



Life Guide

applying God's Word to life

We Are A Family Growing in Christ September 12-14, 2020

(Ephesians 1:3-14) ³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. ⁴ For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace ⁸ that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, ⁹ he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, ¹⁰ to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ. ¹¹ 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, ¹² in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. ¹³ And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

1. What effect, if any, did the “safer at home” order have on your family relationships? Offer some thoughts as to why the time at home proved so difficult for some families. **Answer will vary. For my own family, it was a time where Christ and his promises came more sharply into focus as we turned to him for strength and comfort. We grew closer to each other as God drew both of us closer to himself through his Word. For other families, particularly those who don't know Christ, the stress brought upon by the uncertainty of life, created tension that expressed itself in anger and frustration – sometimes to the point of physical violence.**
2. Explain how sin is the “great separator.” In Isaiah 59:2, the prophet writes: “Your iniquities have separated you from your God. Your

sins have hidden his face from you...” The truth of these words is witnessed throughout Scripture, beginning with the fall into sin. Sin comes between God and his creatures. Sin comes between husband and wife. Sin brings physical death, the separation of body and soul. Sin brings eternal death – the unending separation of the sinner from Holy God. Sin, for all its allurements, all its enticements, always brings division and pain.

3. What does it mean to you that God chose you to be his child before the creation of the world? Why is it so important to know that God chose you “in Christ”? **Personally, I find this one of the most comforting truths in Scripture. God showed me grace before I came to be. He has always loved me and always wanted me in his family. I'm not a spiritual accident or some afterthought. Of course, for this truth to really be comforting, it has to be “in Christ.” If I were left to conclude that God chose me for any other reason, I would be plagued by doubt. For example: some churches teach that God chose us in view of faith. In other words, God looked ahead in time and saw who was going to believe in him. These are the people he decided to choose. While that teaching might have some appeal to human wisdom, it can only lead to doubt. What happens to my confidence on those days when I'm not sure I really believe God and his promises? If God's choosing me is dependent on my believing in him, perhaps I'm not one of his chosen because at this moment in time I'm not sure I really believe. The truth of Scripture counters these doubts. God has chosen me in Christ. God's choosing is not dependent on me. It's all about Jesus and what he did for me. From all eternity, God saw me as his forgiven child for the sake of the Savior he sent to rescue me.**
4. What does the word “predestine” mean? Describe how your life has been “predestined” by God, especially as it pertains to your place in God's family here at Mount Olive. **“Predestine” means to “establish boundaries ahead of time.” Picture a set of guardrails on the highway that keep the car “in bounds” and headed for the goal. God, who has chosen us, sets the boundaries of our life so that we are in the right place at the right time to come to faith in Christ. Paul explained this to the Athenians in Acts 17:26-27 “From one man [God] made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from**

each one of us.” It wasn’t an accident that I was born to believing parents who brought me to the baptismal font a month after I was born. It wasn’t an accident that those same parents took me to church, enrolled me in Sunday School, studied the catechism with me, etc. As for my membership at Mount Olive, I can trace the hand of God’s grace through every step of my life, bring me to this place where I have a caring family of believers who are constantly encouraging me in my faith. While our stories may vary, all of our members will be able to see God’s grace leading them to this same family. They can rest assured that we are not here by chance. This is part of God’s design for our life as he guides us on the path that leads to our heavenly home.

Note: Although it was outside the scope of this sermon, some people may wonder about “double predestination” – the false teaching that God not only predetermines who will be in heaven, he also predetermines who will go to hell. This is not true. The Bible says that God wants all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4). It’s a gross misuse of Scripture to try to use this teaching of predestination to answer the question: “Why are some people lost?” God gave us this teaching only for our comfort, so that we might know his eternal love that has brought us to this day and will see us all the way home to heaven. While our curious minds want an answer to the question: “Why some and not others?” We must answer with Scripture’s answer, that those who are lost have only themselves to blame. God is not to blame. Conversely, we who are saved will give God all the credit. We are not responsible for our salvation in any way or to any degree.

