

Rainbow Chasing

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In 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, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be to the praise of his glory. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession – to the praise of His glory.

EPHESIANS 1:11-14

I was fighting mold. Some say they are fighting mad, but I say I was fighting mold. On my deck, which is under a lot of shade trees, mold was growing. Every few autumns I tried to kill it without much success. So one year I thought I would really try to attack it and eradicate the problem. I talked to a relative who had a similar problem and asked what to do. He said, "You need a power washer." So I found a kind lender who let me borrow a power washer with many instructions. He said, "You need to make sure it's on strong enough that you can truly knock the mold off, but don't turn it up so much that you hurt the wood or cut off your toe, because this washer is really powerful."

So I did it. I scrubbed every inch of that deck. Then I went to the hardware store and said to the salesman, "What do I do next to fight the mold on my deck?" He said, "Well what have you done so far?" I said, "I used a power washer!" He said, "You're kidding? Don't you know that if you use a power washer you actually drive the spores of the mold down into the wood?"

Well, not thinking very nice thoughts about my initial advisor, I said, "No, I didn't know that. What do I do now?" He said, "Well now you need to chemically treat the deck. Use enough of this chemical to kill the mold, but don't get so much of a concentration that you hurt the wood." Okay, I thought. He continued, "But that's not all. Leave it on long enough to kill the mold, but not so long that you bleach the wood." Okay, I got it. "Then you need to wash it off. Now when you wash it off, you need to make sure that the deck is dry before you apply the seal, because the seal won't bond if it's still wet. But don't let it dry too long, or the mold spores will regenerate. When you put the seal on, you need a seal that's got some stain in it, because the stain will keep the sun from hurting the wood. But don't get too much stain, because too much stain will keep the sun from killing the spores in the wood." By the time I got all of this instruction, I knew one thing for sure. That mold was going to grow. And there was not a thing I could do about it. I mean, even if I understood everything to do, there were forces greater than I at work. No matter how much I tried, I was not going to get it all right.

I must tell you, fighting mold can be like the Christian life. You can try to get it all right. You can do so many things correctly, but there are forces greater than you at work. As much as we might try, as much as we have instruction that is true and right, things do not always go right according to our perception and the perception of the world around us. We look at our trials. We look at our families. We look at a child that gets sick. We see a church that goes bad. We look at finances that do not come in and we think to ourselves, is the reason that things are not going right because I did not do everything right? If we cannot get everything right, how do we know that God is still loving, securing, and still holding us in His plan? The Lord's Word in the first chapter of Ephesians speaks to these questions. The apostle Paul writes to proclaim God's past faithfulness to faithless people, His present faithfulness to weak people, and His Spirit's giftedness to His precious people.

God's Past Faithfulness

The apostle shows God's plan unfolding, beginning with ethnic Israel. The Lord's past faithfulness comes out in the opening words. The apostle says, "In Him," that is, in Christ who has just been spoken of in the preceding verse, "In Christ, 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" (Eph. 1:3). As we look at a verse that says "we were chosen," we must ask "Who is 'we'?" Verse 13 helps answer that question. While verse 11 says, "in Him we were chosen," verse 13 says, "and you were also chosen." In verse 11 Paul is speaking about ethnic Israel and in verse 13 he speaks directly to the Gentile Ephesians.

But why has God chosen? It is clear that God's heart, God's plan, God's praise are all parts of His reason for His choosing of His people. Consider once again the opening words of verse 11: "In him we were also chosen." Whatever the reason is for God choosing His people it resides in Him, in Christ. This choice, this wondrous love, is because of God's compassion and because of who Christ is, rather than anything in us.

This is the point made so clearly back in Deuteronomy when God explains through Moses His choosing of His people. Moses says, "The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples of the earth to be His treasured possession. The LORD did not set His affection on you or choose you because you were more numerous than all the other peoples of the earth, but because you were fewer" (Deut. 7:7). He says in Deuteronomy 9 that it is not because of Israel's righteousness or integrity that they were chosen. Likewise it is not because of anything in you that you are precious to God. There is something in God that makes us precious to Him.

As the heart of God is shown in Ephesians 1:11, Paul quickly adds that God has a plan for His people. His people "were chosen having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will" (Eph. 1:11). A human mind just cannot take all this in. There is a plan for God's chosen people who are for the praise of His glory. God is working out everything in accord with the purpose of His will. And His will is to bring all things together under one head, even Christ. Everything is designed to glorify Christ.

A few years ago Tom Hanks starred in a movie called *Joe Versus the Volcano*. It was a comedy of sorts in which Joe goes from one misadventure to the next. There comes a time where he is adrift at sea on a raft. While he is adrift, he has lots of time to remember his mistakes, his stupidities, his loneliness. One night, in a delirium of exposure and dehydration, he wakes up and looks at the stars. He sees something like a child's dot-to-dot playbook; all the constellations are connected. There is Orion, Capricorn, the Pleiades, and they are all marked out. Suddenly he sees, even in his distress, that there is a design to the universe. Even while he is adrift in all the wonder of what is going on in life, he simply says, "God, I thank you for my life. I did not know how big You are!" It is wonderful theology, for Hollywood – in a comedy!

There is a design to the universe and even your mistakes and foibles; even the difficulties you face are not undoing the grand design. The fact that there is a design helps difficulties be somehow manageable, and the fears that you face not as overwhelming. From the smallest level we can fathom to the greatest level we can see, we are told that everything is being conformed to the purpose of God. As difficult as are the individual things we face, here God says that they all are part of a design. Everything is fitting together in ways small and great, so that the praise of Christ's glory would come.

