

The Letter Of Paul To The Ephesians

*⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.
(Ephesians 1:7-10. ESV)*

Message 7

Every Spiritual Blessing – The Pledge Of Our Inheritance

June 16th, 2013

Ephesians 1:11-14

Rev. Paul Carter

Introduction:

Open your Bibles to Ephesians 1:11-14. This morning we are going to finish our look at the Apostle Paul's extended outburst of praise. Let me walk you through this passage and then we'll wrestle with some implications at the end. Hear now the inspired, inerrant and beautiful word of the Lord:

¹¹In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, ¹²so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. ¹³In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:11-14. ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

Understanding The Text:

The first idea being presented in this text appears to centre around the particular election of a remnant from within the Jewish people. Look carefully at verses 11-12 and then the first words of verse 13.

¹¹In him **we have obtained an inheritance**, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, ¹²**so that we who were the first to hope in Christ** might be to the praise of his glory. ¹³In him **you also**,

There is a switch there from some “we” people to some “you” people. Who is the we and who is the you? To figure this out you have to remember that the people receiving this letter were Gentiles in branch churches around the city of Ephesus. Their churches had been founded most likely by converts of Paul’s ministry in Ephesus. The author of the letter is Paul – an ethnically Jewish Apostle. So the most likely answer to this “we”/“you” problem is that when Paul is saying “we” here he is talking about the early Jewish disciples – himself among them – and then when he switches to “you” he is talking about the later Gentile converts. If that’s true – and most scholars and grammarians say that it is – then what Paul is saying is that he is praising God today because within his great plan of election, which he already praised God for back in verses 4 and 5 – God has chosen a remnant for himself from within the Jewish people. Paul understands that while election was ethnic and national in the Old Testament in the New Testament election is about God choosing people from every tribe, tongue and kindred on the face of the earth. Paul knows that but he is praising God that the first slice in that multi-national pie is a Jewish slice. Paul is saying: “God could have rejected Israel wholesale for their refusal to embrace Jesus as their rightful king. He could have done that and no one would have charged him with wrong. But in his grace and mercy he not only included them, he gave them a special place. He gave them the first slice of the election pie so that they too might be to the praise of his glory and grace. You can hear the echo in the language back to what Paul said in verses 4-6 – this isn’t a new teaching this is a break out box. Paul is saying within that doctrine of election I was so jazzed about back in verses 4-6; within that I am particularly jazzed that God has chosen for himself a remnant from among the Jewish people. In Romans 11 he’ll state his hope that this slice will one day grow much larger, but here he’s just saying how glad he is that God has chosen them in the first place. God has a remnant within the Jewish people that shall also be to the praise of his glory and grace.

Now look at verse 13:

¹³In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:11-14. ESV)

The “you also” means that Paul is now talking to the Gentiles again. You also – as fellow slices in the election pie – you also when you heard the word of truth, the Gospel of your salvation and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. Let’s pause there. That’s huge.

Most commentators believe that this is the high water mark in Paul's eulogy. Whatever else he's been excited about it all climaxes right here. This is the BIG THING – this is what God's people have been waiting for for a very long time. I've told you many times that the movement in your Bible is from PROMISE to FULFILLMENT. When you move from Old Testament to New Testament you are not moving from LAW to GRACE, you are not moving from BAD to GOOD, you are not moving from OBSOLETE to FRESH and INNOVATIVE – none of that is true and none of that is helpful – you are moving from PROMISE to FULFILLMENT and that is why Paul says that what we have now IN CHRIST is the PROMISED Holy Spirit. What promise is he referring to? Well if you know your Bible you know the candidates, chief among them would be the promise recorded in Ezekiel 36:

²⁵I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. ²⁶And I will give you a new heart, and **a new spirit I will put within you**. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷And **I will put my Spirit within you**, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. (Ezekiel 36:25-27. ESV)

God promised that a day would come when he would change the heart of his people and put his Spirit in them so that they could be free from their idols and worship him and serve him in holiness. That was the great promise, the great hope and now in Christ we have that. We have the promised Holy Spirit. Paul says something else here that I want you to see; he says:

¹³In him you also, **when you heard the word of truth**, the gospel of your salvation, **and believed** in him, **were sealed** with the promised Holy Spirit

When you heard and when you believed you were sealed. Notice that timing. The Greek word translated as “believed” is an aorist participle which means that it is coincident with the main verb “you were sealed”. Coincident means “happens at the same time”. What Paul is saying here is that at the very same moment that you believed you were sealed with the Holy Spirit. The most literal way to translate this would be to say: “believing you were sealed”. Hear that. At the self same moment you believed – you were sealed with the Holy Spirit. There is no such thing as a true believer who does not have the Holy Spirit. Anyone who tries to tell you that is simply IGNORANT of the claims of Scripture.