5. Why and when did God adopt you? Why is it significant that all of us, male and female are adopted “to sonship through Jesus Christ”? Why did God adopt me? Because he is the God of all grace. Adoption was the only way I could be his child. Because of the sin I inherited, I was not born a “natural” child of God. In his love, God arranged for my “rebirth” as his child through the waters of Holy Baptism. It is significant that I was adopted through Jesus, because apart from him, I could never hope to be God’s child. In Baptism, Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection became my own (Read Romans 6). I was not brought into the family as a “slave” but as a legal “son.” As I mentioned in the sermon, this is not a sexist thought. Paul is thinking of the place and time in which he lived. In the Roman empire, a young man could be legally adopted and become the heir

of another’s estate. Only “son’s” could inherit. Paul is teaching that in God’s church, all of us, male and female, have rights like the Roman sons. We all inherit the forgiveness and salvation that Christ earned for us with his death on the cross. We are named in Christ’s last will and testament – all of us Christians.

6. Agree or disagree and why? God’s plan to save us is a great mystery. In the sense that even the young children sing: “Jesus loves me this I know...” I would have to disagree. The gospel is known to young and old. But how did that happen? Here’s the key to the answer and the point made in our text. This is not a mystery to us because God was pleased to reveal his saving plan to us by his Spirit through the gospel in Word and Sacrament. Apart from these precious means of grace, God’s saving plan is a great mystery. No one on earth could stumble upon this plan. No one on his own could fathom that God would be pleased to rescue fallen, lost sinners by sending his own Son to take their place in life and death. That would seem ridiculous, or as Paul says in 1 Corinthians, “foolishness.” Only the Spirit, working through the Word can reveal this gospel to us and convince us of its saving truth. This he has done for us, young and old alike.
7. What’s the significance of being marked in Christ with a seal? By putting his Spirit in us, God is marking us as his prized possession. It’s his way of saying to us, “You are mine! Satan cannot have you.” The youngest children among us can appreciate this truth. When then want people to know that something belongs to them and they aren’t going to give it up, what do they do? They put their name on it. That’s what God has done for us! What wonderful reassurance that he wants us!
8. What guarantee do you have that heaven is your inheritance? I have God’s Holy Spirit as his deposit. This next illustration will date me. When VCR’s were first available for rental, I had to leave my driver’s license on deposit with the store clerk. It was my way of telling the clerk, “I’m coming back with your VCR. You know I am because I left some very valuable to me with you.” God is coming back for us to take us to heaven and give us the inheritance waiting for us there. We know this is true because he has left his Spirit with us!

9. Ephesians 1:7 says we have redemption through Jesus' blood. Verse 14 suggests that we are still waiting for our redemption. How can both be true? **Both are true. I have redemption right now – the full forgiveness of my sins. I'm free from sin's guilt and punishment thanks to Jesus. Jesus has made me a member of his family and a citizen of heaven where I will enjoy fully and perfectly what it means to be God's son. Heaven is my home, but I'm not there yet to enjoy the full meaning of my redemption. In heaven I will be without sin. So, I am redeemed. It's also true that I'm waiting to enjoy fully what that means.**
10. How can we members of our Mount Olive Family help each other grow in Christ? **God did not make you and me to be spiritual islands. He made us to be a church family. He put us together so that we can be accountable to one another. More importantly, he put us together so that we can be a source of encouragement to one another. In the sermon, I refer to you as my living Bible. You speak Christ to me when I need him most. Much of the time you probably don't even realize you are doing this, but you are just the same. We can help each other most by constantly directing one another to Jesus and his promises. We can do this formally by being in worship and Bible study, and inviting our fellow members to be there with us. We can do this informally by staying in touch with one another and speaking Christ's Word to each other as it applies to the circumstances of life. This means getting to know one another's challenges, fears, successes, joys, etc. Mount Olive's pastors cannot hope to get to know 1800 people in this way. But all of us can get to know some of the members in this way. Right now, we could reach out to one another to see how things are going. Only a fourth of us are back at church. How is everyone else doing? How can we encourage them? How can we keep them close to Jesus? This needs to be something that is intentional. Inviting people to tune in to our live stream services. Call or text them afterwards to discuss the message. Invite a member to be part of a Zoom Bible study. Or offer to participate with them in an online Bible study. These are just a few of the thoughts. I'd be interested to hear what our people come up with for answers to this.**

The Father's Gracious Purpose

Ephesians 1:3–6

³Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. ⁴For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—⁶to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

This section begins a doxology, a song of praise to God, which continues through verse 14. In the Greek it is all one sentence—some two hundred words. The NIV translators have broken it down into shorter sentences, but it's still fairly complex. Therefore, we have highlighted these main concepts. Keep an eye out for them.

1. From eternity God has had a plan of salvation.
2. This plan is fulfilled in and through Christ.
3. God's plan gives us unspeakably great and precious blessings and is our reason for praising him.

