

Ephesians and Colossians



GENERAL EDITORS

Mikeal C. Parsons and Charles H. Talbert

ADVISORY BOARD

Paul J. Achtemeier

Loveday Alexander

C. Clifton Black

Susan R. Garrett

Francis J. Moloney

Ephesians and Colossians



CHARLES H. TALBERT

B
BakerAcademic
Grand Rapids, Michigan

© 2007 by Charles H. Talbert

Published by Baker Academic
a division of Baker Publishing Group
P.O. Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287
www.bakeracademic.com

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Talbert, Charles H.

Ephesians and Colossians / Charles H. Talbert.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and indexes.

ISBN 10: 0-8010-3128-1 (pbk.)

ISBN 978-0-8010-3128-1 (pbk.)

1. Bible. N.T. Ephesians—Commentaries. 2. Bible. N.T. Colossians—Commentaries. I. Title

BS2695.53.T35 2007

227/.507—dc22

2007033127

Scripture quotations labeled NJB are from THE NEW JERUSALEM BIBLE, copyright © 1985 by Darton, Longman & Todd, Ltd. and Doubleday, a division of Random House, Inc. Reprinted by permission.

Scripture quotations labeled NRSV are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright © 1989, by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations labeled RSV are from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright 1952 [2nd edition, 1971] by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

To
M. R. Cherry
from whom I learned a lot
and to whom I owe a lot

Contents



Foreword	ix
Preface	xi
Abbreviations	xiii

Introduction	3
--------------	---

Ephesians

Ephesians 1:1–2	31
Ephesians 1:3–14	41
Ephesians 1:15–2:10	53
Ephesians 2:11–22	76
Ephesians 3:1–21	95
Ephesians 4:1–16	107
Ephesians 4:17–5:21	120
Ephesians 5:22–6:9	136
Ephesians 6:10–20	158
Ephesians 6:21–24	170

Colossians

Colossians 1:1–2	175
Colossians 1:3–23	182
Colossians 1:24–2:5	198
Colossians 2:6–23	206
Colossians 3:1–4:6	225
Colossians 4:7–18	240

Bibliography	249
Subject Index	270
Index of Modern Authors	273
Index of Scripture and Ancient Sources	277

Ephesians 1:3–14



Introductory Matters

Ephesians begins with a “blessing” (Heb. *berakah*) in 1:3–14. Although in Greek it is one long sentence, English translations break it up into multiple sentences. For example, the NRSV has six sentences (1:3–4, 5–6, 7–8a, 8b–10, 11–12, 13–14) that are different from the JB’s six (1:3, 4–7b, 7c–8, 9–10, 11–12, 13–14); the NIV has eight sentences (1:3, 4, 5–6, 7–8, 9–10, 11–12, 13a, 13b–14) that are different from the NEB’s eight (1:3, 4–6, 7a–b, 7c–8, 9–10, 11a–b, 11c–12, 13–14); while the TEV has fifteen sentences in five paragraphs (1:3–4a, 4b–8a, 8b–10, 11–12, 13–14). Long sentences are frequent in Ephesians (e.g., 1:15–23; 2:1–7; 3:2–13; 3:14–19; 4:1–6; 4:11–16; 6:14–20); they are integral to its style.

The origin of the material in 1:3–14 has been a matter of debate. Some have argued that it comes from preexisting liturgical matter, either a hymn (e.g., Lohmeyer 1926; Schille 1965, 65–73) or a prayer associated with baptism (e.g., Dahl 1951, 263). Others have seen it as a redaction of Col 1:5, 9, 13–14, 16 (e.g., Boismard 1999, 81–86; Mitton 1951, 281, 283). Most scholars today tend to view 1:3–14 as an ad hoc composition. They say there is no preexisting source for this segment of the letter; the author himself has composed the long sentence (e.g., Best 2004, 108–10; Deichgräber 1967, 65; Lincoln 1990, 14; Maurer 1951–1952; O’Brien 1979, 509).

