

Book of Ephesians Bible Study Lesson 4

Ephesians 1:11-14

The Secure Assurance of Salvation and the Divine Inheritance

Many people in our society today in all walks of life wonder if they will ever find fulfillment and security for their lives. They wonder if they will turn out to be what they could be if everything went just right. They wonder if life really has the potential to be wonderful, meaningful, secure, and fulfilling---and, if it does, whether they can discover and achieve that potential.

In this passage Paul shows us the awesome and wonderful potential of Christian believers. That for which every person in one way or another yearns, the Christian already possesses or is one day assured of possessing. The apostle gives us a glimpse of the glorious blessings God has planned for and promised to those who come to Him through His Son, Jesus Christ.

It is human nature to break promises. Governments make and break promises. Advertisers and politicians make and break promises. Employers and employees, preachers and church members, parents and children, husbands and wives, and friends and relatives all make promises to each other which often are broken. Some are made with the best of intentions, and some are made in order to deceive and exploit. But all of us find ourselves both making and receiving promises that, for whatever reason, do not materialize.

We can be eternally thankful that God's promises are not like ours. Every promise He makes, He keeps. The promises Paul mentions here that our heavenly Father makes to His children not only are wonderful and exciting but absolute and certain. As the writer of Hebrews tells us, "He who promised is faithful" (Heb. 10:23). Like Abraham, every believer should be fully assured that what God promises He is able and certain to perform (Rom. 4:20-22).

We are certain to receive the full, undiminished inheritance of Jesus Christ. Just as we have been blessed "with every spiritual blessing," chosen "in Him before the foundation of the world," predestined . . . to adoption as sons," given "redemption through His blood," and shown "the mystery of His will" ----so we have also obtained an inheritance.

Our inheritance is the aspect of salvation which is primarily future. We were elected, or predestined, before the world or time existed; we have been redeemed in this present age; and we will receive our completed inheritance in the ages to come, when we enter fully into the Father's eternal heavenly kingdom.

The Ground of Our Inheritance:

The text clearly refers to Jesus Christ (vs. 10), who is the ground or source of our divine inheritance. Apart from Jesus Christ, the only ultimate and eternal thing a person can receive from God is condemnation. God bestows sunshine, rain, and many other good things on all men, the righteous and unrighteous alike (Matt. 5:45). But His spiritual blessings are bestowed only on those who are in Him (vs. 1, 3-4, 6-7, 10). "There is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

In Romans 6, Paul gives the spiritual biography of every believer. "Do you not know," he begins, "that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?" (vs. 3). "Therefore, we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection" (vs. 4-5). By a marvelous miracle that only God can comprehend, every believer has been to the cross of Calvary, been nailed there spiritually with the Savior, and been buried and raised with Him. Jesus Christ not only was crucified, buried, and raised for every believer but with every believer. Not only that, but "we know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is" (1 John 3:2). On that glorious day we will finally and fully "become conformed to the image of His Son" (Rom. 8:29).

When something in the future was so certain that it could not possibly fail to happen, the Greeks would often speak of it as if it had already occurred. Such as "We have obtained an inheritance" (vs. 11), and also "seated us with Him in the heavenly places" (vs. 6). Although the apostle and those to whom he wrote had not yet entered into that glorious experience yet, their dwelling eternally with the Lord was just as certain as if they were already in heaven.

Throughout Scripture believers are spoken of as belonging to God, and He is spoken of as belonging to them. The New Testament speaks of our being in Christ and of His being in us, of our being in the Spirit and of His being in us. "The one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him" (1 Cor. 6:17). Paul could therefore say, "For me, to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21).

Because we are identified with Christ, our lives are identified with His life (1 John 2:6). We are to love as He loved, help as He helped, care as He cared, share as He shared, and sacrifice our own interests and welfare for the sake of others just as He did. Like our Lord, we are in the world to lose our lives for others.

Our inheritance with Christ is yet another of the amazing and magnificent blessings with which the Father has blessed us in the Son. As Paul makes clear in

verse 3, our inheritance includes “every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.” In Jesus Christ, believers inherit every promise God has ever made. Peter tells us that God’s “divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness” and “has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises” (2 Pet. 1:3-4). Paul says with absolute inclusiveness, “For as many as may be the promises of God, in Him they are YES” (2 Cor. 1:20).

Our every conceivable need is met by God’s gracious provision in accordance with His divine promises. We are promised peace, love, grace, wisdom, eternal life, joy, victory, strength, guidance, power, mercy, forgiveness, righteousness, truth, fellowship with God, spiritual discernment, heaven, eternal riches, glory---those and every other good thing that comes from God. Because we have been made joint heirs with Christ, we are guaranteed possession of everything He possesses. We are “heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:17).

Jesus Christ is therefore the ground of the inheritance that we have obtained.

The Divine Perspective:

God’s perspective on our inheritance in Christ is here shown in His predestination, His power, and His preeminence(supremacy).

