



Remember when you were in school and your teacher would make red marks on your paper for run on sentences? Where should I put that period anyway? Just what is the difference between a colon and a semicolon? Wow, remembering grammar lessons will give you nightmares, right? Well here's a nightmare for you. If our teacher thought you had run on sentences, listen to this. The longest sentence in the English language—hold onto your hats—is 13,955 words long. I did not even attempt to waste my time reading it.

English teachers would not like the first half of Ephesians chapter one either. Last week Nathan Lenz reminded me that verses 3-14 are a single sentence in the Greek. There are 233 words in this long sentence.¹ That's not bad compared to 13,955, but it's still a long sentence. On the other hand, since Greek manuscripts did not have any punctuation, it's an interpretive decision as to where to end a sentence.



For example, here is a section of Ephesians chapter six. Greek manuscripts were written with all capital letters and no punctuation. So how in the world can you read such a thing? Well see if you can read this.

BLESSEDBETHEGODANDFATHER
OF
FOURLORDJESUSCHRISTWHO
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HEAVENLYPLACESEVENASHE
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It's a little cumbersome to read but still very readable. That's how a reader of Greek would see this manuscript. So when the Greek scholars looked at the first chapter of Ephesians, their combined opinion was that verses 3-14 are all one long sentence. But most English translations turn this into four or five sentences to help it make more sense to us. But the bottom line is that

verses 3-14 are a single unit of thought. Regardless where you place the punctuation, they are intended to be understood together. It will take more than one sermon to work through this passage but I wanted you understand that it is a single unit. There's one big idea here with several sub-points.

First, let me read this section and then I'll start to explain the insert in your bulletin.

*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.
3 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, 4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love 5 he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.
7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, 8 which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight 9 making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ 10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.
11 In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, 12 so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. 13 In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.*

Take a look at the very colorful bulletin insert. This will make more sense as we move through the passage but let me give you an overview. Verses 1-2 are Paul's standard greeting. We always sing our name at the bottom of our letters or emails but Paul always started the letter telling us who it is from. He always includes who is he writing to, who is with him at the time—usually Timothy was with him. Then he offers a greeting like in verse two—*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Then after the greeting, verses 3-14 form a single unit of thought. Verse three is the big idea. *3 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...* The big idea, the main point of this passage is that believers are incredibly blessed. The rest of the passage has six separate blessings, which is why I numbered them 1 through 6.

Then I color coded the passage with these five different tags.

God's blessings This is the blessing itself—chosen, predestined, adoption, redemption, forgiveness, inheritance, sealed with the Holy Spirit.

"in Christ" This is merely an easy way to see all of the "in Christ" language. Being "in Christ" is our identity. It is who we are. It is the safety and security of a perfect love relationship. I

appreciate how Neil Anderson puts it. “The most overwhelming concept in the early parts of Ephesians is the tremendous inheritance we have in Christ. . . . Forty times in the one book of Ephesians, references are made to either you being in Christ or Christ in you.”²

Source of God's blessing This section answers the where questions of these blessings. From where did these great blessings come?

Purpose of God's blessing Words like, to, that and so that demonstrate purpose. These will answer the why questions. God gave them to us for specific purposes.

Our action This section mostly details God's blessings to us. There is very little activity on our part but there is a significant action that is necessary from us.

Before we get into the six blessings, first we need to see how Paul started this passage.

3 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,

The goal is worship—Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is to be blessed and worshipped in direct response to all of his blessings toward us. If these truths—these blessings—do not impact they way you live, then something has been lost in translation. If these blessings do not stir something within your heart, then you are failing to grasp them.

And by worship I don't just mean that you sing songs to the Lord and get all happy on Sunday morning. There are two basic types of worship in Scripture. One is the type where you actually bow down in worship. That's what we usually mean when we talk about worship. You don't have to actually physically bow down but it's an attitude of your heart. It's the kind of worship that tends to be more emotional. It happens when you are enamored with the Lord, when gratitude is spilling out of you. That kind of worship.