The arrangement of the material within the long sentence of 1:3–14 has long perplexed scholars. One proposal is that 1:3–14 consists of three sections (1:3–4, 5–8, 9–14) introduced by three aorist participles: *eulogēsas* (“having blessed,” 1:3), *proorīsas* (“having predestined,” 1:5), and *gnōrīsas* (“having made known,” 1:9) (e.g., Maurer 1951–1952, 154; Gnilka 1971, 59). Another divides the long sentence into three by taking *en hō* (“in whom,” 1:7, 11, 13) as the clue (e.g., Nestle-Aland 27th ed.; UBS 3rd ed.), yielding four sections (1:3–6, 7–10, 11–12, 13–14). Another proposes six strophes (1:3b–4, 5–6, 7–8, 9–10, 11–12, 13–14) with strophes 1, 2, and 4

(concerning the work of God) being introduced by aorist participles, and with strophes 3, 5, and 6 (dealing with the redemption through Jesus) being introduced by the relative *en hō* (Grelot 1989). Yet another argues for three sections (1:1–6, 7–12, 13–14), each ending with the refrain “to the praise of his glory” (e.g., Cambier 1963, 100–103). Other scholars propose a chiasmic arrangement of all (A, 1:3–4; B, 1:5–9b; C, 1:10–11a; B′, 1:11b–13a; A′, 1:13b–14; so Boismard 1999, 81–86) or part of the section (A, 1:4; B, 1:5; C, 1:6; D, 1:7a–b; C′, 1:7c–8; B′, 1:9; A′, 1:10; so Thomson 1995, 46–83). Still another argues that after the introductory verse 3, there are two parallel structures (A, 1:4–6a; B, 1:6b–7; C, 1:8–10; A′, 1:11–12; B′, 1:13; C′, 1:14; so Iovino 1986). J. T. Sanders’s widely accepted conclusion that “every attempt to provide a strophic structure for Eph 1:3–14 has failed” (1965, 227) may be supplemented by saying that every attempt to find some formal arrangement based on key words or a variety of parallelisms has failed. So Schnackenburg contends that there is no “clear-cut division” of the parts of 1:3–14; rather, there is “a definite movement of thought” (1991, 46–47). Lincoln (1990, 15), Best (2004, 110), and O’Brien (1999, 90) agree. The structure of 1:3–14 is to be sought first of all in its content rather than in a formal pattern.

The question of the function of the unit, 1:3–14, has been addressed by P. T. O’Brien (1977, 1979). He proposes that introductory thanksgivings in Paul’s letters had any of four functions: (1) pastoral, expressing the apostle’s deep concern and love for the recipients; (2) didactic, instructing the recipients with vital teaching related to the gospel; (3) parenetic, emphasizing the ethical implications of Paul’s teaching; and (4) epistolary, indicating the key themes of the letter (1977, 13–15). Applying this schema to the Ephesian eulogy (1:3–14), he concluded that it has epistolary, didactic, and parenetic functions (1979, 514). That is, the opening blessing introduces key themes of Ephesians (e.g., in the heavenlies, in Christ, grace of God, mystery, Holy Spirit) and teaches about the gospel and its ethical implications.

Tracing the Train of Thought

This unit is a *berakah*, a conventional form for blessing God (cf. Tob 13; Sg Three 29–34; 1 Macc 4:30–33; Luke 1:68–79). Both pagan and Jewish traditions are compatible with Ephesians beginning as it does. Hesiod’s *Works and Days* begins with a hymn and a prayer; *b. Berakoth* 32a states that one should always first utter praises and then pray. It is also possible to find ancient letters that begin with a *berakah* (e.g., Josephus, *Ant.* 8.53, has Hiram of Sidon write to King Solomon in response to the latter’s request for help in building the temple, saying after the greeting, “It is

proper to bless God for having given you . . . your father's royal power"; cf. 1 Kgs 5:7; and 2 Chr 2:11–12, where the blessing comes second in the letter; cf. 2 Cor 1:3–7; 1 Pet 1:3–5). When one blessed God, the blessing expressed not a wish ("may he be blessed") but a declaration ("he is blessed"; Hoehner 2002, 162). The omission of the verb "to be" in verse 3 is no surprise. The omission of the verb is common in eulogies. The verb supplied should be "is," not "be": **Blessed is God.**