As Christians we are what we are because of what God chose to make us before any man was created. From eternity past He declared that every elect sinner---though vile, rebellious, useless, and deserving only of death---who trusted in His Son would be made as righteous as the One in whom they put their trust. As Paul has already established, “He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him” (vs. 4).

William Hendriksen’s comment on this passage is helpful and concise: Neither fate nor human merit determines our destiny. The benevolent purpose---that we should be holy and faultless, sons of God, destined to glorify Him forever---is fixed, being part of a larger, universe-embracing plan. Not only did God make this plan that includes absolutely all things that ever take place in the heaven, on earth, and in hell; past, present, and even the future, pertaining to both believers and unbelievers, to angels and devils, to physical as well as spiritual energies and units of existence both large and small; He also wholly carries it out. His providence in time is as comprehensive as is His decree from eternity. (New Testament Commentary: Exposition of Ephesians [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967], pg. 88).

God’s creating and energizing are one in His divine mind. When He spoke each part of the world into existence it began immediately to operate precisely as

He had planned it to do. Unlike the things we make, God's creations do not have to be redesigned, prototyped, tested, fueled, charged, and the like. They are not only created ready to function, they are created functioning.

Energizing is an indispensable part of His creative plan and work. Because in His wondrous grace God chose us to be His children, citizens of His kingdom, and joint heirs with His Son, He will bring all of that to pass. "For I am confident of this very thing," Paul declared, "that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 1:6). God works out what He plans. He energizes every believer with all the power necessary for his spiritual completion. It is not sufficient to think that God only makes the plan, He also makes it work out.

The Lord's perspective and working are seen in His predestination, in His power, and, as we see here, in His preeminence (supremacy). Man is redeemed for the purpose of restoring the divine image marred by sin. Because God's intention in creating men was that they should bear the divine image, salvation's goal is creation's goal. God desires creatures that will give Him glory by both proclaiming and displaying His glory. For that reason He redeems men.

Scripture always presents salvation from God's side, in order that He should have full credit. In our humanly-oriented society, God's wanting exclusive credit seems inappropriate---but only because men have no concept of His greatness, holiness, and glory. The praise and glory that men so much desire are totally undeserved and their motives for wanting them are purely sinful. But God seeks glory for the right reasons and because He alone is deserving of it. His seeking glory is a holy desire of which He is supremely and singly worthy.

Our predestined salvation, including our connected eternal boundless blessings, are therefore designed that they should ***be to the praise of His glory***.

The Human Perspective:

Throughout Scripture there is tension between God's sovereignty and man's will, a tension that, in his limited and imperfect knowledge, man is incapable of fully reconciling. As with all the other actions and paradoxes in God's Word, our responsibility is to believe both sides of them without reservation, just as they are revealed. We know the truths are in perfect accord in God's mind, and that knowledge should satisfy us.

Someone has pictured the divine and human sides of salvation in this way: When you look toward heaven you see a sign that reads, "Whosoever will may come," and after you enter heaven you look back to that same sign and read on the other side, "Chosen in Him before the foundation of the world."

R.C. Sprouls explains: Yes, salvation does relate to the pleasure of God's will, which means that God is pleased by exercising His will to salvation.

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. In other words, God did not choose them because they qualified for the choice. Rather, he chose them because he was pleased to extend mercy to them, while the others He passes over. God is not obligated to save anybody, to make any special act of grace, to draw anyone to Himself. He could leave the whole world to perish, and such would be a righteous judgment.

Why doesn't God give His grace to everyone? It is certainly a legitimate question, but we do not know the answer. We might suggest that God is honored when His justice is manifested in leaving some to the punishment their sins deserve, and He is honored when His grace is manifested in the salvation of His elect. God is also just when He gives grace, for election is inseparably bound up with Christ. It is for the sake of the Beloved, and not just because of God's love for us, that there is redemption at all. God honors His Beloved Son by creating from fallen humanity new vessels of life, a new humanity, a new household of faith, that He calls His church, those who are called out from this world, according to the sovereign plan of Divine election (Focus on the Bible – Ephesians pg. 25-26).

Whatever God's reasons for designing such humanly irreconcilable truths, we should thank and praise Him for them. For the very reason that they are completely true while seeming to be contradictory, we are humbled in His presence as we stand in awe of that which to us is incomprehensible. To the trusting believer such truths are but further evidence that Scripture is God's doing, and not man's.

From our human perspective a rich factor in man's believing the Gospel is the hope he is given in his Savior and Lord, grounded only in Jesus Christ. The good news that God has provided a way of salvation through the atoning work of His Son, Jesus Christ. Having also believed not only stresses the means by which salvation is appropriated but also the uniformity of such means by the use of also.

Faith is man's response to God's elective purpose. God's choice of men is election; men's choice of God is faith. In election God gives His promises, and by faith men receive them.

