

## II. Lesson 2: Christ's Redemptive Blessings – Ephesians 1:1-14

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Stuart chapter 2

**Aim:** To rejoice in the blessings God the Father has given us in Christ and sealed by the Holy Spirit.

### A. Who Is An Apostle? (Eph. 1:1-2)

- *What do you think are the qualifications for being an apostle (1:1)?*

Letters in the ancient world began with three words: 1) the name of the writer; 2) the name of the recipient; and 3) 'greetings.'

#### 1. Correspondent (1:1a)

Paul, the author of this letter, calls himself an 'apostle' (*apostolos*). The Greek noun derives from the verb *apostellō*, which means "send forth." An apostle is one who is sent forth, or more particularly in the New Testament, one sent forth bearing the message of the gospel. The term 'apostle' first described the original disciples (eleven, excluding Judas) and then Paul. The term became a title that carried with it the authority of the One (Jesus Christ) sending forth those who carried the gospel message.

There are four requisites for apostleship. First, an apostle must have been an eyewitness to the resurrected Christ (1 Cor. 9:1). Second, an apostle must have been discipled by Christ (see Gal. 1:12). Third, an apostle must have been given authority by and been sent or commissioned by Christ. Paul's commission is validated by Christ in Acts 26:16-18. Fourth, an apostle is recognized and validated by the other apostles. Was Paul recognized as an apostle by the others? Yes. When Paul presented himself before the council at Jerusalem, the apostles accepted him as God's choice to bring the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 16:22-29). Peter also validated Paul's writings as equivalent to the rest of Scripture (2 Pe. 3:16).

An apostle was one appointed by the Lord to be a recipient and authenticator of the New Testament revelation. This is important, because it means that the book Paul wrote is not to be regarded as other books written by mere men or women but as God's own revelation. It is from God. Therefore it is all true: it speaks with authority.

However, Paul's emphasis does not lie so much on the fact that he *was* an apostle, as wonderful as that was, but on *how* he became one. It was not by his own will but 'by the will of God.' Indeed, if it had not been for God's sovereign and efficacious will, Paul would not only have not been an apostle, he would not even have been a Christian. This is true of all of us. The gospel is a wonderful thing.

#### 2. Readers (1:1b)

Paul describes the believers in Ephesus in three different ways. 1. *Christians are saints.* In the Bible, to be a saint (*hagioi*) means to be set apart. It is something God does quite apart from human merit. A Christian is set apart when God reaches down through the person and power of the Holy Spirit, regenerates him, and thus draws him into the company of Christ's church.

Another way to think about the meaning of 'saint' is to understand that saints are those who have access to the sanctuary of God. In the Old Testament, there were very few 'holy ones.' The

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angels had access to God in the heavenly sanctuary. Occasionally the high priest was allowed in the holy of holies, and the priests were allowed in the holy place. Israel was called a ‘holy nation’ and there were degrees of holiness back then. But in the coming of the New Covenant, everyone in the church is admitted to the most holy place, and so everyone becomes a saint. People are not ‘saints’ in this sense by personal merit; they are set apart by God, and in consequence they are called to live in holiness. Thus the word expresses at once the privilege and responsibility of the calling of every Christian, not the attainment of a select few.

2. *Christians are faithful.* The first and primary meaning of the word ‘faithful’ (*pistoi*) is ‘exercising faith.’ That is, a Christian is one who has heard the gospel of God’s grace in Jesus Christ and who has then exercised faith in that gospel or believed it. This faith has three elements. First, there is an intellectual element. Faith involves content. Second, there is an emotional element. Faith at this level warms the heart and draws forth a loving response to God, who has revealed Himself in Christ. Third, there is a volitional element. Having perceived and understood the gospel and having been affected by it, the true Christian now makes a personal commitment to Christ who died for Him.

The second meaning of the word ‘faithful’ is ‘to continue in faith’ or, as we might say, ‘to keep the faith.’ It involves the idea of perseverance in the Christian life, enduring to the end (Mt. 10:22). It is precisely because God perseveres with us, that we also must persevere. We must be faithful. Both of these ideas may be meant by Paul: they are believers who have exercised faith in believing, and their calling is to faithfulness.