It is not possible to discern any clear-cut formal arrangement of the text, but it is possible to identify a definite movement of thought. The first thing to note is that verse 3 is the main statement to which everything that follows up to the end of verse 14 is syntactically linked, as indicated by the *kathōs* at the beginning of verse 4. What follows in verses 4–14 indicates why God is to be praised. Verse 3, then, is the heading and verses 4–14 elaborate its content (Louw 1999). "The author declares God *eulogētos* and then tries in one sweep to enumerate all his reasons for eulogizing him" (Lincoln 1990, 12).

The second thing to note is that the two movements of the unit's thought are determined by the varying uses of "we/us" and "you." In particular, to whom do "we" and "you" refer in verse 13? The option that seems to fit the context best is that the "we" are Jewish Christians who were in Christ before the "you," namely, Gentile Christians who make up the readers of the letter (e.g., Alletti 2001, 74; O'Brien 1999, 116; Schlier 1963, 66–68; MacDonald 2000, 203).

Verse 3 celebrates the blessedness of God in terms of who he is (**the God and father of our Lord**

An Outline of Ephesians 1:3–14

Berakah: blessing God for blessings bestowed on believers (1:3–3:21)

Generalized introductory blessing:

"Blessed is God . . . who has blessed us." (1:3)

Movement 1: God's gracious acts, before and within history, benefit all Christians ("we" = all Christians). (1:4–10)

Two synonymous expressions for God's precreation activity (1:4–6a)

Election: "he chose us . . . before the foundation of the world" (1:4)

Predestination: "he predestined us . . . for the praise of his grace" (1:5–6a)

Two complementary manifestations of God's grace within history (1:6b–9)

Redemption: "with which he graced us in the beloved, in whom we have redemption . . . according to . . . his grace" (1:6b–7)

Revelation of the mystery: "which he showered on us . . . making known to us the mystery of his will . . . to bring all things together in Christ" (1:8–10)

Movement 2: God's acts set the goal for all Christians, whoever they may be ("we" probably = Jewish Christians [2:1, 3]; "you" = Gentile Christians). (1:11–14)

We: "In him, we who first hoped in the Christ have been appointed to live for the praise of his glory" (1:11–12; cf. Jer 13:11; 1 Pet 1:7)

You: "In him you . . . were sealed with the Holy Spirit . . . [awaiting] redemption . . . to the praise of his glory" (1:13–14)

Jesus Christ) and what he has done (**blessed us** [= all Christians] **with every spiritual blessing**). The spiritual blessings are characterized as being **in the heavenlies** and **in Christ**. The phrase “in the heavenlies” appears five times in Ephesians (1:3; 1:20, Christ is at God’s right hand in the heavenlies; 2:6, Christians share with Christ in his resurrection power, seated in the heavenlies; 3:10, the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places; 6:12, the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenlies). The reference is to the realm of transcendence, the spiritual dimension beyond the world of sense. This realm includes evil powers (2:2; 6:12) as well as those aligned with God and Christ. Hence when the author of Ephesians speaks of blessings from God bestowed on Christians, he specifies the relevant heavenlies as those “in Christ.” Does the instrumental sense apply here or should “in Christ” be understood as incorporation into Christ? Context inclines one to read “in Christ” here as “Christian.” The reference indicates what part of the heavenlies is meant (cf. 2:6): it is the Christ part. The opening statement of verse 3 is elaborated in verses 4–14.

