

Ephesians: Living in Sync with Reality
Part Two – Adopted

March 17, 2024
By Pastor David Fields

I. Our True Location

“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.”

– Ephesians 1:3

Paul is “in prison”, but that’s not his definitive location:

“...your life is now hidden with Christ in God.”

– Colossians 3:3

I think we can know the same kind of joyful, praise oriented spirit. It comes from seeing the world from your most fundamental location.

“[God] blessed us...*in the heavenly realms* with every spiritual blessing *in Christ*.” (Eph 1:3)

“He chose us *in him [in Christ]* before the foundations of the world...” (Eph 1:4)

“*In him [in Christ]* we have redemption...” (Eph 1:7)

“*In him [in Christ]* we were also chosen...” (Eph 1:11)

“And you were also included *in Christ*...” (Eph 1:13)

“When you believed, you were marked *in him [in Christ]* with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.”
(Eph 1:13)

Our true location “in Christ” blessed “in the heavenly realms” says our physical situation is not all there is. Is not our defining reality. Your future is not determined or trapped by this.

II. Our True Identity

“For he [God the Father] chose us in him [in Christ] before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love, he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.”

– Ephesians 1:4-6

“The modern self is crushing. It must base itself on success or achievement or some human love relationship, and if any of these things is jeopardized or lost, you lose your very identity.”

– Timothy Keller, *Making Sense of God*

This text tells us that those who have come to a place of deep trust in Jesus, have a whole new identity, a stable, true identity as God's beloved children, that's not dependent on our performance or our failures, but on God's own deep love. It's not dependent on my efforts, but on his gracious gift of life that he has always had in his mind.

How do we come to embrace this life?

"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."

– Ephesians 1:13

What does the language of "chosen" and "predestined" mean?

1. God initiates and completes his saving purposes.

2. God gives us real agency – and no one chooses God.

Theologians speak of "prevenient grace," which roughly means "God's grace, or God's help, in advance."

Theologian Beth Felker-Jones describes the dynamic like this:

"We do—or don't—turn to God, freely [our agency], *and* we're too broken to do that turning by our own power; we can only do so with divine help [God's agency]."

– Beth Felker-Jones

"The truth is that salvation is entirely a work of God in which humans are totally involved."

– Klyne Snodgrass

3. God's choosing does not mean God's rejecting others.

Paul can't mean: "God is picking some people to be saved and others to not be saved." Why not? Because Paul says: "This is good and pleases God our Saviour, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth."

– 1 Timothy 2:3-4

We understand God's purposes in election by looking at the larger story of the Bible.

God chose Abram, and said to him:

"I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all people on earth will be blessed through you."

– Genesis 12:2-3

God's "choosing" of Abram, and the nation of Israel, wasn't about rejecting other people or other nations. The opposite! God chose Abraham *in order* to bless all other people.

When Jesus chooses the 12 to be his apostles, he's not rejecting everyone else. He has set them apart for a specific task of bearing witness to his life, death, and resurrection, then bringing the news to the world.

That's what election is about in the Bible. God chooses some for the sake of all the others. And that's why the purpose clause matters so much: "Chosen...to be holy and blameless in his sight."

4. God chooses us to be like him, the Holy One.

"Chosen...to be holy and blameless in his sight."

Being holy is not the "grounds" of our salvation. But God will make us holy and blameless as we participate with him. As we embrace who we really are, our true identity in him, letting his Spirit get to work, we become beautifully whole. We come live more and more in sync with the goodness of God. Who wouldn't want that?

But more, too: to be "holy" is to be set apart for a good purpose. And that good purpose is God's glory in the world – is to join God and the work of God's community in the healing of the world.

5. God predestined us to adoption into a community: the People of God

All the "you's" are "Ya'll's" – are plural.

Perhaps the emphasis is less individualistic than we tend to think. Yes, we can personalize the language of "adopted." That's true of each of us. But perhaps Paul's use of plurals places the emphasis on God's choosing of a people for himself?

