

“God’s Plan”
Ephesians 1:1-14
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Ephesians 1:1-14 says [1] *Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus: [2] Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

[3] Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, [4] even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love [5] He predestined us for adoption to Himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will, [6] to the praise of His glorious grace, with which He has blessed us in the Beloved. [7] In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, [8] which He lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight [9] making known to us the mystery of His will, according to His purpose, which He set forth in Christ [10] as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Him, things in heaven and things on earth.

[11] In Him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, [12] so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of His glory. [13] In Him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in Him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, [14] who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of His glory.

This is God's Word.

There is a lot in this passage. We will not be able to cover all that is in this passage in this study. There are just three points that I would like to try to make from this passage. God chose us in kind intention for His glory. I'll explain more about what I mean by all of that as we go through it but the first point that comes out several times in this passage is that God chose us. God predestined us. Specifically, over ten times in different ways Paul says ‘In Christ;’ we've been chosen in Christ, we've been adopted in Jesus, in Him. God doesn't give blessings to people arbitrarily. God the Father gives all good things to His Son and when we are in Christ, we receive those things. So, we should never try to think about the blessings of God apart from our union with Christ, apart from our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

When we start talking about predestination, almost always there will be someone who says “How do I know for sure that I've been chosen, that I've been predestined?” The answer is in the text, really in Ephesians 1:1 when it says ‘to those who are faithful in Christ Jesus.’ How do you know if you've been chosen? How do you know if you've been predestined? How do you know for sure that you've been saved? Are you faithful in Christ Jesus? Dr. Frank Barker, many years ago used to say “It's not about the perfection of your life. It is about the direction of your life.” In other words, it's not about perfection. It is about progress.

I've been married for over 24 years now. I promise you, if you asked my wife “Has Olan been perfect?” ‘No’ will be her resounding answer, and she'll be happy to give you examples of how I've not been perfect, but I'm pretty sure at least I'm hopeful if you said to her, “Has he been faithful?” She would say ‘Yes, in general, he's been faithful’ and that's a good picture of what it

means to be in Christ. It's not about your sinless perfection. None of us have that in this life, but it is about faithfulness in Christ.

This passage shows us that the root of our salvation is God's action towards us – His choice, His predestination, His adoption, His love, His grace, His peace, His initiation, His plan. He gets all the credit. This passage and many other places in the Bible is making it abundantly clear we can't take one ounce of credit for the fact that I'm in Christ because He did it before the foundational world. I didn't even exist yet. So how can I take credit? He chose you. He gets all the credit. But the fruit, the evidence, the proof of my salvation is my slow but sure beginning steps of holiness – living like a faithful spouse, living like an adopted son, slowly but surely becoming more of a blameless person, not perfect, but growing.

Even in great Presbyterian churches, there are still a lot of us that sometimes can struggle with this whole concept of predestination – it's mysterious, how does it work and man's responsibility, etc. I will just say it's not wrong to ask those questions. It's not wrong to wrestle with those things in Scripture, but every once in a while, it's good to just step back and just say, 'Let me just imagine for a second that it's all true, that I was just a wicked dead rebel in the orphanage of this world and God walked in and said, "I like you, I choose you, I adopt you out of the orphanage of this world, and it has nothing to do with you. It just has everything to do with My goodness and love."' Imagine for that moment that it is really true and good and just enjoy it because that's what happened.

God's choosing of us is not arbitrary. It's not like He says 'Well, I need to save some and I need to damn some. I'll just take these people.' We don't know all of God's reasons. We know that it's not about our merit, it's not about our goodness. He had a plan. He had a purpose, and He chose you if you're in Christ. Hallelujah, what a Savior! He's such a good God and we should be rejoicing in Him. That shows us that's the foundation of our faith.

The second point is His kind intention. The text clearly says God chose us, but if you're reading the ESV like I am for this study, it doesn't say in kind intention, but in the end of Ephesians 1:5 and verse 9, where it talks about His will, a better translation, the new American standard would say in kind intention. Ephesians 1:5 and 9 (NASB 1995) says [5] *He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the **kind intention** of His will.* [9] *He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His **kind intention** which He purposed in Him.* Even the King James version, I think gets this a little bit better than the ESV and NASB for in place of 'kind intention' is 'good pleasure.'

