



This week at Magdalen Road Church we began our Autumn series in Ephesians. It was an epic passage packed full of mind-blowing theology, so do take the time to work through some of the stuff we had to miss out.

We introduced the section by considering the busy-ness of our lives, and that fact that so often they get busy with just the kind of things that *everyone else* gets busy with. And suddenly we look at them and look at us and wonder whether we're 'chasing the wrong bus' – their lives 'in Oxford' look so together and they look so strong and confident and we look at a crucified messiah, a church meeting in a school gym and our own feeble lives and wonder if we've got it all wrong. 'In Oxford' they seem to be so much better at life. And yet, just like the Ephesians we're not just 'in Oxford', we're in Christ (v3, 4, 7, 11). And because we're in Christ, say's Paul, so we're in on God's plan to fix a world of broken relationships. Being 'in Christ' means we're able to be in relationship with the God who made us as our sin is dealt with, but also into horizontal relationships with those around us, as he unites a diverse people in the church. We noted from 3v10 that through the church God speaks his wisdom to a watching cosmos as we're a foretaste of what's to come, what's to come is in 1v10 as all things (diverse and broken) will be united under Christ as it is now in the church.

We noted that fundamentally the passage is Trinitarian and ought to result in praise!

### **1. Praise the Father who selects (v3-6)**

God the Father is in charge – there is no inch of room for our boasting or feeling smug, it is he who blesses us and we are simply the undeserving recipients. Indeed, his selecting of a people for himself began before the creation of the world. This truth raises questions for some, but as you read through the bible, it's how he has always worked – as he selected Israel it was not because they had potential or were strategic, but because they were weak and small. As he chose them, so he chooses a people for himself now – the difference being we are varied in ethnicity and background – diverse yet united. United in being in Christ, and so united in being holy and blameless and adopted as sons (language of status). We noted a right response was for **humble confidence**. Humble because it's nothing about us, but confident because we're (undeservingly) in on God's plan for his world.

### **2. Praise the Son who secures (v7-12)**

We're willing to pay for what we love – so the Father **loves** his people as he's willing to give his most costly possession to secure them. And as he does that, so he covers all of our 'anxiety bases'! For those who are anxious about their past – the regret and shame of memories from years gone by, so he has forgiven and redeemed us – bought us for himself. For those with future worries we noted v10 that we know where the future is going – we know the end of the story and whilst the little things may be unclear, we can trust he's

working towards an end-game. Thirdly for those struggling in life in the now, we zoomed in on v11 and noted that, however hard we find this truth to grapple with at times, he is working all out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will. We remembered the cross where the greatest evil ever committed resulted in the greatest good ever imagined.

### **3. Praise the Spirit who seals (v13-14)**

To those whom the Father has chosen, and to those whom the Son has redeemed and forgiven, so God the Holy Spirit seals and keeps. We noted at least 3 aspects of the Spirit's work implied in these verses here: 1) signifying ownership – the brand you press onto cattle that says 'mine', 2) echoes the language of Ezekiel which meant those whom God 'marked' he protected from judgment and 3) the language of deposit that says God has given a foretaste and down-payment that means he will be coming back to collect as they have their inheritance. The inheritance is a new world – the kind of place that the church (imperfectly) points to now.

We said as we finished that if we grasped more of these enormous truths, perhaps we would worry less about being in Oxford and indeed be those who praise our Sovereign Trinitarian God.

Here are just a few questions that might get things going, please feel very free to ignore / adapt for your group:

What do you make of the twin 'homes' of the Christian? In Oxford but also in Christ?  
When do you wobble as a Christian? When do you care too much about being in Oxford?

#### **1. Praise the Father who selects (v3-6)**

When does it say God chose his people? How does it describe them?  
How does this make you feel?  
Does it mean that we're just robots? Why – why not?

#### **2. Praise the Son who secures (v7-12)**

Unpack some of the big bible words in these verses...  
How do they (or ought they to) cure some of our anxieties (present, past and future)?  
What impact does v10 have upon your life?

#### **3. Praise the Spirit who seals (v13-14)**

What is the work of the Holy Spirit in these verses?  
In what way is he a seal and a deposit?

What do you think it means throughout the passage that God did it all – to the Praise of His Glory? What would you say to someone that said 'God's just a megalomaniac with a huge ego!'  
How do you cope with the idea that God is 'sovereign'? What emotions does it raise?