

Ephesians: What Christ Has Done for Us

— *Ephesians 1:4-14* —

By Paul Penno Jr.

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Someone seriously, sincerely ask the question, “Who are the people who are the personal pronouns (“we,” “us,” “our”) in Ephesians one and two? Whoever they are, they are v-e-r-y fortunate for they are “blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ,” they are “chosen ... in Him before the foundation of the world ... [to be] holy and without blame before Him in love,” “predestinated ... unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself,” “accepted in the beloved,” and they “have redemption through His blood,” and “the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.”

That’s not all; they “have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who works all things after the counsel of His own will, [to] ... be to the praise of His glory, who first trusted in Christ” (1:3-12).

There are three possible answers to our question: (1) The first person pronoun people are only believers in the church in Ephesus; (2) or, all believers in Christ in all ages; (3) or, the entire human race, including you and me.

If it’s (1) or (2), it’s the believing in Christ on the part of these people that initiates all these magnificent blessings (except strict Calvinism that says God predestined some to be saved and others to be lost, which we can’t buy). It means either way

a re-writing of Ephesians 2:8, 9 which says “by grace you are saved, through faith,” so that we correct Paul to make him say, “by believing you are saved” rather than “by grace you are saved.”

But the way Paul says it, the grace (which by the way is “abounding”) works “through faith.” God’s grace has to come first; our salvation is not due to our own initiative but is wholly due to His initiative. From “before the foundation of the world” it has been His idea, not ours.

All this is “through His blood,” and that is serious (vs. 7): anything that Christ accomplished by the shedding of His blood at the cross must apply equally to every human being because “God so loved the world that He gave ...” All His wonderful planning “from before the foundation of the world” is for everyone; the Samaritans were right when they said Jesus is “the Savior of the world” (John 4:42). He has given the gift of salvation to the world, but the world has crucified Him and expelled Him from the planet. You can give someone a gift but if he throws it away, he doesn’t have it. But still you did the giving.

Much of this letter to the Ephesians is taken up with telling us what Christ has accomplished for us before we were even born. This can be described as the objective gospel—that is, what we had nothing to do with. It’s all done outside of us.

The other portion is concerned with what we do, what we accomplish. It’s not that in even one percent we save ourselves—God forbid the idea! But this part of the letter is concerned with what the objective gospel accomplishes in us. This that

Christ does now can be described as the subjective gospel.

True, those two italicized words are not in the Bible; they are a modern attempt to help us visualize the two complementary gospel truths that keep coming up throughout the Bible. To confuse and mix them always produces confusion whether salvation is through faith or by works. To avoid being confused requires that we understand and appreciate the objective gospel—what Christ has already accomplished in a legal sense for the world.

In chapter one of Ephesians our apostle/author almost loses himself in his efforts to do justice to the grand dimensions of what Christ did. No language, his or ours, has words adequate to portray it. The quality of our Christian experience, our happiness in Christian living, and our fruitfulness, depend on how adequately we grasp this reality of truth. Grasp only a smattering and we are mired in spiritual frustrations. Learn to “glory” in it all, to appreciate it, then “the world has been crucified to [us] and [we] to the world” (Gal. 6:14). A thousand weary ups and downs in following Jesus become one unending triumph.

Paul is anticipating his later extravagant assessments in chapter 3 where he describes “the riches of His glory” revealed in “the width and length and depth and height [of] ... the love of Christ which passes knowledge.” He is confident that the Lord will yet “do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think.”

Before we are immersed in Paul’s extensive portrayal of wonders, we must note briefly his

underlying idea that lets it all come into focus. He holds this rarely seen foundation truth—the death that Christ died on His cross was the equivalent of the world’s second death. Those who believe in the teaching of natural immortality of the soul are automatically deprived of clearly understanding this insight—that Christ actually died on that cross. Even though they pronounce the expressions about the cross, the idea of dying our second death has to elude them. Learned commentaries generally do not recognize this profound insight. It sets free the soaring concepts that Paul wants to express.

But someone may question: “If Christ was resurrected the third day, how could His death on the cross have been the second death? There’s no resurrection after that one!”