3. *Christians are in Christ.* The phrases ‘in Christ,’ ‘in Him,’ or the equivalent occur eleven times just in Ephesians 1:1-14. They occur 164 times in all Paul’s writings. The phrases mean more than just believing on Christ or being saved by His atonement. They mean being joined to Christ in one spiritual body so that what is true of Him is also true for us. This is not mysticism, but is intended to express the very practical truth that Christians, if faithful to their calling, will not try to be self-sufficient, or to move beyond the limits of the purpose and control and love of Christ, nor will they turn to the world for guidance, inspiration, and strength. They find all their satisfaction and their every need in Him.

### 3. Greetings (1:2)

‘Grace’ (*charis*) is God’s love for the unworthy, revealed in the coming of Jesus and His self-giving on the cross (*cp.* 2 Cor. 8:9). Grace is the spring or fountain of God’s unmerited favor from which all of God’s blessings flow. When we speak of the grace of God, we mean His many-faceted kindness which He has granted to us (*cp.* 2 Cor. 8:9).

‘Peace’ (*eirene*) echoes the familiar Hebrew greeting *shalom*, spiritual and physical well-being. We have peace because we have been reconciled to God through Christ. We read of two main kinds of peace in the Bible. First, there is peace *with* God (*cp.* Rom. 5:1). God is angry with us, because we are at war with Him. This is objective peace; it is totally outside of me. Jesus makes peace; He signs the peace treaty with God on our behalf. All those who have truly been born again have peace with God. We also read about the peace *of* God (*cp.* 4:7). This is something which is experienced by the believer who is undergoing trials of one kind or another. This kind of peace allows us to be free from guilt and free from inner tension, it is a subjective or inner peace.

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Two persons of the Trinity (Father and Son), are mentioned here; the third, the Holy Spirit, is implied.

### **B. God Has Blessed Our Socks Off (Eph. 1:3-14)**

Most of Paul's letters begin early on with a hymn of praise (and prayer) to God. We all know that Paul's letters tend to divide into two sections: teaching and application, or as we could also say, faith and life. Doctrine is followed by duty. God's grace is the dominant theme of the first three chapters. Practical holiness is the subject of the last three.

This is a remarkable section of Paul's letter. In the original Greek, 1:3-14 constitutes one sentence. English translations generally break the words up for ease of reading, but in the Greek Paul simply begins with a note of praise to God for 'every spiritual blessing' and then keeps going, adding phrase upon phrase and doctrine upon doctrine, as he lists these benefits, the contemplation of one leading naturally to the next.

This letter is about the enormous privileges which we, as Christians, enjoy. Earthly blessings are the blessings which God gives to men and women simply because they live on this earth. We do not all have these blessings in equal amounts, but all those we do have come from the same source, which is God Himself. But these blessings are for this life only. When we finish this life, we leave them behind. Unconverted people think only of these earthly blessings and, generally, do not care to remember from where they came. The Epistle to the Ephesians is not about such things. It is about heavenly blessings. It is about spiritual blessings. The other world, to which Christians belong, is an eternal world. It is invisible, but this fact does not make it unreal. What those blessings are, how we come by them, what responsibilities lay upon us in this life, and how being a member of the other world affects our behavior here and now—this is the theme of the Epistle to the Ephesians.

Paul's prayer of blessing God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ is typical of Old Testament, Jewish prayer. It is a prayer of praise and thanksgiving because of what God has done for us. God always gives to us first. Blessing is a response to God's goodness to us. God does something (creates the world, destroys Egypt, etc.) and our response is to bless God – to thank Him for what He has done, and then we give gifts to Him (Gen. 24:27; Ex. 18:9-10). We have to be constantly reminded of this, because we do not naturally thank God for what He has done (e.g., the story of the ten lepers).

So this is how all of Paul's prayers in his epistles are structured. First he thanks God for what He has done, and then he prays that God would complete His work in His church. In Ephesians 1 we have a large example of this prayer format. In verses 3-6, Paul thanks God for what He has done, including creation (He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world). In verse 7, we have a reference to redemption. In verse 10 we have a view of fullness, of Christ filling up all things. The same thought is in verse 14, where the Spirit is the seal of our inheritance until the fullness is brought in. Creation – Redemption – Fullness. We remind God of what He has done, and on the basis of that memorial, we ask Him to complete what He has done, to bring it into fullness. This structure continues in verses 15-ff. Paul thanks God for what He has already done and then asks Him to continue His work in the Ephesians. This pattern really continues all the way down to the end of chapter 3. In 3:14 Paul continues to ask for God's work to be done in the Ephesians, so that they may be filled up with the fullness of God (3:19). So everything in

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Ephesians 1-3 has this prayerful, liturgical structure: reminding God what He has already done, and then asking God to fill it up.