Movement one (1:4–10) consists of two parts. The first (1:4–6a) speaks about God’s blessings before the creation of the world; the second (1:6b–10) speaks about the divine blessings within history. God’s precreation activity is described by the terms “chose” (*exeloxato*, 1:4a) and “predestined” (*proorisas*, 1:5a). The former act of God is described as **he chose us** (= all Christians) **by means of Christ** (= “in him,” understood instrumentally) **before the foundation of the world** (1:4a, cf. 2 Thess 2:13; 2 Tim 1:9; 1 Pet 1:2). The purpose of the choice is given as **in order that we** (= all Christians) **should be holy and blameless in his presence in love** (1:4b). “In love” should be understood as the third in a series of qualifiers, the first two being “holy” and “blameless” (cf. Phil 1:9–10; 1 Thess 3:12–13). The latter act of God is spoken of as **having predestined us for sonship through (dia) Jesus Christ for himself, according to the good pleasure of his will** (1:5). There is some similarity between this letter’s remarks about election and predestination and the thought of Qumran.

The result of the predestining act is **the praise of the glory of his grace** (1:6a). “Grace” was a key term in Mediterranean antiquity to designate a gift bestowed by a benefactor, human or divine. Praise was one of the acceptable and expected responses to the gracious benefactor by the recipients of the gift. Praise was especially relevant when the benefactor was a deity. For example, one aretology of Isis begins, “Hail . . . Giver of all blessings,” to which the response is “praise” (Danker 1982, 180–81). The earliest extant aretology of Isis (first/second century BC) reads, “May our word of praise not be lacking in the face of the magnitude of your benefaction” (G. H. R. Horsley 1981, 1:10–12). Apuleius’s *Metamorphoses* tells how

Isis delivered Lucius from being in the form of a donkey. In response the young man praises Isis for her benefactions in a doxology (Danker 1982, 178–79). A similar phenomenon is found in *1 En.* 27.3, 5. Such praise was often written in flowery prose similar to that of Ephesians.

How should “in him” (1:4a) be understood? Are Christians chosen “in Christ” (location) or “through Christ” (instrumentality) before the foundation of the world? Given the fact that predestination is said to be done “through [*dia*] Christ” (1:5), it would seem preferable to take “in Christ” in verse 4 as instrumental and translate it also “through Christ” or “by means of Christ.” Both God’s choice and his predestining his children were by means of Christ. Consequently, Christ is not the elect one (contra Witherington 1994, 248–49), but the instrument of election. After all, the text says, “he chose *us*.”

When do election and predestination take place? The contention that election and predestination occur within history (Newman 1996; Sloan 1993; Eskola 1998) is untenable. “Before the foundation of the world” (1:4) controls the reading.

What is the relation of “he chose us through [*en*] Christ” (1:4) to “having predestined us through [*dia*] Christ” (1:5)? Aorist participles (like that in 1:5) can express identical action, antecedent action, or simultaneous action. They cannot express subsequent action (Robertson 1934, 858–63). This means that predestination does not follow election; rather, predestination is either the ground or cause of election, or it is another way of talking about the same thing, God’s precreation saving activity. Paul, using traditional material, says in Rom 8:29 that God foreknew and predestined; the terms are virtually identical in their meaning. The same is true here (Best 2004, 123; K. Barth 1957–1967, II/2, 13).

What is the significance of using plural pronouns in connection with election and predestination (“chose us”; “predestined us”)? Does this mean that predestination/election is corporate (e.g., Newman 1996)?

Predestination at Qumran

“I know through the understanding that comes from Thee that righteousness is not in a hand of flesh, that man is not master of his way and that it is not in mortals to direct their steps. . . . Thou alone didst create the just and establish him from the womb for the time of goodwill, that he might hearken to Thy covenant and walk in Thy ways. . . . But the wicked Thou didst create for the time of Thy wrath, Thou didst view them from the womb to the Day of Massacre, for they walk in the way which is not good.”

—1QH XV, 12–21; trans. Vermes 1987, 202

The plural pronoun is used because the letter is written to a church or churches, and what is said includes both those churches and the author and others like him. There is no way that a singular pronoun could have been used in this context. To attempt to derive corporate election from such data is overinterpretation. Individuals are chosen and predestined, but these individuals make up a group (Hoehner 2002, 176).