The other kind of worship is worship that results in service. There are two Greek words translated as worship. The first is the bowing down kind of worship and the second is service as worship. You've heard people say something like this. “Jim's got a new girlfriend and he worships the ground she walks on.” When you say such a thing, it does not mean that Jim actually bows down before his girlfriend in worship. Rather it means that Jim is willing to do things for his girlfriend to make her happy. Now that can be very unhealthy where Jim constantly gives into every selfish desire of his girlfriend. That would be wrong and twisted. But there can be a positive spin om the same idea. Jim may love his girlfriend so much that he is willing to serve her in any way that he can, not to appeal to her most selfish desires but to help her and assist her in life and her walk with the Lord. His love for her makes him want to serve her in a loving and beautiful way.

STRUCTURE OF EPHESIANS

Doctrine CHAPTERS 1-3

SEE who you are IN CHRIST

Application CHAPTERS 4-6

BE who you are IN CHRIST

understand but beliefs to apply. When Paul began this section by writing, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,” what he intended is that we actually bless God because he has given us these blessings. So this is not just a list of God’s blessings. It is also a call to worship God for these blessings. And you worship Him by the two types of Biblical worship—you bow down in awe and you serve Him with your whole life. You see how these two types of worship go together, don’t you? If you bow your heart to the Lord but never serve him, one would have to ask if your heart is actually bowed. On the other hand, if you serve him but you are never in awe of him—if you are seldom to never brought to or almost brought to tears when you ponder what he has done for you, then one might ask whether you actually understand his blessings. In other words, is your service from the heart or is it out of mere duty? So the two types of worship always go hand in hand.

So with all of that as an introduction, let’s get started on the blessings themselves.

“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...” Why should we bless and worship the Lord? Here’s the first blessing.

4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.

This blessing starts to play with the time-space continuum. When God created the heavens and the earth, time and space did not exist. Now clearly God existed but he dwelt in a plane or a dimension outside of our own. So when God chose us, this decision in his mind occurred before creation; before time and space existed; before Adam and Eve even had the opportunity to commit the first sin.

When I preached through Genesis years ago, I said then that God created us in order to be redeem us. He knew we would turn our backs on him. He knew we would break his first command and every other command that he would ever give. He knew all of this but despite that knowledge, he created us anyway. And because he knew this, he decided to choose us before the foundation of the world.

We struggle with this because we are bound by time and space. I have always had a much harder time conceiving of eternity past than eternity future. Do you know what I mean? When I see the

This is the second kind of Biblical worship—a worship that serves the Lord with your whole life and being. This is exactly what I mean when I remind you of the structure of Ephesians. The first three chapters help you to see who you are in Christ so that you can be who you are in Christ.

Therefore, when we take a close look at these six blessings, please do not see them as mere doctrine. They are not just truths to

promises of eternal life and eternal heaven, I just picture a long time. I mean it's a really long time, right? There's no end to it, so I'm not even sure we should talk about it in terms of time, but that's how I perceive it. It's just one day after another and instead of only lasting 28,759 days—which is the number of days for the average lifespan of someone in the U.S.—the accumulation of days will just keep going into infinity.

I'm not saying that is easy to grasp but for me, it's easier than trying to wrap my mind around eternity past, where time and space as we know it was not yet created. But it was then that God in his sovereign power and infinite love chose us—"even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him." Chosen for eternal life.

Now there is an alternative interpretation to my belief. Some would say that we are not chosen for salvation but rather merely chosen to be holy and blameless. In other words, it's not a statement regarding salvation but about Christian living. At face value it has some merit because the verse does not specifically say that we were chosen to be saved but it does say that we were chosen to be holy and blameless.

Let me give you a few reasons why I don't think that is accurate.

First, "holy and blameless" is almost certainly a term for final salvation, our final appearance before God. Look at this well-known passage from Ephesians 5.

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish (Ephesians 5:25-27).

The word translated as blemish and blameless are the same Greek word. They mean the same thing and here, "holy and blameless" is obviously referring to the church, which is the bride of Christ, being presented to him as she was prepared in holiness for him. And as you can see from the purple highlight, I have identified the purpose of the blessing to be "that we should be holy and blameless before him." As the bride of Christ, we were chosen to be holy and blameless so that we would be prepared for our groom. He took something that was not lovely and made it beautiful and prepare for himself.

Second, the next blessing is being predestined for adoption as sons. This is clearly referring to our salvation and not merely to some kind of Christian living.