There are various ways to try and organize Paul's argument. One helpful framework is the Trinitarian outline: 1) Chosen by God the Father (1:3-6); 2) Redeemed by God the Son (1:7-10); and 3) Sealed by God the Holy Spirit (1:11-14). Thus, the blessings listed come from God the Father, become ours in Jesus Christ, and are applied by the Holy Spirit. We will be looking at these individual blessings that we receive from our Trinitarian God.

### 1. God the Father Chooses Us (1:3-6)

#### a) *Blessed (1:3)*

Paul is praising or blessing God in response to the fact that God has blessed His people. In the New Testament the word 'blessed' (*eulogētos*) is used only of God. He alone is worthy to be blessed. Paul cannot bless God in the same way as God blesses him. When God blesses believers, He bestows a certain favor upon them that they do not deserve. When they bless Him, it is an act of praise and adoration that He richly deserves. It is not an act of grace on their part to give benediction or blessing to the Almighty.

Paul was awed and utterly amazed at the blessings of God who 'blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ' (1:3). The blessings of the heavenly world do not belong to anyone naturally. No one is born with them, nor does anyone earn them. It is from God that these blessings come. All the blessings of the heavenly world are given by Him. No one can enjoy its blessings without Him.

'Spiritual' blessings are not invisible blessings; they are blessings that come from the Holy Spirit. We confess that the Holy Spirit is the Lord and Giver of life. What the Spirit gives is life. When we have spiritual blessings, the Spirit gives us life in its fullness. The phrase 'with every spiritual blessing' suggests that from Him comes one continuous flow of blessing, and this is to be conceived, not chiefly in terms of the material gifts of which we think most readily, but in terms of the spiritual that transcend but include the material.

Paul in his doxology reminds his readers that they share in the new society that is built upon the resurrected Christ. Since Christ is exalted in the heavenly realm, those who are 'in Him' also belong to the heavenly realm. We are incorporated as participants in some way in the heavenly realms, because we are blessed in these heavenly places *with* Christ. Although Christians must live temporarily on earth, their real home is in heaven where spiritual blessings abound.

The last part of verse 3 tells us that the spiritual blessings given by God are 'in Christ,' which means 'in Jesus only.' It is important to stress that the following blessings can only be given to us through Jesus. We receive them on no other condition than being in Christ. Once someone has received the Lord Jesus Christ, there is nothing more for him to receive. The greater blessing includes all the lesser ones. Since all spiritual blessings are in Christ, it follows that if someone is not in Christ, he has no spiritual blessings at all.

#### b) *Chosen (1:4-6)*

- *What do you believe Paul meant when he said God "chose us in Him before the foundation of the world" (1:4)? How do you answer the critics who say this means we have no free choice?*

How can we possess the blessings that God has for us? We can imagine a number of wrong ways. The blessings of heaven might be thought to be possessed by *force*, which is what Satan

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tried to do (and so did Adam). We might try to *earn* these great blessings, but we cannot afford the price. Perhaps we can *inherit* them when the owner dies, but the owner is the eternal God who does not die. Perhaps God is gracious and is only waiting for us to *ask* Him for these blessings. Even this will not work. For according to Scripture, we are not the kind of persons who, unaided by God, will even ask Him for blessings. On the contrary, we despise God's blessings. Then how is it that some people receive these blessings, as Paul says they do. The answer is in verses 4-6. It is the result of God's own sovereign act, election.

Election and predestination belong to the whole scope of salvation. Salvation is not an afterthought of God. The redemption of His people, the salvation of His church, my eternal salvation, these are not a postscript to the Divine activity. Instead, from the very foundation of the world, God had a sovereign plan to save a significant portion of the human race, and He moves heaven and earth to bring it to pass. God's plan of salvation is no last-minute affair. In all its details, it was decided before the foundation of the world.

Before Adam fell; before the world was made; even before an angel ever prostrated himself before the Lord's throne; when there was nothing but God in the eternal concert of His three majestic Persons—then the thoughts of God were upon you!

