



Ephesians

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...that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him.

Ephesians 1:10

The verse, like the previous verses, is not a stand-alone thought. It is connected to what has been said. Taking it together with the previous verse we read –

“...having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself,¹⁰ that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him.”

Vincent's Word Studies goes into detail concerning the first words of this verse by saying, “*Eis* does not mean in, but unto, with a view to. Dispensation has no article. The clause is directly connected with the preceding: the mystery which He purposed in Himself unto a dispensation.”

What he is saying is that the translation of the KJV and the NKJV (which is cited above) is faulty and clumsy. It should more aptly read, “...with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him...” (NASB)

God laid out a plan with a view towards the fulfillment of that plan. At the right time, that plan would come to its fullness. As we are still awaiting the return of Christ, that time has not yet been realized, but the work of Christ is what makes that end view both possible and certain. Everything is being reconciled through the work of Christ.

The term “dispensation” means “administration” or “stewardship.” It is used in the management of a household. God’s plan has been worked out and formed with this end in view. Each step has been carefully and logically worked out in human history for the purpose of gathering “together in one all things in Christ.” The Greek word for “He might gather together” gives the idea of summing up. When an orator closes his speech, he will sum up what he has spoken. In essence, “I have talked about all of these things for the past hour, and this is the final point I am making concerning those things.”

God has chosen a way of showing us our desperate need for His grace, given to us through Christ. There was the Garden of Eden; there was the fall; the turning to wickedness; the flood; the Tower of Babel; the dispersion of the peoples; the call of Abraham; the forming of the covenant people and their sojourn in Egypt; their release from captivity in Egypt; the giving of the law; the time of the judges; the time of the kings; etc. Every step of the way has been methodically given to show us what He has done and why.

All of these things were steps along a journey to lead us to the giving of His Son. Through Christ and what He has now accomplished, all things are being gathered into one, “both which are in heaven and which are on earth.” The word for “all things” is in the neuter gender, and it therefore goes beyond the idea of all “persons.” It is a complete restoration of all creation. Vincent’s word studies details what this means –

“God contemplates a regathering, a restoration to that former condition when all things were in perfect unity, and normally combined to serve God's ends. This unity was broken by the introduction of sin. Man's fall involved the unintelligent creation (Romans 8:20). The mystery of God's will includes the restoration of this unity in and through Christ; one kingdom on earth and in heaven - a new heaven and a new earth in which shall dwell righteousness, and ‘the creation shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God.’”

The entire creation is prepared for restoration because of what Christ has done. Christ came in the fullness of times in order to set that final plan in motion, and all of it will be accomplished through Him.

Life application: If things seem out of control, take time to consider this verse. God has a plan which He has been working on since the very beginning. In the coming of Christ, and in His triumph over sin and the devil, the victory is assured. We are simply living in a part of that plan. It is a time of grace where God is building a church made of the people He has redeemed through this time of grace. At some point, the number of people will be realized and we will move into a new part of this plan. Don't worry about the troubles around you. God has it all under control!

In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will,

Ephesians 1:11

In verses 11 & 12, Paul uses the term "we." Then in verse 13, he will use the plural word for "you." For this reason, many scholars state that this is showing the order of salvation with respect to the idea of "to the Jew first and then also to the Greek." This is, for example, how Charles Ellicott sees it –

"Ephesians 1:11-14 form the third part of the Introduction, applying the general truth of election by God's predestination in Christ, first to the original believers (the Jews), and then to the subsequent believers (the Gentiles)."

It is true that the Jews were the first to receive the message, and then the Gentiles were later its recipients, and this seems probable concerning what Paul is saying. Or it could be that he is saying that it was those who heard and received Christ (meaning the apostles, etc.) who are then relaying the message on from that initial point. In this then, the stress is not laid on the nature of the person, but rather it is simply the logical progression of receiving and then transmitting the gospel.

Which option is correct becomes even more important in the opening words, because Paul says that "In Him we have obtained an inheritance." The KJV and the NKJV make the verb active, but it is not. Rather, it is passive. The correct reading is that "we were made a heritage." Thus it literally is worded to suggest that we were designed as an inheritance. It does appear that Paul is speaking of Israel, who was made an inheritance of God in the promise of the coming Messiah.

Following this, he says, "...being predestined." The idea of predestination is detailed in the commentary on Ephesians 1:5. However, Paul adds in that this predestination is "according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will." This idea has to be evaluated with care and it needs to be done so while considering the rest of Scripture.

As was noted in Ephesians 1:5, free will in man is something that God takes into consideration. Therefore, the words “according to the purpose of Him” includes two separate thoughts. The first is the “universal agency of God” (Albert Barnes), and the second is man’s responsibility in exercising his free will. One does not negate the other. Just because God knows what choice a man will make, it in no way negates the choice of the man.

God considers man’s will and includes it in His working out “all things according to the counsel of His will.” It is both a comfort for those who are willing to submit to the authority of Christ, and it is to the shame of those who are unwilling to do so. God, in His infinite goodness, has granted us the right to choose where we will place our allegiance, and thus where we will spend eternity. In the case of Israel, they were collectively made an inheritance, and yet they individually chose to be a part of that, or not, by faith in their Messiah.

Life application: You have a choice to make concerning Christ. If you have chosen Christ, you have the continued choice to make concerning obedience to Him. Choose each step of your walk wisely. Choose Christ and pursue Christ!