It goes without saying that there is no hint of the church as being preexistent in this text (contra Strecker 2000, 569). The instrumental reading of “in him” (= “through him”) rules this out.

The language of election and predestination found at Qumran offers a contrast to Paul’s usage (e.g., CD II, 7; 1QS I, 10–11). According to Qumran sources, the course of cosmic powers and humankind were ordained in God’s act of creation (1QH IX [= I], 10–20; 1QS III, 15). This involved both the election of the righteous and the condemnation of the wicked, a double-edged decree. In Rom 8:28–30, however, there is only a single-edged predestination. The same is true for Ephesians.

The second part of movement one (1:4–10), found in verses 6b–10, speaks about two complementary dimensions of God’s grace manifested within history: redemption (1:6b–7) and revelation (1:8–10). The first of these connects to the conclusion of the previous unit, “for the praise of the glory of his grace” (1:6a). Verse 6b begins a new segment building on the words of verse 6a about God’s grace: **with which he graced us in the beloved**. “The beloved” is a technical term for Jesus (cf. Mark 1:11; 9:7; *1 Clem.* 59.2–3; Ign. *Smyrn.* pref.). Thus the location of God’s grace is in his beloved, the Christ. The author continues: **by means of whom** (“in whom,” but understood instrumentally) **we have the redemption through his blood** (1:7a; Rom 3:24–25; Col 1:20; 1 Pet 1:2; 1 John 1:7; 5:6–8). Jesus’ death is the concrete means by which Christians have experienced their redemption (= deliverance), which in this case is described as **the forgiveness of trespasses** (1:7b; Col 1:14; elsewhere, more than forgiveness; Eph 1:14; 4:30). The undisputed letters of Paul do not have the term *aphesis* (“forgiveness”), although in Rom 4:7 (quoting Ps 32:1–2) Paul uses the cognate verb. Elsewhere Paul speaks of forgiveness in other terms. This segment ends as it began, with a reference to God’s grace: **according to the riches of his grace** (1:7c). One could translate, “according to the riches of his benefaction.”

The second dimension of God’s grace manifested within history appears in verses 8–10. Again, the new thought develops the last-mentioned ingredient of the previous segment: “according to the riches of his grace” (1:7c). It is the grace **which he lavished on us** (= all Christians) **with all wisdom and understanding** (1:8), **having made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure, which he set forth through Christ** (“in him,” understood instrumentally) (1:9) **as a**

plan (*oikonomian*, with a passive connotation; cf. 3:2, 9) **for the fullness of time, to gather up everything** (= the cosmos as a whole) **through the Christ** (“in the Christ,” understood instrumentally), **things in the heavenlies and things on the earth** (1:10). In 1 Cor 15:24–28 Paul spoke of the divine plan for Christ’s bringing harmony to the cosmos in military terms, as the subjugation of God’s enemies by Christ. This metaphor will be echoed in Eph 1:20–23. Here another metaphor is used. The term “to gather up everything” means literally to bring to a head. It was originally applied to adding up a sum. In Greek practice, the sum of a column of figures was given at the top, not the bottom. So the process was called “bringing to a head.” In rhetoric it was used to refer to the summary of the argument of a speech, and eventually to any kind of summarizing. It suggests the gathering of a number of scattered items into some kind of unity. So here in Eph 1:10 God’s plan is to gather all things (the whole cosmos) into a unity through Christ.

There has been a revelation to Christians. It is a revelation of the mystery of God’s will. The Qumran scrolls also connect a revelation of a mystery with a preordained plan (e.g., 1QS IV, 18–19). In apocalyptic Jewish writings, “mystery” usually refers to an event that will be revealed at the end of history (cf. 4 Ezra 14.5–6). God’s prophets, however, may know of it now because God reveals to them “the things that must come to pass” (LXX Dan 2:28–29). At Qumran “mystery” can refer to an event that has already been realized in the community’s life (e.g., 1QS XI, 5–8). In the genuine Pauline letters the mystery is an eschatological teaching about the participation of believers in the glory of the world to come (Rom 11:25; 1 Cor 2:6; 15:51). In Col 1:26–27 the mystery is “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” In Eph 1:10 the mystery is God’s plan to gather up everything by means of the Messiah. This is the overall vision. In 3:6 it is that Gentiles have become part of the one body, a part of the overall plan. One may infer from this statement that Ephesians assumes (as does Colossians) that the unity and harmony of the cosmos have suffered serious dislocation, on earth and in the heavenlies.

