

Our Inheritance in Christ

Ephesians 1:1-14

In a 1998 movie titled *Uncorked*, an ambitious, self-absorbed man named Ross, on a desperate quest for wealth, is determined to sell a priceless family wine collection in order to buy a local manganese mine. His eccentric Uncle Cullen is unimpressed by his nephew's materialism. Ross broods about how to get his brother and uncle to sign over the estate to him. When that fails, he hatches a plot to murder his Uncle Cullen. In his moment of madness he restrains himself and is remorseful. While he apologizes to his uncle, he indicates he will be finding a place of his own.

Uncle Cullen smiles and says, "You already have a place of your own. You already own Sachell Farm." Unwilling to believe it, Ross runs to the family safe. He discovers the deed to the estate has had his name on it all along. He wonders if this could be true. Cullen calls attention to a folder that is also in the safe. Ross looks in the folder and finds a key. With a flash of insight, he runs to the entrance to the mine. The key fits the lock. Amazingly the mine he has longed to own was already in the family. It was a birthright he could only accept as a gift, not earn or buy.

Do we even know how rich we are? It seems that some Christians, who must know that they are dearly loved and provided for by their Father, still stagger through life as though they were waifs with no spiritual resources at all. *Ephesians* reminds us that as God's children, we have at our disposal our Father's own riches. These are not earthly riches, but spiritual riches that empower us to rest in the assurance of our salvation, to battle temptation, to pursue godliness, to build up one another as the body of Christ and to function, in word and deed, as the church, by which God sends His Gospel into the world and through which He showcases His power to restore mankind to unity.

Though Paul's greeting is typical to his other letters, it is far from a cliché pleasantry.

¹Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,
To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus:

²Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

"Grace", conveys the idea of good favor. A form of the word is translated "gift", something given out of the pleasure of the giver without regard to the merit of the recipient. References to God's grace or good pleasure recur throughout this letter. Honest attention to God's holiness juxtaposed against human sinfulness compels us to admit that only grace could have motivated God to provide us with His spiritual resources. He saved us, not because we deserved saving, but because He found pleasure in saving us. Who can grasp this and ever be anything but spiritually humble before the Father?

Paul often coupled "grace" with "peace" as though they were a two-piece set. To the Jewish Paul, peace, or *shalom*, was not merely the absence of strife, but the presence of everything conducive to a man's highest good. Such peace is independent of outward storms. A man with every material benefit can lack peace. A man with nothing can enjoy perfect peace.

Paul presents "grace" and "peace" as a set for one cannot exist without the other. If it did not simply please God to save us, there would not be any other incentive on His part to save us. We haven't earned it. Only by a salvation that is by grace can any sinner know divine peace. And where God's peace chronically eludes a believer, there must be some inadequate understanding of His grace.

The Son of God, the supreme gift of the Father's grace, died for us. Grace made a provision whereby the weighty millstone of any approach to God that depends on our goodness has been crushed under the weight of the cross of Jesus. God required of us perfection. We could not deliver, so by grace, the blood of a perfect sacrifice was spilled, and we have been declared clean by the Father. The Father's riches are our inheritance in Christ, and they are featured in the opening words of Ephesians.

I. Acceptance into a Holy Family (3-6)

³ 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. ⁴ For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵ he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will-- ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

A. God Chose Us ...

God had a plan, and He worked that plan. Before the world was created, He knew that the crown of His Creation would rebel against Him, so He determined that those who believed on His Son would be saved. Now, there have been many lively debates over the centuries as to whether God predetermines that some people will believe and others will not. Can God predestine our choices and still honor our free-will at the same time? I doubt I'll settle that. But I did find a cartoon that illustrates the nature of the argument and how heated it can get. (Calvinist/Armenian squaring off)

I know what I believe and I'll tell you all about it if you to take me to lunch on your dime. This morning, I prefer to touch on something more mutually edifying. From the vantage point of those who are already believers, I think most Christians are perfectly willing to concede that God's plan, regardless of where we differ, includes rendering us holy, blameless and adopted as sons of God. That's certainly what this text is about.