This can be understood if we recognize how “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23), not eternal life, and not a mere sleep in a weekend vacation. It was our second death that Christ “took,” and He had to endure it 100% or it couldn’t be true that He “died for our sins” (1 Cor. 15:3). He must “taste death for everyone” (Heb. 2:9). It is meaningless to say that He tasted our first death, for everybody dies that death (which is only a sleep, 1 Thess. 4:15-17). Scripture becomes clear when we realize that whatever death Jesus died, He “tasted” it for “all men” so that none of us need ever experience that death. But we all “taste” the first death, so that cannot be the one that Jesus “tasted” for “all men” as our Substitute.

In fact, since the world began, only one Man has ever died that second death! Everybody else has merely gone to sleep.

But someone asks, “How could Christ die our second death and not endure the physical agony of the lake of fire? Doesn’t Revelation say that “the lake of fire ... is the second death”?

If we read the passage carefully (20:12-15), we will see that the lost will suffer agony far greater than the Centigrade temperature of literal fire. It’s when the “books were opened” that the full stories of every man’s involvement in the crucifixion and repeated re-crucifixions of Christ are laid open. Each lost person finally sees in awful detail the dimensions of his rebellion against the Lamb of God and against humanity; self-condemnation will be utterly overwhelming. It will be identical to the horror that Jesus felt when He cried out on His cross, “My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Matt. 27:46). That horror is lethal; it is the death of all deaths. Those lost people will want to jump into the lake of fire as soon as possible; a total end will be welcome. When Christ was “made to be sin for us, who knew no sin” (2 Cor. 5:21), He drank to the full that bitter cup of condemnation—the kind that kills the soul (He didn’t die of pain from the nails; He died of a broken heart).

Ephesians 1 is an outpouring of human gratitude for what He did for us!

It’s a strange but delightful promise the Son of God makes to us—that He will dwell with us, live with us, share our abode with us: He “hath blessed us with

all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.” (Eph. 1:3). Imagine living in such “places”!¹

You and I may live in shacks in Shanty Town—but the Lord Jesus says He will live with us there, share our humble abode, partake of our lowly hospitality as our permanent Guest. His holy presence with us makes our shack become a Palace. It is transformed into a “heavenly place,” the loftiest abode in the universe.

Never again are we to be lonely; life each new day becomes a fresh, glorious adventure, for we never can anticipate the new and unimagined joy that becomes ours, dwelling with Jesus in a divine intimacy.

Even Jesus Himself shares with us the unimaginable joy of living in “heavenly places,” for in verse 20 we read that the Father “raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the [same] heavenly places.”

In the case of Jesus there is a super magnificent heavenly joy involved, for Jesus was “dead,” and no one can ever appreciate life like someone who was “dead”—the only such Man so far is Jesus, and now it’s we also through living faith in Him.

Our brother and fellow-believer in Christ, the beloved apostle Paul, has a glimpse of what it all means. He has a unique insight: he sees us as having been “dead,” but he also sees our present life therefore as being a “resurrection” from death. Interesting insight!

¹ “It is his love that encircles us, bringing us back to the fold, giving us the privilege of sitting together with him in heavenly places.” Ellen G. White, “An Appeal for Missions,” p. 31.

This transforms life for us: it makes our present “boring,” ordinary existence to be transformed into magnificent resurrection life.

If this is a new idea to you—thinking of your present life as a resurrection life already having exited from death—don’t thank me for it; I am nobody, I could never have thought of it—thank the Lord. Your eternal life “in Christ” has already begun; you may yet go to sleep a bit; but if your name is in the Lamb’s Book of Life, nothing can ever take it out (aside from your own choice, which, God forbid!).

“I am come,” says Jesus, “that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10).

That’s your life today; it transforms your what-you-thought-was-your-mere-existence into the most glorious life in all of the universe—life with Christ, its Creator, its Sustainer, and the Savior of it all.

And there’s no end to it, ever! Get on your knees, thank Him that it’s true. And then rise, to serve Him gladly forever.

Ephesians 1:4, 5: “Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to the adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.”

About half of the letter is concerned with telling the world what Jesus Christ did for us even before any of us were born. He “has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (1:3). But who is the “us”? The believers in Ephesus, yes; by all means; but is it only they?

Then the apostle goes on: “He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world,... having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will” (vss. 4, 5). Now Paul brings the reader to a point of decision; we must decide: (a) Does he mean that God has “predestined” some people before they are born to be saved, and therefore the “us” means He has “predestined” “all” to be saved? Or (b), has He predestined other wretches before they are born to be lost?