Now let me be very clear on this so that I don't have to answer a lot of angry e-mail. I am not saying that a person cannot have subsequent and powerful and fresh experiences of the Holy

Spirit. I am not saying that. In Ephesians 5:18 Paul uses a present imperative verb to say: “Be ever being filled with the Holy Spirit” so there is a sense inside this same letter that there is a once and for all sealing with the Holy Spirit that is shared by every believer at the point of conversion – that is taught in 1:13 and there is also a sense of subsequence and continual filling that is taught in 5:18. How do these go together? It really shouldn’t be that hard to keep these things separate. Let me use an analogy from marriage. How many times do you get married? Once – by the way – HEAR THAT. You get married ONCE! That’s the theory and many other good sermons could pursue that, but for now, just run with me on this one, you marry your husband or your wife ONE TIME. That’s a big day. Its a once in a life time kind of day. But you also have special anniversaries on an on-going basis. One wedding, many subsequent anniversary experiences. That’s a decent analogy for how this works. Your conversion is like your wedding day – you are joined to God through the agency of the Holy Spirit. You are sealed. That’s a once for all thing. But then you have experiences of subsequence- those are your anniversaries. Now, I’m not going to go into too much detail here, but anniversaries are like guaranteed love night in a marriage, they do not “re-make” the marriage covenant, each anniversary is not a new wedding, but what they do is provide fresh enjoyment of and heightened appreciation for the provisions of the covenant. That’s what the Bible is saying. If you are saved, you are sealed with the Holy Spirit. Period. But your experience of the Holy Spirit and your enjoyment of his benefits may and SHOULD increase through many subsequent and fresh encounters. Does that make sense?

Now what does it mean to be sealed with the Holy Spirit? Sealing in the Old Testament and in the surrounding culture of the day meant two things. It was used to mark out one’s possession – you put your brand on your cattle and even slaves were marked as belonging to their master – and it was used to protect them against theft or damage. So when you hear that you have been “sealed” you need to hear this: You have been marked as belonging to the King of the Universe. There is a bar code now on your soul that when scanned reads: “Child of the King”. This kind of language carries all kinds of Old Testament imagery. Look quickly at Ezekiel 9:

⁴And the LORD said to him, “Pass through the city, through Jerusalem, and **put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it.**” ⁵And to the others he said in my hearing, “Pass through the city after him, and strike. Your eye shall not spare, and you shall show no pity. ⁶Kill old men outright, young men and maidens, little children and women, but touch no one on whom is the mark. And begin at my sanctuary.” So they began with the elders who were before the house. ⁷Then he said to them, “Defile the house, and fill the courts with the slain. Go out.” So they went out and struck in the city. (Ezekiel 9:4-7. ESV)

This is a story about a time when God's judgment was going to fall on Jerusalem but before the judgment fell God sent out angels to mark those that truly belonged to him. He said that his true people would be easily identified because they would be the ones mourning over the sin of the city. By the way, doesn't that sound like Jesus in the beatitudes? Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted? The true people of God feel about sin the same way God does. So if you are looking at a so called Christian who has a very casual attitude towards sin you are probably not looking at a real Christian sealed with the Holy Spirit. That's a whole other sermon, but the point is being marked as God's possession spares you from the wrath to come.

In Pilgrim's Progress this is symbolized by the scroll that Christian and Hopeful present at the gate of the Celestial City. The young man named "Ignorant" or "Stupid" did not have such a scroll. He did not have the mark and so he was cast into hell even from the gates of heaven. If you do not bear the mark then you will face the wrath of Almighty God. The seal is about belonging and it is about being protected from the wrath to come.