From the beginning of time, God has been a choosing God. Before time as we know it began, God purposed to do something. That purpose concerned Christ, His only begotten Son, and certain created human beings whom He gave to Christ (Jn. 17:9). As God chose Israel out of all the nations of the world (Dt. 7:6-8; Is. 42:1; 43:20-21), He also chose a special people to be united with Christ according to the kind intention of His will (1:4), which He exercised in pre-creation eternity. In the Old Testament, God's electing choice centered on Israel, but in the New Testament, while the principle of election is confirmed, there is no longer a national limitation – a truth that this letter develops and expounds.

God is choosing a community of believers to be separated unto Himself. Left to ourselves, this would never happen, for none of us is good, not even one (Rom. 3:12). Just as Adam lost the ability to choose the proper good, we also lost this ability. We would, therefore, exercise our wills to choose the greatest desire we had at the time, but our desire would never be for God, for we were dead in our transgressions (Eph. 2:1; Col. 2:13). God must have chosen for us; He created some vessels for wrath and some for mercy (Rom. 9:22-23).

This matter of individuals being chosen before the foundation of the world by the predestinating love of God is always understood to be *in Christ*. It is with a view to Christ that believers were incorporated in the Divine plan of salvation.

### (1) Objections to Election

*Free Will:* Does God's choosing us mean that we have no choice in the matter of rejecting or accepting Him? God's grace is irresistible. If He breathes His Spirit into us, we will exercise our wills to choose Him, for we have been created to glorify Him and enjoy Him forever. But the urge to accept Christ comes from God who in love predestined us to adoption as sons and daughters (1:5). God freely bestowed His grace upon us (1:6), which means that we had nothing to do with it. It was not because He foresaw us choosing Him, for we did not have that ability. Nor did He see something acceptable in us, for we are all unrighteous creatures.

This does not mean that we never had free will, for we were and still are allowed to choose freely and make decisions. The problem is that we always make decisions that seem to benefit

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ourselves, often out of self-gratification or self-interest. We exercise our wills to obtain the greatest good or desire we feel at the time. Election doesn't hamper or abrogate free will. On the contrary, it is the culmination and fulfillment of free will. At our rebirth we exercise, through the grace of God, the greatest desire with which we have been created (glorifying and enjoying God).

Some object to the doctrine of election because they feel that it is arbitrary. But Paul deals with that argument in verses 5-6 when he says it was 'according to the good pleasure (*eudokia*) of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace.' That is, God purposed to glorify Himself by saving some. God *is pleased* by exercising His will to salvation. Thus, there is a reason why the elect have been chosen to salvation, but the reason is to be found in God and not in them. Since that is so, election is not arbitrary. It has a purpose from God's point of view. While we do not know why He elects one rather than another, which is quite a different thing from saying that He has no reasons. In fact, in so great an enterprise, an enterprise which forms the entire meaning of human history, it would be arrogant for us to suppose that we could ever understand the whole purpose.

Another objection is that election is unjust. It is unjust for God to choose one rather than another, we are told. But as far as justice is concerned, what would justice decree for us, if justice (and nothing but justice) should be done? Justice would decree damnation! Justice would sentence us to hell! It is not justice we want from God; it is grace. And grace cannot be commanded.

### (2) Blessings of Election

This doctrine of election is a great blessing of the gospel. 1. *Election eliminates boasting.* Election means that salvation is utterly of God. We can claim nothing in the work of salvation. We have nothing in which to boast of ourselves; it is all of God. If you are a Christian today, it is because of God's undeserved kindness, or grace. He did it all. It is all of grace—glorious grace, God's grace.

2. *Election gives assurance of salvation.* Suppose the ultimate grounds of salvation were in ourselves. In that case, salvation would be as unstable as we are. Our assurance depends on God, not on us.

3. *Election leads to holiness.* Verse 4 says election is to holiness. That is, election to salvation and election to holiness go together (see 2:10). They are never separated. If we are not growing in holiness, we are not elect; we are still in our sins. Positively, God desires that our characters should be more and more similar to that of the one who has poured out such blessings on us. We are to be holy. Negatively, we are to be 'without blame' (*amōmous*). The idea of this Greek word is connected to the Old Testament sacrifices. Only a perfect animal could be offered to God (Lev. 1:3, 10; *cp.* Heb. 9:14; 1 Pe. 1:19). We are to make a similar effort to live unblemished lives.