If we choose to believe (b), we raise an enormous barrier against the cardinal truth of the entire Bible—that “God is love” (1 John 4:8). There is no way under heaven that any rational human being can believe that a God who is love would determine some poor people to be lost before they are born, in spite of their desire (and trying) to be saved! If “God is love,” He must give every one free choice; and a divine predestination to hell is no free choice!

The “us” in Ephesians one has to be the entire human race. It’s the same “all men” of Romans 5:15-18 who are given “the free gift” of election and justification in Christ their Substitute. (But we can reject what we are given!)

“Good pleasure of His will” is a nice way of saying that this is what God has fun doing! He loves to save lost, hopeless, ruined human beings, young and old. If you would like to enjoy a fulfilled life, get busy being involved with Him in doing that same work.

“Predestined” is a word that means just what it says; let’s not try to argue it away. It’s simple,

honest truth that God has long ago decided to save every human being; He gave every one of us a page in His Book of Life.

He has invited everyone to a place of honor at His banquet table; the place mat with your name on it is there. His banquet is not a helter-skelter fast-food kind of picnic. It's a seven-course dinner in highest honor, with all the trappings extravagantly laid out. Your presence is seriously planned. "This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved" (1 Tim. 2:3, 4).

But Jesus has had to tell the truth: many who have been invited whose names are engraved on the invitations choose not to accept (see Matt. 22:2-8). That's the only reason any human being will not be saved at last!

God has never "predestined" anyone to be lost. That would be a vicious distortion of the truth about a God of love. His divine foreknowledge must never be confused with an awful predestination to damnation.

We used to drive on one-track roads around steep precipices in Ruanda. The Belgians had a law that you must drive one way only during certain hours in order to avoid collisions. If I were on a mountaintop and saw someone breaking the law driving the wrong way at the wrong time, I would see a collision coming. Did I "predestinate" it simply because I couldn't help being in a position to foresee it? God can't help it that He has infinite foreknowledge; but if He wishes He can do something we can't do—lay that super-knowledge aside so He can love

everybody with all His heart. (Jesus loved Judas Iscariot just as much as He loved the Eleven!)

"Adoption as sons" has to be automatic for everyone who chooses to believe in Jesus because He became our Brother in the flesh when He became one of the human family. Jesus never brings any of us home to His Father's house as a temporary guest; we're all adopted.

And it's useless to speculate, "Can the Father love His natural Son a wee bit more than He can love us adopted ones?" He gave His own Son to die our second death, all for the adopted ones. It was an exact equivalence; the only "difficult" thing in being saved eternally is learning to believe how good the good news is.

It may be a thought too big for you to begin to grasp, but you must choose to grasp it or you can never be happy: the Father "chose" you individually and personally to be "holy and without blame before Him." That's your true predestination! It will be true forever unless you interpose a contrary, negative, rebellious will against it.

"The sinner may resist this love, may refuse to be drawn to Christ; but if he does not resist he will be drawn to Jesus, . . . to the foot of the cross in repentance for his sins, which have caused the sufferings of God's dear Son." *Steps to Christ*, p. 27.

But how can one know this personally? If you had some tangible, intimate evidence you could see, wouldn't that make you happy?

Romans says yes, you have it: if your heart cries out "Father," that is the evidence that you have

been personally “adopted.” No human could cry “Father!” unless in a real sense he has been “born again,” or at least has begun to be born again: “As many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear [as is natural for all humans], but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father’” (8:15, 16; remember, a baby is a live son!).

Think it through: walk softly before the Lord, look to Him for guidance, cry out in your distresses, “Father!” and confess that like a child crossing busy traffic hangs on to father’s hand, so do you to Him—you have the evidence that God has adopted you as His child. Now demonstrate your adoption by how you live!

Hold your head high!

“Holy-and-without-blame” leads us to the story of the 144,000 who finally before the end of time stand “without fault before the throne of God” (Rev. 14:5). Someone objects: “That’s the heresy of perfectionism!” No, it’s not. It’s simply the natural result of a heart-appreciation for the objective gospel being demonstrated subjectively in the lives of those who believe it. The fact that it’s never happened yet for 6000 years in a corporate body of people does not mean it never will happen. A fourth angel finally comes “down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth [is to be] lightened with his glory.” He cries “mightily with a loud voice, ‘Babylon the great is fallen.’ ... And I heard another voice from heaven saying, ‘Come out of her, My people’” (Rev. 18:1-4).