God chose us and it was His supreme delight to choose us. It's kind of like going to Chick-Fil-A, right? It's my pleasure. When you ask for something at Chick-Fil-A you almost always hear them respond with 'My pleasure' or 'It's my pleasure.' Sometimes you're like, is it really your pleasure? Right. But it's God's pleasure. Think about that for a second. If somebody genuinely said, "it's my pleasure to do this for you" it has to mean at least one of two things. It either means they like what they're doing or it means they just like you that much. I imagine you have a great friend and this friend knows your favorite hobby – snow skiing, moose hunting, Taylor Swift concerts. I don't know what your favorite hobby is but your friend says, "Hey, I want to take you to do that thing." You would probably say, 'It's my pleasure to accept' because you like the thing so much.

Now, if your friend also knows that you're like me and you hate most manual labor, you hate yard work, you hate moving somebody out of their apartment for the umpteenth time, but they say, "Hey, friend, would you come and do it?" I would probably say, 'yes' if they're my friend, but I wouldn't say it's my pleasure and if I did say 'it's my pleasure' I'd either be lying or

maybe I would say, ‘you know what, I do love you so much. I hate what you're asking me to do, but I like you so much, yes I'm happy to serve you.’

It's God's pleasure to save us and kind intention to bless us. Ephesians 1:3 says [3] *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.* That is His purpose, His end goal. Every spiritual blessing that exists, if you're in Christ, it's already yours. You have it. It's reserved for you in heaven. You may be thinking, ‘I'm a good Christian, so I believe that. But a lot of times down here on planet Earth, it doesn't feel like I've got every spiritual blessing. It feels a lot more like a rollercoaster ride for sometimes I have some nice times of worship, joy and peace. But a lot of the times it's dark, it's painful.’ There's a great old hymn titled Blessed Assurance that says ‘Oh, what a foretaste of glory Divine.’ That's what life on planet Earth is supposed to be like for Christians; it's a great appetizer.

I was one of those kids that heard these words from my mom almost all the time “Quit eating son, you're going to spoil your appetite’ because I would just be eating all the time. I was always kind of a husky fellow. I wish that I could spoil my appetite. Even early in marriage, my wife used to say that if I had enough discipline, I could spoil my appetite. My problem is I'll have a snack at 5 pm and if dinner is at 6 pm and it looks good, I'll just eat again. I can't spoil my appetite. I wish I could. You can't spoil your spiritual appetite either.

Just recently, we were on a family vacation and my wife and sister-in-law were making a Mexican feast which is some of my favorite food. My sister-in-law was making the guacamole. I love a good guacamole. My son came upstairs and said, “Dad, the guacamole is ready.” I took that to mean it's an appetizer and whether it was or not, I don't know. I went down and I treated it like an appetizer. I had lots of guacamole. It was very good. I started to feel full. I still ate the feast later but here's my point. For Christians living on planet Earth, we have the best retirement plan in the world and it's called heaven. It's going to be pure feasting, pure bliss. We won't live by faith anymore. We'll live by sight.

Down here on planet Earth, when it's pretty dark and it's mostly about faith and not much sight, get as much of the appetizer as you can – through prayer, through meditation, through worship, through fellowship with other Christians. Try to set the eyes of your heart on the blessings that you have in Christ and enjoy them as much as you can. You can't spoil your appetite. Really what it will make your appetite do, is grow for more in heaven and that's what we're supposed to be doing. It's thinking about the kind intention of His will to bless us. Here's John Calvin's definition of blessing; ‘It's to prosper us, to enrich us abundantly with all good things.’ Did you notice the phrase in Ephesians 1:7 where it talks about according to the riches of His grace? It's not just out of the riches of His grace, but it's according to the riches of His grace.