"God's eternal purpose...is that through the Spirit we participate in the glorious relationship that the Son enjoys with the Father. To this end, the Spirit unites us as one body with Jesus Christ. Election [i.e. being "chosen...predestined"], therefore, is bound up with community; we are elected to community and for community."

– Stanley Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*

God has wanted you to be his very own child from eternity past. And God wants you, as part of his community, to give yourself wholly to the holy task of loving the world in his name and for his glory.

III. Our True Riches in Christ

God's love is displayed in his costly act of self-sacrifice. Verse 7:

“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us.” – Ephesians 1:7

1. Redeemed

Redemption means to release someone who is enslaved. But this implies that until we turn in trust to Jesus, our state as humans *is* one of bondage. Unless someone sets us free, we remain enslaved.

2. Forgiven

Paul elaborates that “forgiveness” is how God enacts this. Again, this implies that we had stepped over the line, that we aren't in bondage but that we've been a partner to that bondage. That we need God's forgiveness, for we've rebelled against God.

And in Jesus, we have it. Through his own blood, he pays the debt we owe. Isn't freedom one of our deepest impulses? So, this is true for all who respond in faith to Jesus.

3. Let in on the Mystery

Part of the riches is that we are not left in the dark about God's good plans. We can know where history is heading!

“With all wisdom and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment – ***to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.***”

– Ephesians 1:8-10

“The Church is the primary means God has established for drawing a fractured, hostile, and violent world together.”

– Michael Gorman

How we treat one another. How we function in love. We stand as a sign and foretaste to the rest of the world what God is bringing about.

IV. Our True Hope

“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, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are

God's possession—to the praise of his glory.”

– Ephesians 1:13-14

How do we know?

1) We remember the historical “happenings” of the Gospel.

“And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation...”

– Ephesians 1:13a.

2) God's very own presence, his Spirit, living in us, nudges our hearts to want God and his closeness.

“When you 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 1:13b-14

From Romans 8 and Galatians 4 we can know we have the Spirit because our hearts long for God, when we are in trouble, or need his mercy, we cry out to God, “Abba, Father” (Gal 4:6). This tender term in Hebrew of relational closeness of a child with their father. It roughly translates out to “Daddy.”

We now live “to the praise of his glory.” We praise what we love. And, as we know of our true location, as we embrace our true identity, as we celebrate our true riches, and as we rest in our true hope, may we be a people full of love and adoration for our good, good Father.

Life Group Discussion and Reflection

Open Up

What would you do if you discovered that you were related to royalty, and were set to inherit property, status, and a very large sum of money? How would it change how you feel about yourself, act around others, or speak about this new-found connection?

Dig In

Read Ephesians 1:3-14

1. In what ways does this text lead you into praise alongside of Paul – what about this section draws your heart toward thanksgiving and awe and worship? Why?
2. What are some of the primary ways we tend to think about “riches” or “wealth” in our world? How does that connect with or differ from the sort of “riches” that Paul describes in this section?
3. How do you tend to think about your identity?
4. What has been most helpful in connecting you with your deepest identity as God’s adopted child? (Study, regular involvement in worship, spiritual habits like prayer, solitude, meditating on Scripture, conversations with other believers, keeping a day of Sabbath where you ‘unplug’ from the regular work life)? How might you want to deepen these habits of worship and ‘practicing gospel hope’?
5. How do you feel about the fact that God has given us the Spirit as a down payment, a deposit on the future hope he has for us? How have you experienced that draw to view God as your “Abba, Father” (Gal 4:6)? How might you want to be more open to recognizing his hope-filled presence?

Prayer

Take time to pray for the needs of your Life Group members. Take time to give thanks to God for the ‘riches’ we read of in Ephesians 1:3-14. Pray for your neighbours and co-workers and family who also need to know this hope.