The “mighty” part of the message is not physical decibels; it’s the power of the finally clarified truth of “the everlasting gospel,” “the third angel’s message in verity.” God’s people will be ashamed that they didn’t “hear” that “Voice from heaven” decades, now centuries, before. It had sounded, only to be greeted by deaf ears.

Ephesians 1:6: “To the praise and glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved.”

Who is the “us”? Are we lonely people, standing on the side watching the baptism of Jesus at the Jordan River, hearing the Father declare of Him, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased,” feeling that He is not “well pleased” with us?

The truth is that what the Father said that of Jesus that day, He was also speaking of us! That word spoken of Jesus embraces humanity. God spoke to Jesus as our Representative. With all our sins and weaknesses, we are not cast aside as worthless. “He has made us accepted in the Beloved”! Jesus has become the second Adam, the new Head of the human race, and in Him we are accepted by the Father. The glory that rested on Christ is a pledge of the love of the Father for us. It tells us of the power of prayer,—how the human voice may reach the ear of God and our petitions find acceptance in the courts of heaven. By sin, earth was cut off from heaven, and alienated from its communion; but Jesus has connected it again with the sphere of glory. His love has encircled man, and reached the highest heaven. The light which fell from the open

portals upon the head of our Savior, will fall upon us as we pray for help to resist temptation. The voice which spoke to Jesus says to every believing soul, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

Note how Paul continues, reiterating this good news. The “we” and the “us” embrace the human race. It’s already true before you heard the news; now it becomes real to you as you choose to believe it.

Ephesians 1:7-12: “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence [good sense, forethought], having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, 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; in Him whom 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, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.”

In order to get clearly in mind what Christ has done for us, let’s look again. If you had just bought a new luxury car, or a new dress that you really like, you’d want to look again and again at what you had just acquired. That’s why we want to appreciate what is this spiritual wealth that Christ has not only offered us, but has given us if we will have it:

1. To be “accepted in the Beloved” means to be in the family. We’re not just staying for lunch; we’re in. We have the run of the house. We can walk in past all the holy angels—we’re family. It’s beyond comprehension, but true.

2. We have “redemption through His blood” (vs. 7). That means we have this most precious new status as the purchase of His very life—Christ gave Himself for us—the Son of God, the Prince of glory exchanging His life for us. He went to hell so we could go to heaven. Yes! That’s His eternal life that He chose to give up. Grasp this—and the world with its glitter will never again attract you. The “blood” means worlds more than in a literal sense; “the life of the flesh is in the blood” (Lev. 17:11). Times almost without number Leviticus speaks of the earthly priest “pouring out the blood” of the victim, each time symbolizing what Isaiah 53:12 means when it says that Christ “poured out His soul unto death.”

3. “In Him we have ... the forgiveness of sins” (vs. 7). It’s been given, “in Christ.” But remember that Bible forgiveness is far more valuable than mere pardon. It means the sin is separated from us. (The Greek word for forgiveness, *aphesis*, means it’s carried away. You now hate the sin, you don’t want to do it again. You’re free from it.)

Is it deliverance for the alcoholic, the drug addict, the fornicator, the addict of pornography? According to what the holy apostle says, the answer has to be “yes.” The grace of Christ is stronger than the power of sin, because Paul says that this power is “according to the riches of His grace,” which in

Romans he describes as “much more abounding” (5:20).

4. Not only that: the one who will receive this abundance of grace is given “wisdom and prudence” (vs. 8), or as the NEB puts it, God “has lavished on us ... insight.” It’s not that your IQ gets better (maybe it does!); but your discernment and understanding get better.

5. That includes the insider-knowledge of God’s hidden purpose now disclosed, which Paul again says is the Father’s “good pleasure” (vs. 9), or to put it bluntly in a modern word, it’s the fun that God has in this plan of salvation. He loves to watch somebody who is down and out transformed into someone reckoned equivalent in value to His own Son.

6. The Father purposes to “gather” all things in heaven and earth in His Son—and there His redeemed people are the centerpiece of it all (vs. 10).

7. An “inheritance” (vs. 11) is yours; wealth left to you by virtue of your relationship to Christ—it’s the entire earth made new. And heaven way beyond.

Paul can’t find words in Greek to tell it all, and we can’t find them in English to tell it adequately!

All this is the objective gospel—the truth of what Christ has already accomplished for our salvation. Now he mentions the subjective gospel—our heart response:

Ephesians 1:13, 14: “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, who is the

guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.”