

Thought For The Week

Articles: *The "In Crowd"* - ~400 words, ~1200 words

Articles, 1200 word, followed by 400 word

Are You In With The "In Crowd?"

In an insightful sermon based on Ephesians 1:1-14, preacher Jim delivers a powerful message titled "Are You In With The In Crowd?" He opens with gratitude to readers Mike and John for tackling the lengthy scripture, then draws a vivid cultural parallel to the 1964 song "The 'In' Crowd" by Dobie Gray, repopularized in the 1970s by Bryan Ferry of Roxy Music. Jim admits the tune's catchiness but cautions against its lyrics, which glorify worldly cliques chasing carnal pleasures, boasting ungodly virtues driven by the flesh. Reflecting on his pre-Christian days, he shares how such songs once appealed without conviction, but now, as a believer, he heeds the apostle John's warning: "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him, for everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes, the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father, but from the world." Jim flips the script, declaring believers as the authentic "in crowd," a multitude awakened to God's truth, with scales removed from their eyes to see the emptiness of worldly pursuits.

The heart of the sermon lies in Ephesians' thematic repetition, where "in" appears 20 times in these 14 verses, with 10 instances directly tying to the Savior—"in Christ," "in him," "in the one he loves." Jim encourages the congregation to reread the passage attentively: "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus. Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will, to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the one he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ. In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory."

Jim notes Paul's broader use of "in" 36 times in Ephesians and 176 in his epistles, many denoting the intimate bond of being in Christ. He proposes a verse-by-verse dive to unpack this "in crowd" of holy people. Starting with verse 1, Paul asserts his apostolic authority by God's will, chosen before time in divine foreknowledge, showcasing God's awe-inspiring omniscience. Though addressed to Ephesus, the letter's truths apply universally to all churches across time. Key insights: Saints are

simply the faithful in Christ, not a Catholic elite but all believers—Saint Jean, Saint Scott, and so on. The term echoes Old Testament usage, as in Solomon's temple dedication, meaning pious, holy, godly.

Verse 2 offers "grace and peace" from God and Jesus, profound for believers. Grace embodies God's mercy, love, and forgiveness through faith in Christ; in this greeting, it's an ongoing outpouring. Peace arises from sin's forgiveness via Christ's sacrifice and baptism, removing enmity with God, fostering tranquility and a clear conscience as believers walk in fellowship, continually cleansed by his blood.

In verse 3, Jim stresses praise to God for blessing us "in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ." As Peter affirms, God provides all for life and godliness through knowing him. These blessings, poured via the Holy Spirit, transform believers from old sinful selves—nailed to the cross—into new creatures walking in the Spirit. God equips for fruitfulness with the Spirit's fruits: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. For spiritual warfare, not against people but evil forces, he supplies armor: truth, righteousness, gospel readiness, faith, salvation's assurance, the word as sword, and prayer. This battle rages in heavenly realms, demanding these tools to stand firm.

Verse 4—"he chose us in him before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless"—introduces predestination, a minefield of confusion from John Calvin's teachings over 500 years ago. Jim lambasts Calvinism for injecting humanism, relying on reason over scripture, leading to errors like arbitrary election where God predetermines salvation or damnation regardless of merit, portraying a depraved humanity and an aristocratic kingdom. This taints much Protestant doctrine, including "faith only," and stems from cultural biases like Britain's caste system. Jim urges rejecting such "crock" for scripture's plain voice.

Before creation, the Godhead—Father, Son, Holy Spirit—planned a universe of spiritual and physical realms to display love, creativity, holiness. With foreknowledge, God anticipated sin, instituting redemption. All intelligent beings receive free will, laws, and consequences. Angels, in the spiritual realm, face immediate punishment for rebellion, operating by sight. Humans, in the physical, made in God's image, also sin but receive a salvation plan. God knows who will obey the gospel, recording names in the book of life upon faithfulness, yet free will prevails—names can be blotted out. Election isn't random but for those choosing obedience.

God draws gently, as in John 6:44—no one comes unless drawn by the Father. Sensitive souls, seeking truth, hear his whisper through the word, creating faith. Defined in Hebrews as certainty in the unseen, faith pleases God, who rewards seekers. Humans are tripartite: fleeting body, eternal soul (conscious self), and God's animating spirit, returning to him at death.

Upon baptism, believers gain the Holy Spirit's seal, enabling heart-touching. Calloused hearts miss calls like "come unto me...I will give you rest." Salvation is universal, per John 3:16—God loved the world, offering eternal life to believers—and Titus 2:11, grace appearing to all. 1 Peter 1:1-2 describes elect chosen by foreknowledge, through Spirit's sanctification for obedience and blood-sprinkling.

To join God's "in crowd," hear the word, repent, believe, baptize, remain faithful. Baptism cleanses sin, imparts the Spirit for holy purpose, a clean conscience in service. Jim promises more that evening, extending an invitation: Reject worldly crowds, wash sins away, join Christ's redeemed for

eternal praise.

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Are You In With The "In Crowd?"

In a compelling sermon drawn from Ephesians 1:1-14, Jim explores the profound question: "Are You In With The 'In Crowd?'" He begins by contrasting the worldly allure of a 1964 hit song by Dobie Gray, later popularized by Bryan Ferry, which celebrates carnal trends and ungodly boasting, with the true "in crowd" of believers. Quoting 1 John, Jim warns against loving the world, where cravings, lust, and pride dominate, urging instead a life free from such futility through Christ's truth.

Central to the message is the recurring theme in Ephesians, where the word "in" appears 20 times in these verses, often signifying union with Christ—"in him," "in Christ," "in the beloved." Jim invites a fresh reading to highlight how all spiritual blessings flow from this relationship. From verse 1, Paul addresses saints as the faithful in Christ, not an elite few but all true believers, echoing Old Testament usage for the holy and godly.

Verse 2 extends grace and peace from God and Jesus, embodying mercy, forgiveness, and tranquility for those in fellowship through obedient faith and baptism. In verse 3, Jim emphasizes heavenly spiritual blessings poured out in Christ, including the fruits of the Spirit—love, joy, peace—and armor for spiritual warfare against evil, not flesh and blood.

Delving into verse 4, Jim critiques Calvinism's distorted view of predestination as arbitrary election to salvation or damnation, rooted in human reasoning rather than scripture. Instead, God, in foreknowledge, planned redemption before creation, granting free will to all beings. He draws souls gently through his word, offering salvation universally, as in John 3:16 and Titus 2:11, refuting any aristocratic kingdom.

Humans, as three-part beings—body, soul, spirit—respond by faith, which pleases God. Upon hearing the gospel, repenting, believing, and being baptized, one receives the Holy Spirit's seal, sanctification, and inclusion in God's possession.

Jim concludes by inviting all to join this eternal "in crowd," rejecting worldly vanities for Christ's redemption, with sins washed away and a life of faithfulness. In Christ, believers find true belonging, praise, and glory.

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