Let's just hypothetically imagine for the purpose of this study that there were two millionaires in the crowd and they're really passionate about Scotland. Maybe they love golf, maybe they love the Presbyterian history, whatever it is and they hear about the acres going so they say “I never want you to struggle for support, son” so the first man writes him a \$50,000 check. Perhaps that's the biggest check he has ever received in one lump sum and so he says back “hey, thank you.” I mean, that is out of their riches and if the next millionaire comes and says, ‘I'd like to give you \$2 million dollars’ that's more according to the riches for it shows the riches that this man has, especially if he can just stroke a \$2 million check for a guy he's never met. The way that God likes to bless us as His children is according to His riches, that when we're really paying attention, when we really set the eyes of our heart by faith on His goodness

and His glory for us, there's a sense of "it's too good to be true. This is too rich. He's so kind." He takes supreme delight in blessing us.

Did you also notice the phrase Ephesians 1:7 that says 'In Him we have redemption'? It's not just that He adopted us out of the orphanage of the world, but He bought us back out of the slave market of sin. He loves us, He pursues us, He initiates and why does He do all this? He does it for His own glory. Let's look again back at the text for a moment. Ephesians 1:10-13 says *[10] as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Him, things in heaven and things on earth. [11] In Him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, [12] so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of His glory. [13] In Him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in Him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.*

That bold phrase shows up three times in this text (Ephesians 1:1-14). When we get to heaven, it's all going to make sense. My guess is most of us have had the experience before of watching some favorite TV show, bingeing on Netflix, or maybe watching some long great movie or some series of movies or reading a great novel, or maybe even a series of books and then you get to the ending and you think "Man, they didn't really land the plane very well at the end." They asked too many deep questions. They didn't do justice to it, but every once in a while, you see a movie or read a book, get to the end and it's like it was perfect, it was harmonious. All the loose ends got tied up and it was beautiful. Those endings are satisfying, is it not? That's going to be heaven times a trillion and then some.

I think that many of us, myself included, we know God's sovereign, we know God's wise, but we're going to get to heaven and some of the tragedies in our life where we were barely hanging on, we'll get there and we're going to see what God did saying, "okay, Father, I guess it kind of all balanced out." That is not going to happen. We're going to get there and say, "I praise You now for the tragedy because I see the beautiful triumph that You pulled out of it and it's perfect. It's better than I could have imagined." I think there's going to be stunned shock and all silence. You ever had that at the end of a great movie? Especially one with a surprise ending? It's not like one of those dark surprise endings that leaves you in depression for a week, but one of the surprise endings where you leave and it's just joy. You can't go to bed at night because you're thinking about how they did that because you didn't see it coming. It was amazing. That's going to be in all eternity, where we're walking around there hearing each other's stories saying things like, 'God did that in your life? Let me tell you what God did in my life.' It's all for His glory – the praise of His glory.

Ephesians 1:6 gets even more specific when it says 'the praise of the glory of His grace.' You know what glory is really about? I love Exodus 33 for it has one of my favorite passages. Exodus 33:18 says *[18] Moses said, "Please show me Your glory."* I'm paraphrasing the rest of it where God basically says 'Come up on the mountain and bring something to write with.' We know Moses saw something – the backside of God's glory, but it's not described for us at all. The description that is given to us is what Moses heard – the Lord God, the compassion and gracious One, the name of God, the character of God, that He's just, and the justifier – which is the glory of God. He works grace in and for His people.

Ephesians 1:1-14 talks about the Father, the Son and in verse 13 it talks about being sealed in the Holy Spirit. If you were in Christ, what that means for you and I is this; the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are in a Divine conspiracy to bless your socks off. They're not going to fail. They're not going to miss. They're not going to make a mistake. You're not going to get to

heaven and say, “Pretty good, Lord, but one thing You could have done that would have been a little bit better...” That’s not going to happen. We’re going to get there and fall on our face and worship for all eternity, for joy over the ways that He has blessed us.

Now, we are supposed to live for the praise of the glory of His grace. I think we're probably all aware that just last month, our denomination, the PCA, lost two giants of the reformed faith (Timothy Keller, Harry Reeder) and our church had one of those giants as a pastor (Harry Reeder). My guess is that many reading this have either been to a funeral service or maybe watched one or a prayer service or a service of remembrance, or have received phone calls, text emails from friends saying “Hey, so sorry and here's a way that Pastor Reeder was used in my life. I'm thinking and praying for you.” Or there's Facebook posts galore, articles by famous people like Al Mohler and Kevin DeYoung, and then random Facebook posts about people you never heard of praising these men. It is good, right and Biblical to honor people who have lived faithfully for Christ.