I have a hard time believing that Paul wanted his readers, who were already believers, to fixate on whether or not they were believers because of God's irresistibility or their own free-will. Once we are able to leave that debate behind, I think the context bears out that Paul wanted his readers, (Did I mention "who were already believers"?), to trust that the plan of God to save them was thorough. It covered all the bases necessary for a complete and full salvation.

B. God Chose Us to Be Holy and Blameless

"Holy", means to be distinct and set-apart by God as God's own possession. The Jewish temple was considered holy because it was different from any other building. A priest was holy because he was set-apart by God for service. God chose believers to be different from the rank and file of the human race. As we considered last week, you are not everybody else. How the world reacts to provocation is really of no consequence to you. How the world justifies its violence, its materialism, its hedonism, its selfishness and its other assorted lusts and ambitions should hold no fascination for you.

"Blameless" refers to the unblemished character of a proper sacrifice. Under Jewish law, before an animal could be offered at the temple, it had to be inspected. If any blemish was found, it was rejected. To say that we have been called to be blameless should purge from our lives any sense of indifference in regard to our obedience to God and personal purity. Some who profess to have faith in God have surrendered to the notion that they are sinners. They have given up the fight we might say because they envision that their sanctification is chiefly God's concern and none of their own.

Ultimately, only God's might can render believers holy and blameless, but to be disinterested in and disengaged from the pursuit of holiness and blamelessness is, at best, to grieve the Holy Spirit Who lives within us to guide us into righteousness and, at worst, it proves that believer's faith to be a lie.

C. God Predestined Us to Be Adopted

The Romans lived under a legal doctrine called *Patria Potesta* meaning, "the father's power." A child never ceased to live under the authority of his living father. He could be a grown man, a Roman Senator, a judge, or the richest guy in town. But, if "Pop" was still around, he wielded authority over Junior, his possessions and his family. It must have made for some interesting exchanges: As Flavius pillages central Europe, he receives a message from home, "Come home now, son." He responds, "Aaaw, man!" At times in Roman history, a father could order his son's death, and the execution was legally carried out. I remember Bill Cosby's TV character, Dr. Cliff Huxtable, telling his son, Theo, "I brought you into this world ... and I can take you out." That was the essence of *Patria Potesta*.

Obviously, formal adoption was a big deal. If a person had a new father, he was essentially a new man with a new identity. All ties with the past - his assets, his debts, and especially, the rule of his former father were severed. When God adopted you as His child, your past ceased to matter. God does not accept us in spite of our sins. He severs us from our past. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

II. Atonement to a Holy Father (7, 8)

... ⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace ⁸that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding.

A. God Redeemed Us with Christ's Blood

"Redemption" was a classical Greek theme that referred to the ransoming of a slave or a prisoner and the pardoning of a condemned man. Often, it referred to the payment of a ransom price. It always carried the idea of the deliverance of a person from a situation in which he was powerless to help himself. Redemption perfectly expresses Christ's work on our behalves. He died on a cross in the place of helpless, hopeless people to remove the death penalty that was hanging over their heads. This was necessary because of the gap that exists between a holy God and sinful people.

Though my translation does not bring the idea into the English, the original speaks of "the redemption". Many students of Greek believe that Paul was drawing attention to the fact that "redemption by blood" was a familiar image to people throughout the world. Sacrifices to allegedly appease offended deities were offered in pagan temples as well as in Jerusalem. They suggest that Paul was emphasizing what we know to be true, that Jesus' redemption is the only true redemption.

B. God Forgave Our Sins

Man at his most arrogant and dishonest point of self-delusion, concludes that there is no God. In this world of complex order and intricate design, he tells himself that he is an atheist. What is really at play is not honest intellectual pursuit, but a desire to live unaccountably and unrestrained. He reasons, "I am my own moral authority." No wonder David writes, "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no god ...'" (Psalm 14:1) Atheism is silly when you dissect it. However, if you are like most people that have lived in this world, one indisputable testimony of creation is that there is a God. A similarly apparent truth is "You are not Him!" You are estranged from Him. You need forgiveness.

Before this world was created, God knew how He would remove the guilt and fear that accompanies a human being's personal sense of sinfulness. He removes the sense of estrangement and makes it possible for the sinner to partake of what is otherwise the elusive peace of God's presence. The word "forgiveness" in verse 7 refers to a casting away, a release or a separation. David wrote "... as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103:12).

