

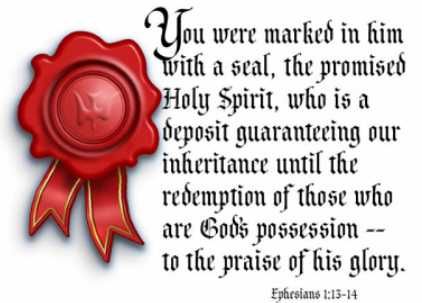
2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-19

Psalm 24

Ephesians 1:3-14

Mark 6:14-29

www.heartlight.com



## THE GUARANTEE OF OUR INHERITANCE

Eph 1:1-2. *Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God: To the saints who are also faithful in Christ Jesus: <sup>2</sup>Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup>*

- *To the saints* (v.1). Other translations say, “To the saints *at Ephesus*;” however, the most trusted Greek manuscripts do not, and there are other reasons for saying the letter was not just to Ephesians. (Close friends in Ephesus are not mentioned, etc.) In any case, it is safe to assume three things by way of background:
  - (1) The letter is from Paul, written while he was a prisoner in Rome. See 3:1, 4:1, and 6:20.
  - (2) The letter was carried by Tychicus from Rome and delivered to the church at Ephesus and probably other churches in Asia. See 6:21-22, and compare also Col 4:7-9.
  - (3) The letter is one of four letters written by Paul during his imprisonment in Rome. The other three are Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon.

- *An apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God* (v.1). Paul considered himself to be an *apostle* – sent out by and on behalf of Christ as the twelve apostles were sent as described in Mark 6:7-13.

Paul was an apostle in obedience to the will of God. At the time of Paul’s conversion Jesus said to him, “*I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting; but rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do,*” and from that time on Paul was “told what to do” as he went among the gentiles and preached the gospel. Even though he was in prison when he wrote the letter we are reading and suffered many hardships, Paul was contented with his life, because he was doing the will of God.

He was often alone, but never lonely. Loneliness is a common problem in the world today. In spite of wireless phones and the internet, many of us feel forlorn and unhappy all the time, even though we are in touch with people we know.

Happiness doesn’t come when we seek it for its own sake. But when we seek to do the will of God, loneliness and unhappiness fade away. In Philippians 4:4-13 Paul wrote, “*I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound; in any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and want. I can do all things in him who strengthens me.*” Paul was alone in prison when he wrote these letters, but he was never lonely, because he had Jesus. In his words we find ways to “*keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus*” (Phil 4:7).

- *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ* (v.2). Paul began all his letters this way. An old story tells of two nuns traveling on a train. They were strangers to each other at first and did not speak the same language, but one opened her Bible, smiled at the other, and ran her finger along the words, “*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*” From that moment the two were no longer strangers.

*Grace* has two aspects. First, it stands for the undeserved love and generosity flowing from the heart of God. Paul said salvation comes by grace alone, “*and this is not your own doing*” (Eph 2:8-9).

Second, grace speaks of the beauty and charm in the life of someone doing the will of God, as he or she exhibits the gifts of the Spirit: “*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, ...*” (Gal 5:22-23).

*Peace* did not depend on circumstances in Paul’s life. His was the inner peace that comes from doing God’s will. When you live by faith in God, you have *peace* with God. The Bible ties *faith, peace, and grace* together in one verse: “*Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through out Lord*

<sup>1</sup> Bible quotations are from the RSV.

*Jesus Christ. Through him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand ...*” (Rom 5:1-2).

Eph 1:3-14. *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, <sup>4</sup>even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. <sup>5</sup>He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, <sup>6</sup>to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. <sup>7</sup>In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace <sup>8</sup>which he lavished upon us. <sup>9</sup>For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ <sup>10</sup>as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.*

*<sup>11</sup>In him, according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will, <sup>12</sup>we who first hoped in Christ have been destined and appointed to live for the praise of his glory. <sup>13</sup>In him you also, who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, <sup>14</sup>which is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.*

Note how little these sound like the words of a condemned prisoner! Discuss the following points:

(1) Verse 3 speaks of *spiritual blessings in the heavenly places*. Discuss the blessings you find in v.4-10. Note the vital need you and I have for each individual blessing.

(2) Verse 4 says you are *chosen* – predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ. Why? Romans 8:29 gives the answer: *“For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren.”* God wants to have a large family.

(3) Verses 4 and 5 always bring up the “election-versus-choice” debate: Does your salvation depend on being “chosen before the foundation of the world,” or does it depend on the choices you make in this life? Verses 4 and 5 support the “election” idea, and certainly rule out any picture you may have of God waiting passively to see what choices you will make and then judging the result. On the other hand, the Bible also has verses like 2 Peter 3:9, which says the Lord *“is forbearing toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance,”* indicating that God *is* waiting patiently for sinners everywhere to repent.

In the end, it is healthiest for us to believe that *everyone* is “chosen,” that *no one* who repents and believes in Jesus Christ is excluded from the kingdom of God, and that Spirit of God is at work in *every heart*, including yours, to bring about good choices, salvation, and eternal life with him. So, as the Bible says, *“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure”* (Phil 2:12-13).

(4) The word *redemption* appears in v.7 (and again in v.14 in the KJV). In the world, *redemption* implies a buy-back by the original owner, as when a man redeems his watch from a pawn shop, or Albertson’s redeems a coupon for a box of Cheerios. What do v.7-8 and 13-14 tell us about *redemption*? How do you apply these concepts to yourself? What has God done in your case, to *redeem* you to himself?

(7) Discuss three stages of conversion in v.13: (a) *You have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation*, (b) *have believed in him*, and (c) *were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit*. Discuss each stage in terms of your own experience.

(8) The Bible says the Holy Spirit dwells within every believer and is able to change the believer’s life from life in the flesh to life in the spirit. In particular, v.14 says the Holy Spirit is *the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it*. Compare 2 Cor 1:22, *“He has put his seal upon us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.”* Here is great comfort if you doubt, or wonder if you are “good enough.”

The Holy Spirit has *sealed* you for eternal life. His is the seal the enemy has no power to break. His presence is the *guarantee of our inheritance*. When life looks bleak, as it does at times for all of us, talk with others who believe in Jesus, and look as well within your own heart. See, with eyes of faith, the clear evidence that Jesus Christ is alive, and that he is the Savior and Redeemer of your soul!