4. Finally, *election promotes evangelism.* The fact that God elects to salvation does not eliminate the means by which He calls those elect persons to faith. One of those means is the proclamation of the gospel to sinners by those who already believe. If God cannot call effectively, it is certain that you and I cannot. On the other hand, if God is doing this work on the basis of His prior election of some, then we can spread the word of truth boldly, knowing that all whom God has previously determined to come to faith will come to Him.

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### *c) Adopted (1:5)*

- *Some people believe that everybody is a child of God. But God only had one Son! How, then, do we become children of God (1:5)? See Romans 8:14-17.*
- *But what about Jesus' statement in John 10:34? Jesus quotes Psalm 82:6 in addressing the Pharisees. Does this mean that we are all children of God? Why not?*

In verse 5, 'predestined' (*proorisas*) literally means 'marked out beforehand.' It is simply another word that expresses the fact that God's plan for His people is from eternity.

Adoption means becoming God's children with all the privileges implied. The relationship which we have to the great God is that of children to their Father! We are His sons (Jn. 1:12). All of us are the Bride of Christ; we are also all sons of God, whether we are male or female. Because Christ is the Son, we become sons in Christ.

Why does He do this? To show His grace which He freely bestowed upon us (1:6). We certainly did not deserve His grace, but because God is merciful, He provided a way for our sins to be forgiven—through the suffering of Christ (1:7), who became sin itself (2 Cor. 15:21) and took upon Himself the wrath we all deserved. Why then can't all be saved? Because we would never understand God's holiness or His justice.

Scripture tells us that God had only one begotten Son (Jn. 3:16). If a person is not born again, he has no right to be called a child of God. Even if God elected him unto salvation, he does not become a natural son, but rather an adopted child. If we do become children by adoption, then we also become heirs of God and fellow-heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17).

If a person is not born of God, whose child is he? Jesus said to the Pharisees that they were doing the work of their father, the devil (Jn. 8:44). This indicates that a person is a child of whom he or she obeys.

In the ancient world, adoption was not as it often is today. Babies were not adopted, but adults. If a rich person had no natural heir to whom he could leave his riches, he would look round for someone outside his family who would be worthy of inheriting his wealth. He would then adopt him. Absolutely everything he had was now going to go into good hands. Once this is understood, the Bible's teaching on this point can only be seen as startling. God does not adopt people of proven worth. He does not give His treasure to people who are outstanding. Adoption is not a reward for holy living. God adopts wrongdoers. He enriches failures. He makes rebels his heirs. What grace—grace that is greater than all our sin!

### *d) Accepted (1:6)*

The Greek verb *charitoō*, used in the clause 'which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved,' is from the noun *charis* for 'grace.' This phrase can be taken to mean 'the favor with which He has favored us.' It is the objective grace of God which is in mind, God's undeserved favor towards us, rather than any virtue that we derive.

How is it that the just and holy God can give us such a reception? It is because His eternal Son has never disappointed Him in any way, and He sees us as being in Him. He accepts us for Christ's sake. There is not an ounce of worthiness in us. But God Himself has made us accepted in the Beloved, in Christ. It is nothing to do with us, and everything to do with Him. 'He has made us accepted in the Beloved.' We are back to the theme of grace.

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### 2. God the Son Redeems Us (1:7-10)

#### a) Redeemed (1:7a)

In the Old Testament, provision was made for the redemption of lands or persons that had passed from their original owner to become the property of another (Lev. 25:25-27, 47-49; Num. 18:15). The people of Israel, moreover, were themselves essentially a redeemed people. They had been slaves in Egypt, and later, through their own sinfulness, in Babylon as well. Yet God had redeemed them, and by redemption they were made His people (Ex. 15:13; Dt. 7:8; Is. 48:20; 52>9). The fundamental idea of redemption is that of the setting free of a thing or a person that has come to belong to another.

Redemption means being delivered from the slavery of sin by the death of Christ. In antiquity, a person could become a slave in one of three ways. He could be born a slave; children of slaves were automatically slaves too. He could become a slave by conquest; the citizens of a conquered city or nation would be enslaved. He could become a slave through debt; a person who could not pay a debt could be enslaved as the last possible resource for payment. Significantly, the Bible speaks of people being slaves of sin in each of these ways. We are born in sin, receiving a sinful nature from our parents (Ps. 51:5). We are conquered by sin (Ps. 19:13). We are also slaves of sin through debt (Rom. 6:23).

