

Ephesians 1:3-11

Dear Friends in Christ,

We all have any number of Bible verses or larger portions of Scripture that quite often make their way to the forefront of life. For me, one such verse is this: "In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." (1 Jn. 4:10) *To be the propitiation*, that is, the gift to gain favor. It's a gift because, as God's Word teaches, "(we) were dead... in trespasses and sins...and were by nature children of wrath." (Eph. 2:1,3) And "we were enemies." (Rom 5:10) You see? We didn't love God. That which is dead can do nothing. And even now, our love is often weak or not there in certain circumstances.

We all remember the two criminals crucified with Jesus. We're told, "Those who were crucified with him also reviled him." Both criminals addressed Him in an abusive and angrily criticizing manner. But as time passed, one of those criminals watched - and listened - and was brought to faith. Toward the end, he requested, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." (Lk 23:42) And then Christ gave the greatest promise anyone could receive; the one He gives to all His people: "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." (Lk. 23:43)

There are many issues of this world that can diminish or sidetrack the importance of God's love in Christ. No matter what the times are, no matter what we face in and from this world, we pray the Holy Spirit strengthens us in . . .

THE LOVE THAT WILL ALWAYS BE

I. Before Time.

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, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. (vv. 3-6)

Among a number of powerful statements in this text that magnify the love of God for us are these two we meet at the beginning: (1) *chose us in him before the foundation of the world*. Chose you - me - before creation. (2) *In love he predestined us for adoption*. Adopted you - me - to be His children - before creation.

Think of it! We travel back in time to the opening words of Scripture: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." (Gen. 1:1) We were there before that moment, before time; not yet born, yet there in name, face, date of birth and date of earthly departure. *Chosen before the foundation of the world*. Predestined to be His children.

And moving a little forward in time, there standing before us are the words the Holy Spirit gave to David:

My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them. (Ps. 139:15-16)

II. Throughout All Time.

Our text states that we were chosen, (listen!) made "holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will." Please hear this from the 17th to early 18th century commentator, Matthew Henry:

Here is also the rule and the fontal (that is, the source) of God's election: it is according to the good pleasure of his will (v.5), not for the sake of anything in them (in us) foreseen, but because it was his sovereign will, and a thing highly pleasing to him. (Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary On The Whole Bible*, Vol. 6, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, Massachusetts, New Modern Edition, 1991, p. 554)

God chose us because He wanted to. God loved and loves us because He wanted to. You know, of course, we didn't deserve it. As stated at the beginning, "In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sin." (I Thess. 4:10) It's a verse deserving of our remembering. And so, Paul writes of Jesus:

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ.... (vv. 7-9)

Commentator, Armin J. Panning wrote: "*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 or taken away." (Panning, *Galatians, Ephesians, "The People's Bible"*, Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee, 2000, p.133) Well, we were slaves, captives to sin. And, as we know, the sin is still there. However, the Holy Spirit had David write: "For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us." (Ps. 103:11-12) Forever removed!

Paul writes that the mystery of God's will "is that the Gentiles (non-Jews; us) are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel." (Eph. 3:6) We are partakers of the promise: *The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord*. This goes with us throughout all time and into eternity.

Here's a story for you. Author unknown:

A pastor's son and his mom had been to a shopping mall and the boy had acted badly, wanting this and that, running off, etc. As they were driving home, he could sense her displeasure and said, "When we ask God to forgive us when we are bad, He does, doesn't He?" His mother replied, "Yes, He does." The boy continued, "And when he forgives, He buries our sins in the deepest sea, doesn't He? The mom replied, "Yes, that's what the Bible says." The boy was silent for awhile and then said, "I've asked God to forgive me, but I bet when we get home, you're going to go fishing for those sins, aren't you?"

God forgiving and burying our sins in the deepest sea is the mystery of God's will no human can appreciate unless God works faith in the person. It's this: "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (I Jn. 2:8-9) God doesn't go fishing for the sins of His children in Christ!

III. Into Eternal Life.

And so, our text closes with these words: "In him we have received an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to his will..." (v.11) It's an inheritance we will receive in eternity. It's what Jesus promised: "...whoever believes has eternal life." It's His love that will always be.

It's the apostle Peter who gives wonderful insight into this inheritance. I think most of you are quite familiar with and, hopefully, comforted by these words:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (A living hope. All earthly hope ends in death!), to an inheritance that is imperishable (it will never be destroyed), undefiled (without the corruption and evil caused by sin), and unfading (it will never lose the incomprehensible joy it gives), kept in heaven for you (not here; not the promise of a happy life here), who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

I pray that none of us spend our days in this world with thoughts such as, "I hope I get to do this before I die." - or, "I hope I get to see this before I die." - or, "I hope I get to have this and that and whatever before I die." All of this implying that heaven won't quite be what it should be if my worldly wants don't come true.

God did not promise fulfillment of our worldly wants. It's His love in Christ that helps us through the now and directs us to that moment when we will never again ask, "Well, what am I going to do if this or that happens? Then what?" Never again!

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott

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“The Love That Will Always Be”

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- II. Throughout All Time.
- III. Into Eternal Life.

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