Let's look now at verse 14; we have been sealed with the promised Holy Spirit:

¹⁴who is **the guarantee** of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:11-14. ESV)

The key word there for us is the word translated in your English Bibles as "the guarantee" or in some versions "the deposit" or "pledge". It is the Greek word *ar-hrab-ohn'*. This is actually a Greek word borrowed from Hebrew – the Hebrew word *erabon* sounds almost identical and it is used three times in Genesis 38 – the story of Judah and Tamar. It refers to a down payment that seals a financial transaction. So imagine that you want to purchase a house but there are many people bidding on the house so in our culture, what do you do? You put down a deposit to close the deal. The deal isn't legal until the deposit is in the bank. That's what this means here. The Holy Spirit is God's deposit that finalizes the deal of our redemption and that signifies that more is yet to come. You don't purchase a house with your \$10,000 deposit – you finalize the deal but you have to still pay the rest of the money – and so it is here. We have the Spirit as a deposit **UNTIL WE ACQUIRE POSSESSION**. Now, many Greek scholars think the ESV has this backwards and I agree – the NRSV is far better here. I think it should be translated: "until the

full acquisition of the ransomed” meaning until God comes to claim what now belongs to him. That better fits the grammar and it better fits with the Old Testament promises such as Malachi 3:7:

¹⁷“They shall be mine, says the LORD of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him. (Malachi 3:17. ESV)

We are presently purchased and owned by God but we will be fully acquired by him on the day when he makes up his treasured possession and spares us from judgment as a man spares his son who serves him. Either way you translate that line however, the same conclusion is plainly evident: the seal of the Holy Spirit is not the final destination. It guarantees something better that is yet to come. It is a foretaste, a first instalment promising MORE. Paul doesn’t spell out that MORE here but based on other teachings in the Bible I think we can safely suggest three categories of MORE.

Three Categories of “More”

1. More intimacy

According to Paul in Romans 8, the first thing the Holy Spirit does in the life of the believer is open an intimate dialogue with God as Father. He says in Romans 8:15:

but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, **by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”** (Romans 8:15. ESV)

The Holy Spirit comes into our hearts and immediately opens a channel and cries out: “Father! Father God; over here! I would like to draw your attention to this child – your child, she has something to say to you Father. Now go ahead child and speak. Speak to your Father.” Isn’t that beautiful? Isn’t that amazing and yet Paul is saying here in Ephesians that this amazing gift is just a foretaste and first instalment on something way better. What could be better than that? Well let me show you. Turn in your Bibles to Revelation 22. The Apostle John says:

¹Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ²through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. ³No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and **his servants will worship him.** ⁴**They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.** ⁵And night will be no more. They will need no

light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever. (Revelation 22:1-5. ESV)

That is better. The marked people of God will spend eternity serving **BEFORE THE VERY FACE OF GOD!** Moses saw only the hem of his garment and it changed him forever. We will see his face and it will change us forever. We will need no light or lamp or sun for the Lord God will be our light and we will reign with him forever. That is better and that is yet to come.

Secondly, I think we should be looking forward to:

2. More holiness

We know that the Spirit in us is mortifying the sin in our bodies and transforming us by one degree of glory to the next into the same image as Jesus Christ – we know that and yet we long for more don't we? We still struggle with sin in our bodies even as saved people, don't we? In fact the Bible says:

⁸If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. (1 John 1:8. ESV)

We're all sinners in here – we are right now simultaneously saint and sinner and we will be until that day when we won't be. That day will be better. 1 John goes on to say:

²Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. ³And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. (1 John 3:2-3. ESV)

One day we are going to be pure just like Jesus is pure and that day will be better. One day we won't change – one day we will **BE CHANGED**, one day we shall **BE LIKE HIM** for we shall see him **AS HE IS**. Now we see through a glass darkly but one day we will see him face to face and that day will be better. We will be done with sin forever. We will live holy as free men and women who choose holiness because we've seen it in the face of Jesus and we'll love it and we'll love him and we will choose to walk in holiness because the last stain of sin will have been burned out of our bodies by the sheer brilliance of the light of Jesus Christ. That will be better.