Against the background of this assumption, the overriding theme of the letter may be understood. The theme is that the cosmic, redemptive purpose of God, predestined from eternity and executed through the instrumentality of Christ, is to overcome hostility and divisions in the universe by bringing all things together under the headship of Christ. This task includes not only overcoming racial (Jew-Gentile) and household divisions on earth but also an ultimate restoration of harmony in the heavenlies. A revelation of this mystery has been given to Christians as an expression of God’s grace. This reordering is accomplished “through Christ” (1:10; *en autō*, understood instrumentally). In Eph 1:22 God places all things under the feet of the exalted Christ and makes him head over

all things so that Christ fills all things (cf. 1:23; 4:10). That is, the Christ is God’s instrument to restore order to the fractured cosmos. Hence the instrumental sense of “in Christ” seems appropriate here.

Movement two (1:11–14) speaks about God’s acts as setting the goal for all Christians, whoever they may be. In this unit there are two components, one referring to *us* (1:11–12) and the other to *you* (plural; 1:13–14). Both components connect to the last-mentioned item in the previous segment (Christ, 1:10b). The first component (1:11–12) begins: **through whom** (“in whom,” understood instrumentally) **we were appointed, having been predestined according to the purpose of the one who works in everything according to the counsel of his will, with the result that we who hoped beforehand in the Christ** (= Christ as the object of hope) **might be for the praise of his glory.** “We” who hoped beforehand in the Christ must be Jewish Christians who came to faith before the Gentile readers of this letter (cf. 2:1–5, 11–22; cf. Col 4:11). The outcome of their experience results in “the praise of his glory,” an appropriate response to the divine benefactions.

The second component of movement two is found in verses 13–14. It also begins with a reference to Christ: **through whom** (“in whom,” understood instrumentally) **you, having heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, through whom also** (“in whom,” understood instrumentally), **having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise** (cf. 4:30; 2 Cor 1:22), **who is the first installment of your inheritance, with the goal of the redemption of the purchased possession, resulting in the praise of his glory.** The exalted Christ gives the Holy Spirit (cf. Eph 4:10–11; John 20:22; Acts 2:33). The instrumental sense of “through him” is therefore required in this context. “You” represents the recipients of the letter, Gentile Christians who have responded positively to the preaching of the gospel. They have consequently been sealed with the Holy Spirit. The auditors would not necessarily have understood the sealing as a reference to baptism. In Acts, the gift of the Spirit was sometimes associated with baptism (2:38), sometimes with the postbaptismal laying on of hands (8:14–17; 19:6), and sometimes with a pre-baptismal anointing of those who heard the preaching of the good news (10:44–48; 11:15–17; 15:7–8). The genuine Pauline letters offer some support for this third option (1 Cor 2:4; Gal 3:2; 1 Thess 1:5; cf. Lull 1980). The readers’ sealing, then, was their experience of the Holy Spirit whether it was associated with baptism or not. The experience of the Spirit must not be conceived in terms of gifts only; the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22–23) must be included as well (Best 2004, 150–51).

Sealing in antiquity could indicate ownership (e.g., Rev 7:3–8), authenticity (e.g., John 3:33; 6:27), or protection (Matt 27:66; Rev 20:3).

