

## Reflections on One Sentence in Ephesians

At the very beginning of Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus, he must have gotten carried away with praise to God, because he wrote a very long sentence, extending from 1:4 to verse 11. In this sentence, Paul squeezes in all that God has done for those who have faith in Christ, blessing us with every spiritual blessing. Let's reflect on all that Paul has put into this one long sentence. If we diagram the sentence, it includes the following ideas:

- Even before Creation, God chose us to be in Christ and to be holy
- In love, God predestined His people to be adopted as His sons, in accordance with His pleasure and will
- God freely gave His people His glorious grace, which is in Christ Whom God loves
- Our redemption, which includes the forgiveness of sins, was secured thru Christ's death, in accordance with the riches of God's grace, granted to us in perfect wisdom
- In the fullness of time, God revealed the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, purposed in Christ
- God's plan is for all things in existence to be placed under the headship of Christ
- God predestined us, His chosen ones, according to the plan of Him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will
- God seals believers with the Holy Spirit thus guaranteeing our inheritance

And all the above is to initiate God's new realm that brings glory to God (vv.12,14). To appreciate all that God has done for us so that we can be properly grateful and respond accordingly, let's think through each of these ideas.

1. **Prior to creation:** In God's perfect omniscience, and because He has great cosmic purposes such as to deal with evil, God planned a world in which there would be . . . well, what we have, sin and temptation to sin, and death. He made first a temporary world, a provisional world, one that would be replaced in the future. God evidently allowed this present kind of world in order to accomplish something vastly greater than the wickedness that was permitted in it. It appears that God's great purpose was to fully expose evil, not only in the abstract but in reality, as a real enslaving force, and to do away with it forever. Thus in a future era, a subsequent, eternal creation, there would be a new heavens and earth in which there would be only goodness and not even the prospect of evil. But there's more.

It seems also to have been God's great purpose to exalt the Son. So God's plan, called in theology "a covenant of redemption," made before God created, was that the Son would have a major role in dealing with sin and evil, so that He might be praised by willing and grateful creatures. For this to occur, it would be necessary in advance to elect certain ones to participate in this great cosmic purpose, because the sin that would occur would be so deep and so pervasive that without God's initiation, no human creature would or could respond. So election and predestination were essential. What this compellingly means is, we need to be humble and exceedingly grateful, as it's only because of God's having chosen us and inclined our minds and hearts toward Him that anyone is saved, let alone even knows He exists.

2. **God's love:** We err grievously if we suppose that God's love is like human love, except of course that it's greater. No. As God is a transcendent Being, so is His love. Human love is an emotion that, in essence, is desire. "I love classical music." "I love my wife." "I love my BMW." Etc. God's love, in stark contrast, is a generous giving to others, it's blessing others, it's seeking the good of others. God's love is willed. It stems from His essence, His nature, His very being. God's love transcends anything we can suppose or imagine.

God is *a se*. That means He is self-existent, He has life in Himself. He alone in this cosmos is fully independent and autonomous. And He's an infinite Being. Nothing – *nothing* – can enrich Him or cause Him in any way to be better or greater or more glorious than He is, or was, or always will be. His love therefore cannot be desire. It can only be a willful sharing of the inherent goodness of His Being with others. Mercy and grace are how His love is expressed toward sinners, toward unlovely, unworthy human creatures.

3. **Adoption:** In the era of Scripture, adoption was common. In love, a man would take someone to be his son and heir, and that adoptee would have all the very same rights and privileges as a natural-born son. There were no conditions attached. The adopted son was one of the family, no longer a member of his prior, natural family. In fact, his natural family would consider him to be dead. Levirate marriage was a posthumous adoption, that is, the son resulting would be the offspring and heir of the decedent. Paul uses the term to mean that a believer in Christ becomes a member of a totally transcendent family – with full rights as if a natural-born son – a new family generated by God because of the death, resurrection and ascension of the Son. But this adoption involves much more than position or status, because

God placed His Holy Spirit in us. So “adoption” is not merely a metaphor, it’s a reality to be experienced partially now, but fully experienced in the future. And if we’re sons of the Most High, then we are obligated to not only honor our Father, but to *be like Him*. That’s the responsibility of all sons, natural born or adopted. Adoption is a very serious matter; it permits intimate access to the Father, and it expects love, trust and service in return.