Is it fair to say that we struggle with forgiveness? Janey Walser wrote in a recent *READER'S DIGEST*:

"I once worked in a grocery store and often assisted elderly people when they came in. One woman shopped nearly every day, asking for just a few items each time. After a month, she said to me, "I suppose you wonder why I'm here so often. You see, I live with my nephew. I can't stand him, and I am not going to die and leave him with a refrigerator full of food."

Any forgiveness we manage to muster usually falls quite short of a forgiveness that removes the sins of others "as far as east is from west". When God forgives, He does not revisit us with old grudges.

C. With "Redemption and Forgiveness", God Threw In "Wisdom and Understanding"

The phrase in verse 8, "... that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding" could simply remind us that God made His salvation known in His own perfect way, according to His plan and on His timetable. More interpreters, however, consider "wisdom and understanding" to be gifts to man that accompany God's "redemption and forgiveness".

"Wisdom" refers to the knowledge of precious things and first facts. It is the knowledge that satisfies the hungering mind. Godly knowledge is essential, but knowledge alone can degenerate into mere Bible trivia. "Understanding" is a more practical knowledge. It is the sound sense that enables a person to use wisdom to meet life's issues. This understanding must have its roots in godly wisdom for good, practical sense that is not rooted in rock-solid truth degenerates into mere pragmatism.

III. Anticipation of a Holy Future (9-14)

A. God Revealed to Us His Mystery verses 9 -13a

... ⁹And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, ¹⁰to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment - to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. (What does he mean?)

¹¹In 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, ¹²in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ (meaning Jewish believers like himself), might be for the praise of his glory. ¹³And you also (Gentile believers) were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation.

Paul borrows the religious jargon of his age when he speaks of a "mystery". Ancient mystery religions spoke of a mystery as some divine truth unknown until a person had been formally enlightened. The mystery of which Paul spoke was made known in Christ when the times "reached their fulfillment" (verse 10). Every man-made scheme to know God had been tried, tested, and found wanting. Even with a law from God Himself, the Jews failed to remain in fellowship with Him because they could not keep that law. Only the grace of God in Christ would prove adequate.

What did God really have in mind in the Old Testament, in the preservation of His chosen nation through fantastic ordeals, in the blood of the sacrifices, in the symbols of the Law and in the words of His prophets? God's mystery was unveiled when He revealed in the death and resurrection of Jesus that He was restoring to perfect unity, a presently chaotic creation or, as verse 10 words it: "...to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ."

Ephesians vividly illustrates this great theme of God bringing all things together in Christ. His redemptive work unites Jew and Gentile into "one new man" (2:15). Later, Paul shows that the mutual submission of believers in reverence to Christ will resolve the battle of the sexes, bridge the generation gap and settle the normal animosity that existed between an ancient slave and his master.

B. We Wait for the Fruition of God's Plan with a Solid Basis in Hope verses 13b-14

Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession - to the praise of his glory.

Paul applies two metaphors to the Holy Spirit, Who is sent by God to believers. He is a seal. Ancient wax seals were placed on crates being shipped to indicate ownership, legal documents to indicate authenticity and official letters to indicate authority. The Holy Spirit within us is God's authoritative proclamation that we are His own. The Holy Spirit is also called a "deposit". Paul was speaking of a "down-payment", which was the assurance of payment-in-full at a later date. The Holy Spirit within us is God's own assurance that He will bring to completion everything He has promised.

How does the Holy Spirit function as a seal and a deposit? As we yield to His presence, glimpses of what lays ahead become apparent now. We do start to win battles against temptation. We are drawn together with people we never dreamed we could have anything in common with. We do become more like Jesus in demeanor and practice. We become more confident in our eternal salvation. That transaction will certainly be completed. God will finish His work. The Holy Spirit in us testifies!

Before the world was created, the Father willed, planned and set in motion His eternal plan to reconcile believers to Himself. He saved us, not because we merited salvation, but because of His grace. All the riches of our eternal God's grace have been bestowed on those who believe. And, this is so just because God loved us and was pleased to extend to us His grace.

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