The Guarantee of Our Inheritance:

Men have always wanted assurances. Because the promises of other men are so often unreliable, we demand oaths, sworn affidavits, surety bonds, guarantees, warranties, and many other such means of trying to assure that what is promised is received.

God's simple word should be sufficient for us, but in His graciousness He makes His promises even more certain---if that were possible---by giving us His own guarantees. Here the Lord guarantees His promises with His seal and with His pledge. This is reminiscent of Hebrews 6:13-18, in which God gives His promise of blessing and then confirms it with an oath to provide what the Holy Spirit calls "strong encouragement" (vs. 18) to all who hope in Christ.

God's Seal:

Because we do not directly and immediately receive the fullness of all God's promises when we first believe, since it is reserved in heaven for us (1 Pet 1:3-4), we may sometimes be tempted to doubt our salvation and wonder about the ultimate blessings that are supposed to accompany it. While we are still in this life our redemption is not complete, because we still await "the redemption of our body" (Rom. 8:23). Because we have not yet received full possession of our inheritance, we may question its reality or at least its greatness.

Every believer is given the very Holy Spirit of God the moment they trust in Christ. Incredibly, the body of every true Christian is actually "a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in [him]" (1 Cor. 6:19).

When a person becomes a Christian, the Holy Spirit of God is now within. He is there to empower us, equip us for ministry, and function through the gifts He has given us. The Holy Spirit is our Helper and Advocate. He protects and encourages us. He also guarantees our inheritance in Jesus Christ. "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:16-17). The Spirit of God is our securing force, our guarantee.

The sealing of which Paul speaks here refers to an official mark of identification that was placed on a letter, contract, or other important document. The seal usually was made from hot wax, which was placed on the document and then impressed with a signet ring. The document was thereby officially identified with and under the authority of the person to whom the signet belonged. The seal of God's Spirit in the believer signifies four primary things: security, authenticity, ownership, and authority.

A seal in ancient times from a noble source represented *security* and sacredness. When Daniel was thrown into the lion's den, King Darius, along with his nobles, place their seals on the stone place over the entrance to the den, "so that nothing might be changed in regard to Daniel" (Dan. 6:17). Any person but the king who broke or disturbed that seal would likely have forfeited his life. In a similar way the tomb where Jesus was buried was sealed. Fearing that Jesus' disciples might steal His body and falsely claim His resurrection, the Jewish

leaders obtained Pilate's permission to place a seal on the stone and to guard it with soldiers (Matt. 27:62-66).

In an infinitely greater way, the Holy Spirit secures each believer, marking him with His own unchallengeable seal.

Authenticity: When God gives us His Holy Spirit, it is as if He stamps us with a seal that reads, "This person belongs to Me and is an authentic citizen of My divine kingdom and member of My divine family."

Ownership: When the Holy Spirit seals believers, He marks them as God's divine possessions, who from that moment on entirely and eternally belong to Him. The Spirit's seal declares the transaction of salvation as divinely official and final.

Authority: When Christians are sealed with the Holy Spirit they are delegated to proclaim, teach, minister, and defend God's Word and His gospel with the Lord's own authority.

God's Pledge:

The Holy Spirit not only guarantees our inheritance in Jesus Christ with His seal but also with His pledge. An arrabon (pledge) originally referred to a down payment or earnest money given to secure a purchase. Later it came to represent any sort of pledge or earnest. A form of the word even came to be used for an engagement ring.

As believers, we have the Holy Spirit as the divine pledge of our inheritance, God's first installment of His guarantee that the fullness of the promised spiritual blessings "in the heavenly places in Christ" (vs. 3) will one day be completely fulfilled. They are assured and guaranteed with an absolute certainty that only God could provide. The Holy Spirit is the church's irrevocable pledge, her divine engagement ring, as it were, that, as Christ's bride, she will never be neglected or forsaken (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5).

The Goal of Our Inheritance:

Although our divine inheritance in Christ is marvelous, awesome, and guaranteed promise to us from the Lord, it is not the primary purpose of our salvation. Our salvation and all of the promises, blessings, and privileges we gain through salvation are first of all bestowed with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, ***to the praise of His glory.***

The great, overriding purpose of God's redemption of men is the rescuing of what is His own possession. All creation belongs to God, and in His infinite wisdom, love, and grace He chose to provide redemption for the fallen creatures He had made in His own image---for His own sake even more than for their sakes, because they do not belong to themselves but to Him.

As Paul has already twice declared (vs. 6, 12), God's ultimate goal in redeeming men is ***the praise of His glory***. We are not saved and blessed for our own glory but for God's (Is. 43:20-21). When we glorify ourselves we rob God of that which is wholly His. He saved us to serve Him and to praise Him. We are saved to be restored to the intended divine purpose of creation---to bear the image of God and bring Him greater glory.

R.C. Sprouls says: The goal of creation is neither chaos nor disharmony but unity, and the point of unity will be His anointed king, Jesus Christ.

This is fully accomplished at the believer's glorification, when we receive full glory and redemption and are made the perfect possession of God.