The Book of Ephesians – Chapters 1 - 3

1. Let's return to Ephesians 1. And, as we should always do when facing a life changing process, we start with a prayer. Ephesians 1:15-23 is a prayer in response to the facts just listed. It is asking God to help us accept reality.

2. It is also another long sentence – 169 words. Paul is on a roll and, evidently, low on punctuation marks (I know they weren't invented yet…just play along). Here, in this prayer, we join the father of the demon possessed boy in Mark 9:24 and say "I believe. Help me in my unbelief."

3. When Paul speaks of election and predestination, he knows what he means and, most likely, so did the hearers. However, we can go sideways very quickly on this. I know God has a plan, but so does Satan so let's be careful before relying on comforting platitudes and bromides about God's will and way. What we CAN glean from these words is that the will of God included us and that is an amazing thing.

4. Take a look at this amazing chapter: 2:1-3. We are skilled at sin. It comes naturally to us (not an original sin thing, but a fallen world thing). That is why the next passage is shocking in the extreme (2:4-11). Again…look at the verbs.

5. This brings to mind Christmas or, to be more accurate, Advent. One of the scriptures I just can't get past without staying awhile to dwell in what it all means is that one line: "peace on earth, goodwill toward mankind." That is shocking. The world into which God was sending His Son was not deserving of peace or goodwill. It was horrid – nasty, brutish and short, in the words of Thomas Hobbes (1651).

6. So…will you receive the grace that God has already given you? Yes, if we are honest, our inner lives (and some of our outer lives) are full of sin and brokenness. Yes, we have lived in rebellion, well equipped with excuses as to why the commands do not apply to us in this or that situation. And…still, 2:4-11 is there. Take time to be seated there. Dwell there. Absorb this. You should never speak of God or teach anyone about Jesus unless and until you can accept the reality of chapters 1 and 2. If you move forward too soon, you will teach a

tentative salvation dependent upon man's lists of requirements, clothed in divinity, but still tentative. Your God, your Jesus, will not be totally trustworthy and your converts will forever question their salvation and His love.

7. Ephesians 2:11-22 emphatically declares that God's grace crosses all the lines we like to draw, even those HE drew long ago. His intention was always to save all of us, and we need to get that salient fact in our brains and hearts before we move from sitting to walking to standing. (no races, genetic reality, variations within groups and subgroups). Skip ahead to Eph. 3:14,15.

8. This was such a hard lesson for the early church (which wrestled with how Jewish Christianity should be) and for good reason. When Paul says "for circumcision means nothing." (1st Cor. 7:19; Gal. 6:15) I have no words for how shocking this was. It was rather like listening to Jesus say in the Sermon on the Mount, "You have heard it said…but I say" or standing with the best buddies of Jesus and seeing Elijah and Moses and hearing the voice of God say…"You listen to him."