In the New Testament, the redemption of man is redemption from the bondage and the power of sin, involving a resolution of the power of guilt. The means of redemption is the blood of Christ. Jesus came to redeem His people (Mt. 26:28; Mark 10:45; Rom. 3:24; Gal. 3:13). We have been redeemed. We have been bought back. The price has been paid. Christ paid that price when He shed His blood on the cross. It is the price we should have paid ourselves, but He has paid it instead. Nothing could speak louder about how seriously God views the problem of the alienation that exists between us and Him because of our rebellion through our sin.

To whom is this redemption price paid? Theologians debate whether or not God paid a redemption price to Satan for Christ's redemption of us, and of course the answer is no. You can see that from the exodus. God didn't pay Pharaoh anything to get His people out of Egypt. Instead he killed Pharaoh and destroyed Egypt. God cast us into slavery because of our sins, and so it is to God that the price must be paid. And the price that God demands to satisfy Him is blood. It was the blood of a lamb in Egypt, and it was the blood of the spotless Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, on the cross. So God pays the debt to Himself.

There are three words for 'redemption' in the New Testament. The first word is *agorazō*. It comes from the noun for a Greek marketplace, and *agora*. It means 'to buy' or 'to buy in a marketplace'. This word emphasizes the price Jesus paid for our salvation (*cp.* Mt. 20:28; Titus 2:14; 1 Pe. 1:18-19). The idea of deliverance by payment of a price was common in the Old Testament period. The Jews spoke of *gaal* ('to redeem') and *goel* ('kinsman-redeemer'). The kinsman-redeemer was to purchase back property lost to debt and restore it to the family. Boaz did this for land that had belonged to the husband of Ruth.

The second New Testament word for 'redemption' is *exagorazō*. This is the same word as the first one, but with the addition of the prefix *ex*, meaning 'out of.' *Exagorazō* means 'to buy out of the marketplace,' with the thought that one thus purchased might never return there again. This is a particularly blessed thought for Christians because it has to do with the effective and permanent nature of redemption. Jesus purchased us so that we might be taken out of the marketplace of sin and never have to return.



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The third word for redemption in the New Testament is *luō* (plus the derivatives *lutroō*, *lutron*, *lutrō* and *apolutrosis*, which is the word here in 1:7). It means ‘to loose, set free, or deliver’—by the payment of a price. Here too is a beautiful and encouraging thought for Christians. For it is not merely that we are bought out of the marketplace of sin, never to be returned there. A person could be bought on the slave block, never be sold on the block again, but nevertheless continue for the remainder of his life as a slave. This is not what Jesus Christ does for us. He buys us from sin to set us free.

### b) *Forgiven (1:7b)*

Sin involves the bondage of the mind and will and members, but forgiveness is freedom, and *aphesis*, the word used here, means literally the loosing of a person from that which binds. Forgiveness means having God wipe the slate clean (Jer. 31:34; 1 Jn. 1:9). Jesus speaks of forgiveness in terms of paying a debt (Mt. 6:12; 18:21-35). Our own debt to God cannot be measured, and we cannot pay it. But God does not cancel our debt by a wave of the hand. Justice demands that the debt be paid. And it has been! God’s abounding love paid it, when the Savior died in our place.

### c) *Enlightened (1:8-10)*

God has ‘lavished’ His gracious riches ‘upon us.’ The Greek verb used (*perisseuō*) expresses the superabundance of God’s giving, the overflow as of a fountain from a deep and abundant source.

The words ‘in all wisdom (*sophia*) and insight (*phronēsis*)’ are another of the great blessings which the apostle enumerates. God not only receives and forgives. Those whom He has reconciled to Himself as children He also enlightens with the understanding of His purpose. ‘Wisdom’ is the knowledge that sees into the heart of things, while ‘insight’ is the understand that leads to right action. Such ‘wisdom’ and ‘insight’ are possible because God reveals ‘His will’ concerning the goal and purpose of life, and concerning its details. Where do we find this ‘wisdom’ and ‘insight’? In the Bible. There is no further revelation—we have all the wisdom and knowledge we need.

When Paul uses the term ‘mystery’ (*mystērion*) our antennae should go up immediately, because in the ancient world there were various forms of religions that were called ‘mystery religions.’ To be a member of one of these particular groups, one had to undergo some exotic initiation rites involving, usually, a kind of occult practice. Secretly, the mysteries of the religion were revealed to them, and these were carefully guarded from outside. But that is not what ‘mystery’ means in the New Testament. Paul is showing that the revelation God gives of Himself and of the plan of redemption is a gradual, progressive unveiling of His full and final purposes. God has disclosed to the church His eternal purpose and plan for what we call ‘history,’ for space and time. Thus, the word in the New Testament conveys the thought not of something mysterious, but something revealed.