In connection with the last-mentioned function, seals sometimes served as amulets in western Asia Minor. It may be that in Ephesians the auditors would have understood the Holy Spirit as “the talisman above all other talismans and the protection from all forms of magical influence and the temptation of reliance upon magic” (Thomas 2001). Jewish and early Christian writings attest to this conception. In Ezek 9:4–6 sealing means protection against harm. In *Pss. Sol.* 15.4–7 those with God’s seal will never be disturbed by evil and will escape judgment. In *T. Sol.* 17.4 a demon says that if Christ’s seal is on a person, the demon is thwarted and flees. In Rev 7:3 an angel prepares to mark the servants of God with a seal of God as protection. In the *T. Job* 5.1 an angel seals Job, who then asserts, “Till death I will endure; I will not step back at all.” The last-mentioned example goes beyond protection and alludes to spiritual empowerment. In Eph 1:13 and 4:30 the sealing functions to keep converts to the day of redemption. This combines spiritual protection and empowerment.

The Spirit is, moreover, a down payment, first installment, or pledge (*arrabōn*) of the future inheritance. The future hope is understood as the ultimate redemption by God of the possession, the people of God. That all of this happens for Gentile Christians yields the same result as the experience of the Jewish Christians: “for the praise of his glory.” The great benefactor elicits the praise of his beneficiaries, as is proper.

The *berakah* has spoken of the blessings the blessed God has showered on his children. They have been listed in a sequence that runs from before the creation of the world (chosen, predestined), through human history (redemption, revelation), looking to the ultimate redemption of God’s people (cf. Rom 8:28–30). This grand salvific scheme expresses God’s grace and evokes a threefold response of praise. The divine benefactor’s grace is celebrated in this literary laudation that begins the Ephesian letter. The appropriate praise for the gift has been given, written down, and sent out for all to read.

Theological Issues

Being elected/chosen before the foundation of the world (1:4) and being predestined according to God’s will/purpose (1:4, 11) appear to be synonymous expressions in 1:3–14. This early Christian confession about a precreation activity of God through Christ has held a remarkable fascination for later interpreters. A brief overview of later Christian interpretations is here offered in order to clarify the issues raised in Ephesians.

The view of the Eastern Fathers and the Orthodox tradition is reflected in the 1823 Larger Catechism of Philaret, metropolitan of Moscow. In the

The Larger Catechism of the Eastern Orthodox Church (Philaret)

Q 121: *Has not that will of God, by which man is designed for eternal happiness, its own proper name in theology?*

A. *It is called the predestination of God. . . .*

Q 125: *How does the Orthodox Church speak on this point?*

A. *In the exposition of the faith of the Eastern Patriarchs, it is said: As he foresaw that some would use well their free will, but others ill, he accordingly predestined the former to glory, while the latter he condemned.*

—Schaff 1931, 2:464–65

Eastern Church the problem of predestination was solved by saying that God knew beforehand how creatures would choose; on the basis of this foreknowledge he predestined them either to life or to death. In Ephesians, however, God’s predestining activity arises out of the good pleasure of his will (1:5; cf. 1:11, “the counsel of his will”). There is no hint of a predestination based on foreknowledge. In Rom 8:28–29, where we read, “those whom he foreknew he predestined,” foreknowledge is understood in the sense of a precreation choice. There is no hint of foreknowledge of how creatures would act once they came into existence.

John Calvin, drawing upon Augustine, offers a perspective closer to that of Qumran: God foreordained some to life, some to death. The same observation must be made about both: Eph 1, like Rom 8:28–29, knows nothing of predestination to damnation, only of election and predestination to life, sonship, and purity of life. Arminius was repulsed by Calvin’s interpretation and responded forcefully (Nichols and Nichols

Predestination according to Calvin

“We call predestination God’s eternal decree, by which he compacted with himself what he willed to become of each man. For all are not created in equal condition; rather, eternal life is ordained for some, eternal damnation for others. Therefore, as any man has been created to the one or the other of these ends, we speak of him as predestined to life or to death.”

—Inst. 3.21.5, trans. Allen 1936, 2:176

Foreknowledge according to Arminius

"God decreed to save and damn certain particular persons. This decree has its foundations in the foreknowledge of God by which he knew from all eternity those individuals who would, through his prevenient grace, believe, and, through his subsequent grace would persevere . . . , and, by which foreknowledge, he likewise knew those who would not believe and persevere."