I don't know about you, but part of what enters my mind when I'm reading or hearing all this is I wonder what people say about me when I die. To me, when Abby, Ike and Jennifer spoke about their father, Harry Reeder, at the memorial service, it was so powerful. I couldn't help but wonder what my kids would say about me one day. I think it's a good thing to think about your legacy – how will you finish well? What are other people going to see and think? It's also dangerous. Do you see the subtle danger? It can happen very quickly and subtly. I can see it happen in my own heart. Yes, I want all the praise to go to Jesus, but God, I'd like just a footnote, a short footnote. Right? I want it to be like Jesus in big lights, and then I want there to be an asterisk at the bottom, with maybe just a line or two about me. It's not when I just think about my funeral, it's when I think about this sermon study. I pray “God bless, show up, power, help people” but then I just see this little creeping thing in my heart where I want people to like me too. Or when I go help the friend move out of the apartment – “All glory to Jesus but I wish they'd say thank you a little bit more.” That pride starts to creep in.

In Ephesians 2 it talks about the Gentiles being brought into the Kingdom and part of the tension in the early church, including the church in Ephesus, was the Jews and Gentiles had a hard time getting along sometimes, and a large part of that was the Jews were kind of like, “Hey, we're here first. We're supposed to be special. We've been doing this thing for like thousands of years. You're Johnny come lately. I mean, we'll let you into heaven. We don't want you to go to hell, but there's got to be, like, some kind of second tier status, right? We're better than y'all.”

That's part of what Paul is saying in Ephesians 1:12 that says, *[12] so that we who were the first (talking about the Jews) to hope in Christ might be to the praise of His glory.* It's all supposed to be about Jesus. It's not supposed to be about Jews and Gentiles or me or you or anybody else. We're supposed to be lost and just praising Him, worshiping Him, and honoring Him. So, think about your legacy, but be careful and that's part of what was so great about Ike, Abby, Jennifer and everybody else who was on the stage at the memorial service, the way that they the way they honored Pastor Reeder. They all said a lot of great things about him, but they all said it's about Jesus and anything good and right in any Christian's life is ultimately because of Jesus. Jesus gets all the credit and glory and we need to remind ourselves of that.

In closing, this passage talks about God blessing us and then us praising God and the word bless and praise in the Greek are really pretty similar concepts. They both basically mean to speak well of. So, part of what this passage is instructing us is enjoy all the good things that God says about us, like, I love you, I forgive you, I save you. Enjoy that and then out of the overflow of that experience, turn around and live for the praise of His glory, that every word you

speaking, every thought that you think, every desire of your heart, every intention, would all be about praising the Lord Jesus Christ, praising the glory of His grace – a total life given to that. Why? It is because the Lord Jesus Christ gave His total life for us – all His sweat, all His blood, all His tears, His life, His death, His taking of the wrath of God, His resurrection, was for us so that He could speak well of us – It is finished, done, signed, sealed, delivered.

At the end of Ephesians 1:7 it speaks ‘according to the riches of His grace.’ It's a little strange when you're talking about God to talk about His riches in anything, because it's like, He is rich in everything. If He has it and it's good, He's rich in it. So why this phrase, the riches of His grace? There's probably multiple reasons, but I think part of this is, salvation for us is free, but for God the Father, it was supremely costly. His grace is so costly because it took the blood of His Son to be shed for all the sins of all those who were in Christ, all of our pride, all of our selfishness, all of our arrogance, but if I'm in Christ, I'm covered. I'm forgiven and slowly but surely, by His grace, I'm being changed and conformed to His image. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, we love You but we don't love You near enough. Thank You for how perfectly, how well, how wisely, how fully, how deeply, and how encompassing You have loved us with Your life, Your death, Your resurrection. Make us more grateful, make us more in awe of the Gospel. Don't let us get bored. Don't let us get numb to truths that we've heard for 40 plus years. Let there be a sweet freshness to Your goodness every time that we open the Word so that we may be compelled to live for the praise of Your glory. We pray all this in Christ's Name, Amen.