Verse 3 literally says, "Blessed be God ... who has blessed us ... with every spiritual blessing." The author speaks to and for people who realize how very fortunate they are. What makes them so fortunate is that they have received "every spiritual blessing." Not one good thing is missing. Everything connected with "the heavenly realms" is theirs. Precisely what those blessings are will be indicated later.

From whom did the recipients receive those blessings? Paul identifies the giver as "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," who has blessed us "in Christ." Everything from God comes in Christ and only in Christ.

How important Christ is in the equation becomes evident when Paul declares, "He [the Father] chose us in him [Christ] before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his

sight.” We have noted that God had a plan that existed already in his mind “before the creation of the world.” In Christ, God chose us to be holy and blameless. It is not that we were holy and blameless to begin with, and for that reason God took a liking to us and chose us. No, far from it! He chose us when we had no righteousness to offer. In fact, he chose us before we were born, before the world even existed. God chose us, Paul says, not *because* we were holy and blameless, but he chose us “*to be* holy and blameless.” He chose us—sinners that we are—in order to make us righteous in Christ. Every spiritual blessing rests on Christ and his saving merit.

God’s choosing us from eternity is often referred to as election. It can also be called predestination, as Paul does when he continues, “In love he [the Father] predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will.”

Election and predestination are not two separate, unrelated things. In fact, Paul connects them here. We have called attention to the fact that this whole opening section is actually one long sentence. Instead of having two separate sentences here, in the Greek Paul puts the two expressions together in a way that might well be translated, “God chose us by predestining us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ.” Note the same combination in verse 11.

Think of what that says! From eternity, before time existed, God’s plan was to make us members of his family, to bring us into his household as his sons and daughters. Hence, he is our Father and we are his children, in line for a full inheritance. Everything that God has is even now being used for our good and blessing, and it will visibly and tangibly become our personal possession in heaven.

Why does God do all that? “In love he predestined us,” Paul says, “in accordance with his pleasure and will.” We might simply say that he did it because he wanted to do it. It was “his pleasure and will,” prompted by his great love for us.

But Paul answers our question in yet another way. Recall that he began this section by directing the reader’s attention to the God “who has blessed us ... with every spiritual blessing in Christ.” As we have seen, these spiritual blessings, which culminate in our adoption as God’s sons and daughters, are totally undeserved. They come as a pure gift of God’s grace. Why does God give them? So that we may be led to thank and praise him, or as Paul says, “to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves [Christ].” Note again, everything comes through Christ, the one whom the Father loves and with whom he is well pleased (Matthew 3:17).

The Father’s Plan Accomplished by the Son’s Work

Ephesians 1:7–12

⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace ⁸that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. ⁹And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, ¹⁰to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

¹¹In 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, ¹²in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.

In this section the emphasis shifts from election itself to the one through whom our election was made possible. The centrality of Christ, so evident in the previous section, becomes even more pointed and direct here. Note once more Paul’s key concepts: God’s eternal plan, fulfilled in Christ, for our good and blessing, so that we are led to thank and praise our gracious God.

What was earlier referred to in general terms as “every spiritual blessing” and then narrowed down a bit as our

“adoption” into God’s family now comes into sharp focus. Our greatest blessing, the apostle tells us, is the forgiveness of sins we have in Christ. “In him [Christ] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding.”

Paul uses two terms that differ as to the picture underlying them yet are virtually interchangeable in meaning: “redemption” and “forgiveness.” *Redemption* implies that someone is a slave or captive and needs to be ransomed. *Forgiveness* implies that someone has acted improperly toward another and in so doing has incurred guilt that needs to be covered over or taken away.

Both require the payment of a heavy price. The sinner has offended God himself; the price is—or at least should be—the sinner’s life. “The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). But “in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us,” he did the unthinkable: God himself paid the price. He sent his Son to be our substitute, to suffer and die in our place. Through his blood we have been rescued from the captivity of sin and freed from its guilt.

In a million years we would not have devised such a plan. Rather, God devised it “in accordance with the riches of [his] grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding.”

Not only would we not have thought up a plan like this, but we would never have grasped or understood it if God had not “made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ.” The “mystery” of God’s will shall be treated more fully later in this letter (3:2–13). Suffice it at this stage to say that the mystery of God’s will is almost synonymous with God’s plan of salvation, that is, his will to save sinners. God’s plan is not mysterious in the sense that it mystifies people or is incomprehensible to them. It is a mystery only in the sense that people cannot come to understand it by themselves. God has to explain it to them and lead them to know it and accept it. And that he does, of course, in the gospel that proclaims his grace in Christ.