4. **Redemption:** At the Exodus from Egypt, the children of Israel were “redeemed.” That is, they were bought out of slavery to Pharaoh into the freedom of being under the sovereign rule and love of Jehovah, the Creator God, who’d be with them in the land promised to them. The purchase price for that redemption was either the life of the Passover lamb or the first-born of Egyptians. But redemption means much more to Paul. A believer in Christ is redeemed from slavery to sin, from the iron grip of Satan, and from incessant servitude to self and its fleshly desires. The purchase price for our freedom is . . . Christ. Redemption is Paul’s term for all that Christ accomplished for us by His Person, His life, His teachings, His righteousness and obedience as well as His death, resurrection and ascension. Redemption includes the forgiveness of sins. Redemption frees us not only from the guilt of sin but from the power of sin, and at the resurrection we’ll be freed from the strictures of a mortal body. Redemption also establishes a relationship with God that otherwise would be impossible. In Scripture, by the way, a redeemer would have to be a kinsman; because all humans stem from Adam, every human can be redeemed by Christ; this is one of the reasons the Son necessarily took on human nature.

5. **Fullness of time:** God created time. In His perfect wisdom, it was exactly the right thing to allow events to progress thru time to a climax. So Scripture chronicles a long history of the progressive unfolding of truth, of gradual revelation of what God needed to do and would eventually do. In His wisdom, there were successive dispensations in which God dealt with His human creatures in somewhat different ways, but in all of them there was an invisible linking thread: failure would be dealt with by Someone unique who would one day come. All of Scripture thus is like the time-lapse film of a flower opening: going from a tight bud to a loosely opened blossom to a fully open and lovely bloom. The advent of the incarnate Son climaxes all that preceded, yet that is not the full climax of God’s great cosmic purposes. Because of His rejection by the Jewish people, He will come again to establish His millennial kingdom. But even that will not bring to a final climax all that God intended; that will occur afterward, when all lives have been resurrected and inherit all that a good God purposed in creating.

6. **Headship of Christ:** The author of Hebrews seems to use the term Son in two different ways. One refers to the Second Person of the Trinity. But the other way it’s used refers to the incarnate Deity, the One who took on human nature and obediently served God even to the point of the cross (and resurrection). This latter use of “Son” probably refers back to Psalm 2, “You are my Son . . . Kiss the Son, lest he be angry . . . blessed are all who take refuge in him.” This “Son” is Christ. Paul surely is thinking of Psalm 2 (which you should read!) when he penned that “all things in heaven and earth will be together under one head, even Christ.” This Son, that is, Christ, the God-man, is the beloved of God. He is the most beautiful and perfect Person in existence. The Father has been pleased to make Him sovereign Ruler and Judge of all. He will rule over all kings on earth, and He will judge every human’s deeds and motives. Paul probably is referring here to the future when Christ returns as King to rule with total and absolute authority over a restored earth and over all nations for a thousand years. All believers, that is, all who are *in Christ*, having been resurrected (or raptured) will share in that rule. It will be absolutely glorious!

7. **a Seal . . . the Holy Spirit:** The gift of the Holy Spirit to followers of Christ is loaded with meaning. It means approval, for sure. It means security as well. It also means that God has taken permanent ownership of us. It means too – and don’t miss this! – that the life we live here and now is a deposit or down-payment, or token anticipation, of the resurrection life that’s to come. One commentary says it’s “a little bit of heaven with the guarantee of much more yet to come.” Yes! It means that we’re here in this present life to live out, now, our future existence when we’re sinless, holy, faithful servants of the living God. In the same way that so much of the O.T. is proleptic of how things will be in the future, our present lives are to be proleptic of how things will be in the coming transcendent era. The Spirit empowers us, makes it possible for us actually to be just like Christ and to live a Christ-type of life. Just as Abraham was future-oriented, so we’re to live – and be – as if we’re already in the future. The New Testament was given to us purposely to reveal how to live that life now, one that pleases and glorifies God.

This sentence in Ephesians 1 wasn’t given to us as information, although that is how we usually read it, if we even think about what we read. No, it was given in love to elicit love. If we’re following Christ, as we should be, the indwelling Spirit prompts a response of love and gratitude, rejoicing, and deep, penetrating awe. If not . . . something is very wrong. Go back to the text and read it again, slowly, asking God to meet with you as you read. *That* is why the text is there.