—"My Own Sentiments on Predestination," trans. Nichols 1986, 1:247–48

1986, 1:221–23). He contended that grounding the distinction between the elect and the reprobate in the will of God rather than in the will of the creature who chooses to believe or disbelieve is "repugnant to the nature of God" (who is merciful and just), "contrary to the nature of man" (who has freedom of will), and "injurious to the glory of God" (since it makes God the real sinner). Arminius's views reflect those of the Eastern Fathers. Once again predestination is based on God's precreation knowledge of his creatures' future behavior. In Ephesians (and in Rom 8), however, there is no hint of such a reading. In Ephesians (and canonical Paul), election before the foundation of the world and predestination are God's choice, not the sinner's.

Karl Barth offers a fresh reading that avoids the box in which the two previous interpretations find themselves (*Church Dogmatics*, II/2). He maintains that Christ is both the Elect Man and the Reprobate Man. All individuals are elect in Christ. But Christ's election is unto death so that we who deserve death might enjoy eternal life. He is also the one true Reprobate. Christ's death is, therefore, the shadow side of predestination. One can say predestination is double since Christ is both the Elect Man and the Reprobate Man. This novel solution, however, is not without its problems. There is little biblical evidence for Christ's being the one elected prior to creation. Most of the references to Christ as elect refer to election within history (e.g., Luke 9:35; 23:35; Acts 3:20; 1 Pet 2:4). Only 1 Pet 1:20 comes close to a precreation election of Christ. There we hear that Christ was foreknown before the foundation of the world. This need mean nothing more than that Christ was chosen before creation. Acts 4:28 says the death of Jesus at the hands of enemies is according to God's predestined plan. In 1 Cor 2:7 we hear of God's secret wisdom, which was predestined for our glory. Elsewhere Christians are said to have been elected before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4), predestined (Eph 1:5, 11), or foreknown and predestined (Rom 8:28–29). In sum, Ephesians (and canonical Paul) know nothing about Christ's being

the Elect One from before creation and Christians' being elect in him. In Eph 1:4 Christians are elect through Christ just as they are predestined through Christ in 1:5.

Barth's interpretation introduces another problem. If all are elect in Christ by an eternal decree, then it would seem that no negative decision at the human level (unbelief) could ever frustrate the prior positive decision at the divine level (election/predestination). Hence all will be saved in the end. This runs directly counter to Eph 5:5–6, which claims some will not inherit the kingdom of God and Christ.

Given the failure of such attempts to explain God's precreation salvific activity, can anything more facilitate a reading of Eph 1:3–14? Recognizing the enormity of the task, several modest observations may be offered. First, note that Ephesians locates the references to election before the foundation of the world (1:4) and to predestination (1:5, 11) in the context of a eulogy that praises the heavenly benefactor for his blessings to Christians. This means that such language is used by Christians to acknowledge God's/Christ's role in their salvific experience. Second, this means that talk about God's precreation salvific activity is the language of believing confession, like talk about the future hope of believers. It is not of or for public speculation. Third, such language grows out of believers' reflection on their experience of God's grace. John Knox's comments on Rom 8:28–29 also apply to Eph 1:4–5, 11. He says,

We must also remember that this whole chapter is written from the standpoint of Christian religious experience. Now one who has received the grace of God finds himself ascribing the whole process of his salvation to God's action; he himself has had nothing to do with it whatever. Even his faith appears to be God's gift. Some doctrine of predestination is the only possible rationalization of this experience, just as some doctrine of freedom is the only possible rationalization of the sense of responsibility we also find within ourselves. (Knox 1954, 526–27)

Finally, such language prevents real or potential misunderstandings of the nature of the divine-human relationship. In the milieu of the auditors of Ephesians, the pervasive principle of reciprocity would tend to subvert the Christian view of divine initiative. The precreation salvific activity of God/Christ precludes any notion of human merit as playing a part in establishing or maintaining the relationship between creator and creature. (For a more detailed discussion, cf. Talbert 2002b, 222–34.)