

THE SOVEREIGN GOD AND
THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL:
A STUDY OF EPHESIANS

(LESSON TWELVE)

“GOD’S INHERITANCE”

EPHESIANS 1:3-14

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:

4 According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:

5 Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.

6 To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.

7 In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.

8 Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence;

9 Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself.

10 That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him:

11 In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:

12 That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.

13 In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise,

14 Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.

In **Ephesians 1:10**, the Apostle Paul explains the nature of the “mystery” of God’s will which He has been pleased to make known unto us: “*That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him.*” In our previous **Lesson**, we stated that this verse is one of the most important in this epistle, because God’s ultimate purpose with respect to the world is revealed in it.

The “*mystery*” that has been revealed is that God Almighty has a great purpose and a great plan as it relates to the management and administration of the affairs of this world, which He is carrying out in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a purpose and plan which He will, without fail, bring to a successful completion. God’s ultimate plan and purpose is to reverse the fallen condition of His original creation, including man, and to re-harmonize and re-unite the whole of creation to Himself in and through the Lord Jesus Christ.

The **New Living Translation** renders the verse as follows: “*And this is the plan: At the right time he will bring everything together under the authority of Christ — everything in heaven and on earth.*”

Having informed us that the ultimate purpose and plan of God is to re-harmonize and reunite the whole creation to Himself in and through Jesus Christ, Paul proceeds to tell us something of the way in which God is working all this out. Having looked at the purpose and plan in general, he now gives us the details. In verse **11** He writes, “*In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.*”

Before we examine the verse, I would like to make a comment about the Apostle Paul’s writing style. He is never satisfied with merely outlining to his readers, the truths concerning the Christian faith in an intellectual manner. Paul cannot make mention of these truths without being astonished and amazed by them. So, for instance, when he mentions that “*we have obtained an inheritance*” in Jesus Christ, he is so blown out of his mind that such a thing could ever be possible, that he has to explore how such a thing has come to be. He is not content to simply state that in Jesus Christ, we have received an inheritance, but he must tell us how this has happened. He says it has happened because we were “*predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.*”

As we noted earlier, Paul in verse **10**, explains that God is working out His grand purpose and plan to re-harmonize and re-unite the whole creation in Jesus Christ. In verse **11**, he begins to explain **how** God is doing so. As we consider this matter, it is important for us to observe two phrases, one at the beginning of verse **11** and the other at the beginning of verse **13**. “*In whom also we have obtained an inheritance*” (verse **11**), and “*In whom ye also trusted*” (verse **13**). It is evident that the “*we*” in verse **11** is in contrast with the “*ye*” in verse **13**. It is very likely that the “*we*” in verse **11** is a reference to the Jews, including Paul himself, while the “*ye*” in verse **13**, is a reference to the Gentiles, represented here by the Ephesians and the other churches to whom this letter was sent. Paul’s statement in verse **12** seems to support this position. He writes, “*That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.*” This statement appears to highlight the fact that the Jews were the first to believe in Jesus Christ and accept the gospel of grace, and that the Gentiles did so at a later date. Historically, this is exactly what occurred as the verses outlined hereunder prove:

LUKE 24:47

“And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”

JOHN 4:22

*“Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: **for salvation is of the Jews.**”*

ROMANS 1:16

*“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; **to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.**”*

Paul emphasizes the “we” (Jews), and the “ye” (Gentiles), because of the astounding reality that both groups have been brought together and have been made one in Christ. What is true of the Jews in verse **11** is also true of the Gentiles. Paul is focusing attention on the fact that in the purpose and plan of God which He is bringing to pass, both Jews and Gentiles are a part of it. In **Galatians 3:28** he wrote, *“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.”* The really important matter, however, is how God brought all of this to pass and this is what Paul will explain to us in verses **11-14**.

The word “also” in verse **11** connects what follows with what Paul had stated in verse **10**. It was the purpose and plan of God not merely to make known unto us the “*mystery of His will,*” but to actually fulfill that plan and purpose in us. We were not only chosen for this in Christ before the foundation of the world, but the plan and purpose were actually effected in us! Oh, how high and how deep and how wide is the love of God for His Church! Not only have we received the initial blessings of redemption, forgiveness of sin, and spiritual illumination because of our vital union with Christ, but, in addition to these, which, though they have a lasting significance, focus the attention upon **the past**, we have also received the right to **future** glory. We were made an inheritance. The **King James Version** translates the phrase, “*We have obtained an inheritance.*” However, the best Greek manuscripts do not support the translation “*we have **obtained** an inheritance,*” but that “*we were **made** an inheritance,*” or, “*we were **designated** as a heritage.*” The saints are God’s heritage, they are His personal possession as a result of the work of Jesus Christ on the Cross.