God's Present Faithfulness

But I have almost moved too quickly to say "we." Because "we," as I noted above, is the covenant people of Israel. How can this promise to Israel of God's design for all things have any application to Gentile believers? Paul shows us. As the verses 11 and 12 are the "who's we" section, verses 12 and 13 are the "you too" section of this passage. "All this was done in order that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory" (Eph. 1:12). "And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation" (Eph. 1:13). You too were included! Speaking now to the Gentiles, who were not originally included in God's covenant people, Paul says you too are part of God's expanding covenant. The "you" includes us.

In Ephesians 3:6 it is explained explicitly. Paul writes, "This mystery is that through the gospel, the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, sharers together in the promise of Christ Jesus." We are together part of a great plan. God has expanded His covenant in an expansion of amazing mercy. Whereas Israel was not chosen because it was more numerous or more righteous or operated with more integrity, how do we get included? We are told, "you were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth."

Isn't it amazing that Paul does not say to the Gentiles, "you responded to the truth?" He does not even say you obeyed the truth. He simply says you were included when you heard, when you actually, really heard. We are reminded in other places, of course, that there can be people with ears that do not hear. Until the Spirit of God has come to open our ears, to make our hearts malleable, we cannot really hear. So Paul says that actually hearing, really hearing, apart from any other qualification of yours, marks you as part of God's treasured possession.

Much is being said at one time in these few words of Paul. First Paul tells us that there is a big picture! Everything – the Jews and all their history, you and your history – all are part of a big plan and the plan is part of a broadening mercy. And there is a role for you in the big plan!

The Lord reassures us of His plan, not so that we can become apathetic, thinking that this plan will go forward regardless of our involvement, but to encourage us because we are part of the plan. You are for the praise of His glory. The incidental things that we face are never totally debilitating. Hindrances will not destroy us because God's plan is going forward. God is going to use you and me in our weakness and fallibility, because our failure is not final. My weakness never makes my efforts futile, because there is a big plan that God is continuing to work to the glory of Christ

I love chasing rainbows. If a rainbow appears in the sky, I will go running for a camera and try to get a picture. And yet as much as I like chasing rainbows – for the beauty of the colors, the science of the prism of light, and their storied nature – I recognize something more. Even as I chase rainbows I know that I will never see a whole one with my feet on the earth. I will see the bow, at most, from horizon to horizon, in a wonderful arch. But from earth's vantage I will never see a complete rainbow, the huge circle that it is, where God has completed the whole thing. Earth always gets in the way!

Still you can see a whole rainbow. If you get in an airplane above the clouds, when the sun is just right, you can occasionally see the whole circle – the rainbow all around. In this passage, God has pulled us back above the clouds. He has said that earth will always get in your way. You are going to look at a sick child, you are going to look at your troubled finances, you are going to look at a strained marriage, and in all your sin and weakness say, “How can God possibly still be caring and loving and using me?” To answer this fear, the Lord says, “I want you to remember something. You are part of a bigger plan.” Heaven’s perspective sees God bringing His glory into effect and using fallible, frail, human creatures to do this. This is often at odds with the secular perspective that says there is no purpose in life’s occurrences. But heaven’s perspective is often at odds with our own personal world when we think there is no purpose in whatever we face.

God’s Promised Spirit

We may want to believe in God’s grand design, but how do we really know that this is true? The apostle reveals our assurance in verses 13 and 14. He writes, “Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession – to the praise of His glory.”

We are told first of the purpose of the Holy Spirit. What is He doing? The Spirit is a seal. This reference was meant to remind readers of the soft wax that was attached to a document in ancient times with the signet ring of a king to both seal the document and proclaim, “This is real. This is valid. This comes with the king’s authority so that what is promised truly will apply.” The apostle goes on to show that the Holy Spirit, that seal, is also a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance – the redemption of those who are God’s possession. Such a deposit is similar to a down payment on a house, it promises everything else will come. Not everything is here yet, but this deposit is the first fruits of the rest of the harvest that will come.

Now, of course, we have a question! How do I know I have the Spirit that assures God’s promise applies to us? Some English translations say, “Having believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.” Some might read this as a sequence: having believed, then you are marked with the Spirit. But there is not a sequence of events being described here, but rather an explanation of what is coming together.

“Having believed, you were marked,” are two things that occur together – and one evidences the other. Belief is the mark of the Holy Spirit. This is not a sequence. It is an explanation of what the belief is. Do you believe that Jesus died for you, that He rose again, that He comes again in victory, and that He is using the life that you live now for His glory in all your weakness and sin? Do you believe that? How could you believe that?! Only by the Spirit of God.

The world does not believe the truths of the Gospel; the world cannot believe them. But your world has been already changed, internally and spiritually, if you believe those things. The Spirit Himself is the pledge of God in your belief that you are a part of that big picture. You could not believe if the Spirit were not present in you; and, the presence of the Spirit in you is God’s assuring seal that His promises apply to you.

I know our minds struggle to grasp the reality of God’s great assurances because many things get in the way. Our hurts and failures make it seem that it cannot be true that we are part of God’s plan. But God says you are part of His plan and your belief is evidence that the Spirit of God is at work in you. He is still performing a work of new creation, not only in your heart but as a first fruit of what is going to happen in the whole creation! When difficulty comes, we say, “Lord, I do not understand this. I cannot make sense of it in this life. Still, this is my faith by virtue of the confirmation of the Holy Spirit: You, my Lord, are doing all to the praise of your glory. Even my most difficult things do not deny the wonder that you are working in this world.”

May God confirm the belief of your heart so that you, in all your weakness, in all your sin, in all your difficulties, believe that God does have a role for you. He will use you. Serve Him. He will use you because you have the seal of His Spirit, the belief that Jesus is your Savior

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