Father blessing the world in Christ. *"As a rule, it is not until the close of a Christian's life that he comes to realize by faith that everything he has experienced in life has been a blessing of God and that such blessing was in Christ."* (Koehler 195)

"The doxology is the rhythmic expression of the apostle's strong sense of gratitude which moves his heart. Paul is personally involved in the three great events he has mentioned: the election by grace, the calling of Israel, and the calling of the Gentiles." (Koehler 205)

Calling of Israel (1:7-12)

The word used in reference to Christ, “the Beloved,” is the same word spoken to and of Jesus at his baptism and Transfiguration by God the Father: “This is my beloved Son...”

The first half of the hymn encompasses eternity, while the second half is restricted to the history of the church with the outlook upon the personal consummation.

Calling of the Gentiles (1:13-14)

“The fact that [Israel was] given possessions of the land of Canaan constituted the pledge, the down payment, for the eventual consummation, which was to be the coming of Christ in the flesh. The earthly inheritance was a type of the heavenly inheritance.” (Koehler 233)

“Believing is not a mere knowing about Christ; it is hoping in him and trusting him, combined eo ipso with love for him. To believe means to be completely absorbed in Christ. That alone constitutes true living. Whoever contents himself with eating and drinking and kindred sensual enjoyment merely vegetates like the grass of the field.” (Koehler 236)

Sealing has a three-fold significance:

1. Marking of ownership of the one whose image appears on the seal.
2. Being securely shielded from violation or abuse.
3. A means by which a message is certified. {The Holy Spirit in giving faith assures the Christian of his final protection and forgiveness of sins.}

“[F]aith is everything in the Christian’s life. Faith is, we repeat, a being absorbed entirely in Christ, as Paul expresses it in a twofold way: ‘Christ lives in me,’ and ‘The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who love me and gave himself for me’ (Gal. 2:20).” (Koehler 238)