What Paul desires for us to understand is that we as God’s heritage, were given the right to all the blessings of salvation in Jesus Christ, apart from any merit or deserving of our own, and we will never lose them!

But how did vile and wretched creatures such as you and I come to be made an inheritance of God? The answer is found in the words “*being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will.*” The word “predestinated” is a translation of the Greek word **proorizo (pro-or-id'-zo)**, which means “to mark out the boundary or limits of a place, thing or person previously, to predestine or foreordain.” Before time, before the creation of the world, God purposed and planned to restore harmony and unity to His entire creation and He purposed and planned that you and I should be included. We have been made God’s inheritance because He predestinated us to be so. To be predestinated means to be predetermined. What could ever be more wonderful than the knowledge that God thought of us in the counsel of His own will! He not only had a purpose and conceived a plan to carry it out, He also included us in the purpose and the plan! We could translate the verse as follows: “*in whom we were made an inheritance, having been previously marked out for this destiny according to the purpose of His will.*”

Brothers and sisters, our predestination to a special relationship with God is connected with the God's ultimate purpose and plan for His creation. The God of the elect is the God of the universe. The purpose and plan which form the basis of our being made God's heritage, embraces the whole plan of the world; and our position as the heritage and possession of God has absolutely nothing to do with us, but is an expression of His sovereignty. Paul says that our predestination is *"according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will."*

The word *"counsel"* is the translation of a Greek word which has in it the ideas of intelligence and deliberation. The Greek word translated *"will"* refers to "a desire that springs from one's emotions." Paul is informing us that God's act of predestinating us to be made His heritage, came from His heart of love. But His desire was governed by His reason and His deliberation. In choosing us, God did not act arbitrarily, but He acted intelligently and by deliberation. He had a reason for acting the way He did. It is also implied in this statement that the reasons for God's predestination of us, do not lie in ourselves, but wholly and solely in the mind and will of God. We are not only in the mind of God and the heart of God; we were always there. We are there now because we were there before the foundation of the world.

The Jewish believers were chosen because they were predestined, and so were the Gentile believers. But this predestination is not a matter of chance or whimsical impulse on God's part; it is according to the plan of God, who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will.

Brothers and sisters, God is sovereign; He is in charge. When our lives seem chaotic, we need to rest in the assurance that Jesus is still Lord; God is still in control and His purpose to save us cannot be thwarted, no matter what.

There may be someone here who may be wondering if, indeed, all the blessings of salvation, both future as well as present will really be realized in their life? They may be asking, "Does God's plan for my life also secure the future?" It is precisely to give an assurance to even the most faint-hearted Christian that Paul writes what he writes in verse **11**. The **Passion Translation** renders the verse beautifully: *"Through our union with Christ we too have been claimed by God as his own inheritance. Before we were even born, he gave us our destiny; that we would fulfill the plan of God who always accomplishes every purpose and plan in his heart."* What could possibly be more assuring than this?

What has Paul told us in these first 11 verses of his letter to the Ephesians concerning the purpose and plan of God as it relates to us? In verse **3**, he tells us that we have been blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ; in verse **4** he tells us that God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, in order that we should be holy and without blame before Him; in verse **5** he tells us that in love, God predestinated or foreordained us to the position of sons, according to the good pleasure of His will; in verse **6** he tells us that God has accepted us and as a result, we are the recipients of His special honour and favour; in verse **7**, he tells us that we have received redemption inclusive of the forgiveness of our sins, according to the riches of God's grace. And now, in verse **11**, he tells us that we have been made an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will.

Brothers and sisters, there is absolutely nothing that Paul says we have received and enjoy, that we have deserved, merited or worked for. We have not made even the slightest contribution in order to secure any of these blessings.

We have them because of **God's choice, God's foreordination, God's love, God's good pleasure, The riches of God's grace, God's purpose.** It is all of God! Why, then, do we doubt that our ultimate salvation is not secure seeing that it is part of a larger, universe-embracing plan. Not only did God **make** this plan that includes absolutely all things that ever take place in heaven, on earth, and in hell; past, present, **and even the future**, pertaining to both believers and unbelievers, to angels and demons; He also is **wholly responsible for carrying it out.** His protective care in time is as comprehensive as is His decree from eternity.