The term ‘mystery’ means the revelation of a truth that was once unknown. God has chosen to make known to us according to His kind intention (1:9) His plan of salvation, which was conceived in Christ and fulfilled by Him in His ministry on earth. The disharmony of the world is not to go on forever, for the same God who has predestined us to salvation in Jesus Christ has also predestined all things to be brought together in submission to Him.

The word translated ‘dispensation’ or ‘administration’ is *oikonomia*, which was used either for the administration of a household (*oikos*), or for the responsibility of the one who administered

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it. It is used several times in the New Testament in this latter sense of stewardship. For the church is the household of God, Jesus Christ is the chief steward, and under Him his ministers are called to live as stewards (1 Cor. 4:1-2; 9:17; Titus 1:7; 1 Pe. 4:10). Here it is the government or arrangement of things for God's people, and for the whole universe that is in view.

Paul uses a concept that is integral to the New Testament teaching, seen in his use of the Greek word *pleroma* ('fullness'). When Paul speaks of 'when the times will have reached their fulfillment,' he is looking to the final *pleroma*. God has revealed to the Church, through Christ, the ultimate goal of creation. Paul's doctrine of predestination is not only concerned with individuals, but includes the destiny of world history. God has determined from the foundation of the world how the universe is going to end up. God has determined a destiny for this world.

Jesus Christ orders everything in its full time, and in infinite wisdom orders the time of all things. It is also to be noted here that the word used for 'time' is not *chronos* which connotes the passage of time in days and months and years, but *kairos* which speaks of particular times, the decisive times of fulfillment in the purposes of God. Here is a paraphrase: 'When all the times and seasons which the Father has fixed by His own authority have run their course, God's age-long purpose which He planned in Christ will attain its full fruition.'

God's ultimate purpose in redemption is 'to bring all things in heaven and on earth together' again under Jesus Christ. The key to understanding verse 10 is a word which, strangely enough, most of the translations omit. It is the word 'again,' and it occurs in Greek in connection with the verb 'bring together under one head.' The root of the verb is *kephatē*, which means 'head.' The verb in Ephesians 1:10 is an expansion of this word (*anakephalaiousathai*) which has the word 'again' (*ana*) linked to it. The word really says that it is God's purpose 'to bring together, unite, [or] sum up' all things 'again' in Jesus Christ. In other words, everything was together in Jesus once, ceased to be united to Him through the Fall, but is to be reunited in him *again* by redemption. The goal of creation is neither chaos nor disharmony but unity, and the point of unity will be His anointed king.

This is not a doctrine of universalism, the doctrine that all fallen creatures will be saved. Rather, it is the teaching that all things will be subjected to Christ—some willingly as those who have been redeemed by Jesus joyfully exult in His rule, some unwillingly as evil is nevertheless restrained and all are forced to acknowledge Jesus as Lord of all.

### 3. God the Holy Spirit Seals Us (1:11-14)

God the Father chooses, Jesus Christ redeems, and the Holy Spirit applies the benefits of Christ's work savingly to God's elect. In verses 11-14 we have a rich statement of the chief doctrines of the Holy Spirit and His work.

#### a) *Inheritance Given (1:11-12)*

This universe is destined for glory, and Christians are predestined to participate in and witness to that glory. As adopted children, the inheritance is ours now, but we shall enjoy full possession of it then.

'In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined....' The first work of the Holy Spirit is what theologians term the *effectual call* (v. 11). At first reading, verse 11 seems to say the same thing as verse 4. But that would be redundant. Actually, in this verse Paul is carrying the argument a bit further, showing how, having first 'predestined' to salvation, God now

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chooses those who have been chosen, thereby working out His purposes in their particular lives. This is accomplished by the Holy Spirit. This effectual call by the Holy Spirit is necessary because apart from it, no one would turn from sin to Christ. The verb here is *klēroō*, which means ‘chosen by lot,’ although the idea of the ‘lot’ often disappears in its usage. The word ‘inheritance’ is *klēronomia*, and it implies that those who are God’s portion have their inheritance in Him.