Although a fuller explanation of the mystery is coming in chapter 3, Paul does not leave us waiting until then without a clue. The mystery of God’s will, Paul tells us, has as its purpose, “to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.” Recall that in writing to the Colossians, Paul stresses the greatness of Christ, who is the head of the church. In Ephesians the same subject matter is treated, but from the other side. Here Paul talks much about the church, of which Christ is the head. However, not just the church but “all things in heaven and on earth” are to be brought together under Christ. Hence, we might say that in his letter to the Ephesians, Paul sets forth God’s stated purpose and plan to bring all things in general, and the church in particular, under the headship of Christ. (See also verse 22.)

In speaking of how God’s eternal plan centers on Christ, Paul returns once more to the subject of election and predestination. He states, “In him [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, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.”

When we hear such expressions as “predestined according to the plan” and “in conformity with the purpose of his will,” we realize that nothing of which Paul speaks is happening by chance. Everything occurs exactly according to God’s carefully foreordained plan, which was in place already in eternity.

In verses 4 and 5 Paul spoke in general terms about election and predestination. Now in verse 12 he narrows his focus and becomes specific about God’s plan. Here Paul gives a clear indication of who the “we” are whom God chose. “We, who were the first to hope in Christ,” are the people of the Jewish nation, among whom Paul includes himself.

In order to fulfill his promise of a Savior, given to Adam and Eve already in the Garden of Eden, God chose Abraham out of all the families of the world and gave him three specific promises. God promised that he would make Abraham into a great nation,

that his descendants would live in a special land, and that from the Jewish nation, the Savior of the world would be born.

Before the world began, in keeping with his carefully laid out plan, God chose the descendants of Abraham, the Jewish nation, as his own special people. And in time he carried out that plan, as Paul's readers clearly understood. Why did God do that? Paul answers, "In order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory."

God's faithfulness to his promise, his reliability in sticking with his plan, and his patience with rebellious Israel serve to magnify God's glory. Well might Paul urge his readers, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (verse 3).

God's faithfulness to the Jewish nation was only part of his plan, though. Paul hints at that when he says, "We ... were the *first* to hope in Christ," implying there are others. "We Jews may have been the first to believe in Christ," Paul says—but he quickly adds, "You [Ephesian readers, Gentiles by birth] also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation." The Jews are part of God's plan, but in Christ the Gentiles are also in the picture. Note the implications of that for God's plan and purpose of bringing "all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ."

The Father's Plan Sealed by the Holy Spirit

Ephesians 1:13–14

¹³And 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, ¹⁴who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

We have noted that the grand plan Paul is setting forth in his letter to the Ephesians involves all three persons of the Trinity. From eternity God the Father chose the elect in Christ. But that eternal counsel of God, centering on Christ, finds its fulfillment in

time—when the Holy Spirit does his special work of bringing people to faith in Christ through the message of the gospel.

Paul directs our attention to this work of the Spirit when he shifts the spotlight from the grace God has shown to the Jews to the equal grace God has shown to the Gentiles. Paul sets the gentile Ephesian believers alongside Jewish believers when he declares, "And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation."

Not only has the Holy Spirit brought the Ephesians to faith, but his presence in their hearts serves yet another purpose. "Having believed," Paul says, "you were marked in him [Christ] with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit." The Ephesians bear a seal: having the Holy Spirit in their hearts. In ancient times a seal was the sign of ownership. For a Christian to bear the seal of the Holy Spirit is an indicator that he or she belongs to God. That is a *present* blessing.

But Paul points to yet another blessing coming from the Spirit's presence in our hearts by faith. We have assurance for the *future*. The apostle describes the Spirit as "a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession."

A deposit, a down payment, is the first installment of a transaction and guarantees the rest of the obligation will also be met. The fact that God has given his Holy Spirit into our hearts by faith at the present time is an assurance that the rest of God's promise will also be forthcoming. It is his guarantee that he'll hold our inheritance in heaven for us "until the redemption [the final deliverance] of those who are God's possession." For a parallel passage that speaks of the Holy Spirit, both as a seal indicating God's present ownership of the believer and as the guarantee of future blessings with God in heaven, see 2 Corinthians 1:21, 22.

Once again, for the third time in this section, Paul tells us why God has showered us with all these blessings: to give us cause to thank and praise him. All this is "to the praise of his glory."¹

¹ Panning, A. J. (1997). *Galatians, Ephesians* (pp. 130–138). Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Pub. House.