Who does Paul say is responsible for the working out of these things, is it we or is it God? Let us read the verse again: *"In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of **him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.**"* It is God who works out His purpose and plan in us. This is one of the most comforting truths we can ever know. Paul literally states that God works by an operation of His divine energy in all things. If it were not so, not one of us would have any hope. He is working **"all things after the counsel of His own will."** The Greek word translated "all" here has the absolute sense, meaning that it does not only apply to 'the all things' that have to do with to divine grace and redemption. It refers to every single thing that happens whether good or bad. It has the same meaning as **Romans 8:28:** *"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."*

But what about Philippians **2:12:** *"Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."* The answer is verse **13:** *"For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."* The **New Living Translation** renders verse **13** as follows: *"For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him."* It is God who is working effectually in us through the Holy Spirit, giving us both the desire and the power to do what pleases Him.

It is God who is doing the work! Therefore, there is nothing that can upset the future glory of the elect. It is the whole basis of my assurance at this very moment and it is my assurance in respect of the future. It is God Himself who placed me where I am, and it is God Himself who will keep me secure in that place forever! I am in the purpose and plan of God and I am there in spite of my mistakes; I am there in spite of my faults and my failures; I am there in spite of my sins.

JOHN 5:24

"I speak to you an eternal truth: if you embrace my message and believe in the One who sent me, you will never face condemnation, for in me, you have already passed from the realm of death into the realm of eternal life!" (**The Passion Translation**)

JOHN 6:37-40

"But everyone my Father has given to me, they will come. And all who come to me, I will embrace and will never turn them away. And I have come out of heaven not for my own desires, but for the satisfaction of my Father who sent me. My Father who sent me has determined that I will not lose even one of those he has given to me, and I will raise them up in the last day. For the longing of my Father is that everyone who embraces the Son and believes in him will experience eternal life and I will raise them up in the last day!" (**The Passion Translation**)

JOHN 10:28-30

“My own sheep will hear my voice and I know each one, and they will follow me. I give to them the gift of eternal life and they will never be lost and no one has the power to snatch them out of my hands. My Father, who has given them to me as his gift, is the mightiest of all, and no one has the power to snatch them from my Father’s care. The Father and I are one” (The Passion Translation).

The God who, in love, foreordained His people to the adoption as sons will never forsake them, but will finish that which He began in them (**Philippians 1:6**). He will carry out his plan to the very finish. Nothing will ever be able to frustrate His design. Neither sin, nor death, nor hell can move his firm predestinating love.

In verse **12**, Paul tells us why we were predestined to be made an inheritance of God. He writes, *“That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.”* The saints were made God’s heritage *“that we should be to the praise of His glory.”* Paul’s thought at this point seems to be as follows: If it is true that God’s ultimate purpose and plan for His entire creation was determined from eternity, and if this ultimate purpose and plan is being carried out by God Himself, and if the destiny of His children was included in this plan, then Paul and his readers have no reason whatsoever for boasting in themselves. Whatever they **are**, whatever they **possess**, whatever they **enjoy** and whatever they **accomplish**, has nothing to do with them. They are and possess and enjoy and accomplish only because they have been included in the ultimate purpose and plan of a sovereign God who is not dependent on them to bring His purpose and plan to a successful conclusion, but is dependent on Himself alone! Since this is the case, Paul reasons that God’s intention is that we should bring praise and glory to Him.

We must be very careful that we interpret the words *“should be”* accurately. To us, the words “should be” very often convey the idea of an obligation and they may suggest to us, as we read this verse, that it is the obligation of the Christian to live a life that will be to the praise of God’s glory. But in this verse, Paul is not speaking so much of the Christian’s **experience** as he is of the Christian’s **position**.

The words *“That we should be to the praise of his glory,”* highlight the ultimate end which God had in view when He predestinated us to be made His inheritance. The life of every saint should be a celebration of God’s glory. Our salvation should always serve as an occasion for us to praise the One who saved us. We should praise and glorify Him by attributing our election and predestination to His grace alone. It is important for us to recognize that our predestination to be made God’s inheritance was not only for our personal benefit but was also that through us, His glory might be manifested. **Isaiah 43:21** speaks of this very idea: *“This people have I formed for myself; they shall shew forth my praise.”*