Third, why does this have to be either/or? Why not both/and? Why can't it be chosen for salvation and chosen for holy living? It may or may not be that we are chosen for holy living but it most certainly means that we are chosen for salvation.

In his autobiography, Charles Spurgeon told a story about the former slave trader and hymn writer, John Newton.

John Newton used to tell a whimsical story, and laugh at it too, of a good woman who said, in order to prove the doctrine of election, “Ah! Sir, the lord, must have loved me before I was born, or else he would not have seen anything in me to love afterwards.”³

When it comes to being chosen from before the foundation of the world, we don’t have to worry about the time-space continuum. We just have to believe that it is true.

In love 5 he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

Spiritual adoption is a fantastic blessing but unless we understand what we were adopted out of, it will have less significance to us. Ephesians chapter two is quite clear about where we started.

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— 3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

We had been sons of disobedience and children of wrath. This is obviously the language of children and family, isn’t it? This was our spiritual family of origin, so to speak. We were sons of disobedience and children of wrath. Unless we were adopted, this would remain our lot.

And just like being chosen to be holy and blameless before the foundation of the world, we were predestined to be adopted as sons. Predestination is a decision that has been made before it happened. It means to foreordain something. God decides in advance that something will definitely be done. You and I do this all the time. Tonight, I decide that I will drive to work tomorrow. I have made the decision in advance of the event but the problem is, I am not sovereign. I don’t have the power to be 100% certain that I will drive to work tomorrow. I might get sick. Maybe my car will break down. But God is not limited by any circumstances, so what he decides to happen, will happen. That’s predestination. Something is predetermined before it happens. And all believers were predestined to be adopted as sons.

Next week I will talk a little more about the implications of our adoption but before we’re done, I want you to see the reasons we were predestined to be adopted as sons.

“In love”—This incredible action on God’s part was motivated out of love for us. He loved us, not because we were inherently loveable but just the opposite. Ephesians 2 says, “But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved” (Ephesians 2:4-5). Christ loved us *even when* we were dead in our trespasses. He perfectly loved those who were unlovable and undeserving of his love.

“According to the purpose of his will”—at first this just sounds like a decision. Why did you go to Walmart? Because it was according to the purpose of my will. I can do whatever I want and I

wanted to go to Walmart. While it is true that God can do whatever he wants and this phrase certainly means at least that much, there's a hidden gem here. The NASB translates it "according to the *kind intention* of his will."

We know that God was motivated by love to predestine us for adoption, but there's just something about the word kindness that stands out to me. God willed that we would be adopted. He decided in advance that this would happen but his decision, his will, was motivated by his kind intention. Love is an all-encompassing word but kindness is in the realm of gentleness. It amazes me to think that the One who has the power to predestine my adoption is also so gentle and kind to me.

"To the praise of his glorious grace"—This is the worship piece. Our predestination is supposed to result in praise and worship of the Lord. It's supposed to make a difference.

Yesterday and Friday we were in Minneapolis for a Bible quiz tournament. A month ago at the tournament in Iowa I started to become buddies with this cute, blonde-haired 8 year-old Bible quizzer. She started talking to me right away on Friday when she saw me. She's a great quizzer for being so young so I was surprised to see that she was not quizzing over the weekend. Apparently her ability to quiz was based on one of her brothers quizzing. The brother made a very selfish decision which prevented her from quizzing, from doing something she loves to do. So this adorable little girl with the enormous smile was telling me this whole story and she said, "I'm really angry at my brother." She said the exact same thing two more times over the weekend but each time she did, she still had this huge smile on her face. Do you see the incongruency there? I could tell she was very hurt by what her brother did but by the third time she told me the same story, I started talking to her gently about forgiveness; that was Jesus did for her will not allow her to hold onto this anger. I mostly encouraged her to talk things through with her parents.

But it's a picture of lots of us. We wear a big smile on our face but we hold anger in our heart. We smile large but we hang vigorously to some sin in our life. That's not worship. That's not allowing these blessings to bless the Lord in worship.

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¹ <http://www.openculture.com/2014/07/5-very-long-literary-sentences.html>

² Neil Anderson, *Who I am in Christ: A devotional*, Gospel Light, ©2001, p. 68.

³ C.H. Spurgeon, *C. H. Spurgeon's Autobiography: 1834-1854*, © 1898, p. 171.