3. More glory

As Christians we are born again and yet we will die if Christ should tarry and yet if we have the pledge of the Holy Spirit then death is not the end of our bodies rather there is a better day, a more glorious day ahead for our flesh. Paul says in 1 Corinthians:

⁴⁰There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of another.... ⁴²So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. ⁴³**It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory.** It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. (1 Corinthians 15:40-43. ESV)

A better day is coming for our bodies! Right now our bodies often let us down. They get sick, they get frail. We age. As we get older our bodies dishonour us. We lose some of our dignity and then when we die they put our bodies in a box and throw dirt on us. That is not a great day for the body but a better day is coming. What is sown into the ground in dishonour is raised up in glory on that day. That's a good day for the body. Because of the deposit of the Holy Spirit inside you a day is coming for your body when every tear will be wiped away, every mark of death and age removed and you will be glorious. You will be a sight to behold. It will be a good day to have a body on that day. And you will live in that body, serving before the face of God forever. That is better. There are better days ahead for those who are in Christ and sealed with the Holy Spirit.

Now that's a huge truth and just like last week that huge truth needs to rattle around in our brains and move some stuff. Specifically we need to think in terms of a new category – the “now/not yet” category that is so characteristic of the Kingdom of God. This is such an important way of thinking that I want to conclude our time together by suggesting a few ways to think in the now and not yet category as people sealed with the Holy Spirit having received a down payment promising better things yet to come.

“Now and Not Yet”

In the now/not yet category we need to think in terms of:

1. Partial knowledge now, full knowledge later

Paul says that in 1 Corinthians:

As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. (1 Corinthians 13:8-10. ESV)

Right now in Christ, sealed with the Holy Spirit you should expect partial knowledge and insight into the marvellous things of God. We do see. Praise God we do see. Our eyes have been opened to see the sinfulness of sin and the beauty of God in Christ and seeing those things has made all the difference in the world but we don't see everything, we don't know everything. I have a list of things I don't know that is as long as your arm. I don't know. I am so comfortable saying that. I don't know exactly how old the earth is – several of you have asked me that but I don't know. Why exactly did God choose you and not your brother – some of you have asked me that and I usually just say what's in the Bible – for reasons that serve his own glory but some of you want to know specifics. I don't know. Will I die of this cancer or will God heal me? I don't know. I see only in part, I know only in part. Beware brothers and sisters of so called Christians who tell you that they are not subject to this limitation. Beware of those who claim special insight into things the Bible doesn't address. One day we'll know those things, one day we will see perfectly and know all things but today we don't. Now we see through a glass darkly.

Secondly we should think in terms of:

2. Growth and struggle now, full liberty and perfection later

A real Christian grows – 2 Corinthians 3:18; and a real Christian struggles – 1 John 1:8. Those are facts. In this life – if you are sealed with the Holy Spirit – you will grow and you will struggle. Anyone who doesn't grow isn't saved and anyone who tells you they aren't struggling is a liar. Now we grow and now we struggle but one day we will be free from that struggle; one day we will know liberty and holiness forever. Paul asks: “who will set me free from this body of death? Thanks be to God for our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” (Romans 7:4-25). That day is coming, but it is not here yet.

Thirdly and lastly:

3. Suffering and trouble now, happiness and perfect peace later

Having the Spirit does not mean that you will not groan and suffer. All true Christians have the Spirit and yet Jesus said all true Christians would suffer:

In the world you will have tribulation. (John 16:33. ESV)

The word Jesus used there is the Greek word *thlipsis* and it means trouble or burdens or afflictions. You are going to have some hard times, Jesus says. You are going to get sick. Your kids are going to die. You will know poverty, loss, disease and hardship. But take heart, I have overcome the world! Now we have trouble, now we share in the brokenness but that state of affairs will not last forever. Beware of false prophets who tell you that good Christians never get sick or never lose their jobs or never suffer hardship. That's a lie spoken by liars who do not tremble before God's Word. This is not yet the fullness of things to come. A day is coming when he will wipe away every tear from our eyes and when death and sorrow and pain will be no more but today is not that day; not yet. In the world, now, we have tribulation. But take heart – Christ has overcome the world and we will share in the world to come. I know that – we can know that – because we have the pledge and promise of our inheritance having been sealed with the Holy Spirit when we believed.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. And all God's people said, amen.