The second function of the Spirit in these verses is the *glorification of Christ* (vv. 12 & 14; cp. Jn. 15:26; 16:13-14). The whole reason for this predestination was that those who first trust in Christ would be to the praise of His glory – that they would worship and glorify Jesus Christ. Whenever the church has forgotten this it has tended to call attention to the Holy Spirit rather than Christ and has fallen into an unhealthy and often divisive subjectivism. Since the work of the Holy Spirit is to glorify Christ, we may conclude that any emphasis upon the work of the Holy Spirit that detracts from the person and work of Christ is not of the Spirit. On the other hand, whenever Christ is exalted—in whatever way—there the third person of the Trinity is at work, and we may recognize that work and thank Him for it.

### b) *Inheritance Guaranteed (1:13-14)*

- *What does it mean to be sealed in Him (1:13)?*

The third work of the Holy Spirit is the *making of one new people*, the church, out of those who were diverse peoples beforehand. In verses 11-12 Paul speaks of himself and other Jewish believers, saying that such were ‘chosen ... for the praise of His glory.’ In verses 13-14 he speaks of the Gentile believers, to whom he is writing this letter, saying that they ‘*also were included ... to the praise of His glory.*’ This was an important thing in Paul’s day because of the hostility that existed between Jews and Gentiles—between Greeks and Romans, rich and poor, slaves and freemen, too, for that matter. In Paul’s day (as in ours) the world was sharply divided along many scores of lines. People were divided by distrusts and hatreds. But into this divided world came a new breed of people, people whose lives were transformed by the Holy Spirit and who were united in Christ in spite of their differences (see 2:15-16). To have both Jew and Gentile equally partaking in the blessing of God which is Christ Jesus is a major reconciliation.

The fourth aspect of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in these verses is the connection between the Holy Spirit of God and the *Word of God*, the Bible (v. 13). The Holy Spirit never speaks or works apart from the Scripture (Jn. 3:8; 1 Cor. 2:12-14; 1 Jn. 5:6).

The final work of the Spirit mentioned here is His work of *sealing God’s people*. The word ‘seal’ in Greek is *sphragis* and it contains the concept of an indelible mark, representing a promise. The closest thing to this in the ancient world would be whenever a king wanted to authenticate a decree and marked it with a wax impression from his signet ring. This signet ring wax impression represented and guaranteed that what had been promised would take place.

There are three purposes for which a seal is used and each illustrates the Spirit’s work: 1) a seal is used to confirm an object or document as being true or genuine; 2) a seal is used to mark a thing as one’s property; and 3) a seal is used to mark something fast or secure. Each of these illustrates something important about the Spirit’s work. The Holy Spirit verifies that the one receiving Him really is God’s child (Rom. 8:16). My perseverance in the faith does not rest in my own ability to persevere. No Christian is ever lost based on the promises of God. When we believe in Jesus Christ, God the Holy Spirit is sealed on us and our souls are marked indelibly as the children of God.

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The Holy Spirit is also God's claim on us that we are truly His possession (v. 14). Sealing by the Spirit indicates that a believer belongs to God. It is 'proof positive' that he is one of God's elect. The proof is not that you feel you've had an experience; feelings are deceptive. However, as one who is sealed, the believer has a responsibility to fulfill the office to which he has been called—that of adopted son (1:5). Proof of being sealed, therefore, becomes evident by the fruits of one's life.

Finally, the Holy Spirit makes the Christian secure in his new faith and relationship. The Holy Spirit is actually more than a certification of God's promises. He is himself a portion of our inheritance. The Greek word translated 'guarantee' (*arrabōn*), is originally a word taken from the Phoenician world of commerce. If a trader wished to buy something, but did not have all the money required, he left a deposit or 'earnest' with the seller. This deposit was a pledge to buy the goods and a promise to return with the full amount necessary. It was a down payment guaranteeing that there would be more to follow. This is exactly the Holy Spirit's role. He has been given to us as a down payment on the fullness of the inheritance which is already ours in Jesus Christ.

### C. Application Questions

- *Although we are not apostles, God does have a purpose for all of us. Where do you believe God is sending you forth this week as a minister in his name?*
- *As an adopted child of God, I will experience heavenly glory. Yet I am thankful for His grace each day. How can I show my thankfulness by forgiving others this week?*

For next time: Read Ephesians 1:15-23 and Stuart chapter 3.