...that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. Ephesians 1:12

Again, we should take this together with the previous verse for context –

“In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, ¹² that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.”

As noted in verse 11, Paul is probably generally speaking of Israel collectively by using the term “we.” However here he is actually referring to the individual Jews of Israel who received Jesus as their Messiah. It is they “who first trusted in Christ,” and who “should be to the praise of His glory.”

Vincent’s Word Studies notes that the term “who first trusted” refers to Jewish Christians, and the verb describes their messianic hope before the advent of Christ. Therefore, the appropriate rendering of these words should be “we who have before hoped.”

Further, he notes that the article in Greek before “Christ” should be translated. It should say, “in the Christ.” As the coming Christ was the subject of all messianic expectations, and as Jesus fulfilled those expectations, Paul is speaking of Jesus as the Christ who was

anticipated and who has come. Therefore, the thought should read, “that we who have before hoped in the Christ...”

It is these Jews who were a part of the body of Israel, and who had so long awaited the coming Christ, who put their hope in Jesus and who are “to the praise of His glory.” These first believing Jews were the “means of celebrating his glory” (Albert Barnes). In the body of Israel, it is these who ascribed true heartfelt praise to him as the result of their salvation.

Life application: Paul does not lump Israel and the Gentiles together as the same entity. Rather, he consistently makes a noted separation between the two. This is a truth which continues to this day. We are all one in Messiah as regards to salvation, but there are Jews and there are Gentiles; there are males and there are females. These differences continue to exist.

In Him you also *trusted*, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, Ephesians 1:13

The word “trusted” in this verse is inserted by the translators, assuming that it is referring to “trusted” in verse 12. It only says, “In Him you also, after...” What Paul is referring to is debated, but what seems likely is that he is speaking of the inheritance and predestination of verse 11 –

“In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, ¹² that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

¹³ In Him you also *trusted*, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise...”

The reason this is likely is because later in this verse he notes their belief, something synonymous with trusting. And so here, it is more likely that he is speaking about the inheritance and predestination than simply repeating the idea of trusting. Paul is specific that the Gentiles (represented by the Ephesians at this time) have also received what the Jews had received. This reception came about “after you heard the word of truth.”

A person cannot receive the inheritance without being told about it, unless one believes that the inheritance is something given apart from faith. But this is contrary to the whole tenor of Scripture, including the rest of the verse to come. It is only after hearing

this word of truth, which as Paul says to them is “the gospel of your salvation,” that the inheritance can come. This gospel is the message of God’s workings through Christ in order to redeem man. It is the grace of God in Christ which alone can bring salvation.

After giving this carefully worded thought, he next says, “...in whom also.” This is referring to “In Him” at the beginning of the verse, and thus to Christ who has been the main subject of verses 3-12. Paul continuously reminds us that all of these spiritual blessings come about through being “in” Christ.

In order for this to happen, he then describes to them how it happened with the words, “...having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.” The Bible never teaches the Calvinistic idea of “regeneration in order to believe.” In other words, it is neither explicit or implicit – here or anywhere else – that this occurs. Belief is a volitional act of the will. It is not, either before or after salvation, something forced in man externally. Such a warped doctrine is never hinted at in the Bible. Instead, it is always shown that God is pleased with faith which comes from the man when he exercises his own free-will.

When the individual believes, he is “sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.” The word for “sealed” is *sphragizó*. It “signifies ownership and the full security carried by the backing (full authority) of the owner. ‘Sealing’ in the ancient world served as a ‘legal signature’ which guaranteed the promise (contents) of what was sealed” (HELPS Word Studies).

This seal then is as sure as a signature of ownership by God. It is something that is given and will never be taken back. If it were to be taken back, then it means that God has made a mistake in His sealing; something impossible. Paul will explain this further in the next verse. For now, the logical progression of what Paul is saying is –

- ✓ A person hears the word of truth (the gospel of their salvation).
- ✓ They believe the message.
- ✓ They are sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.
- ✓ They are now entitled to all of the benefits that the Jews, as an inheritance, also received by that same process of faith.

The key point to remember is that none of this would have occurred without first hearing the gospel message. As Paul said to the Romans –

“So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Romans 10:17

Only after hearing can one believe, and only after one believes are they sealed with the Holy Spirit. When sealed with the Holy Spirit, the individual will also share in the inheritance. Without that sealing, they will have no such inheritance which is found in God's provision in Christ.

As a point of debate, Vincent's Word Studies agrees that the word "trusted" is incorrect, but he says that the thought "In Him you also" is nominative to the words "were sealed." This doesn't make sense as the "were sealed" comes after the thought, not before. As Paul didn't use the term in the preceding verses, it is what the later-mentioned sealing results in – that of an inheritance – which is mentioned both before and after the words, "In Him you also." The highlight of Paul's words are on the wondrous benefits which result from the process, not the process itself.

Finally, the Pulpit Commentary notes that, "The Spirit is called the Spirit of the promise, because he is often promised in the Old Testament (Isaiah 32:15; Ezekiel 36:27; Joel 3:1, etc.)." What had long been anticipated by the Jews has come about because of the work of Christ. This promise was granted to them, but it is also granted to all who believe, even among the Gentiles.

Life application: You can no more lose your salvation than God could make a mistake.