

The Foundations

by Ray C. Stedman

In the epistle to the Ephesians we are still working together today with the great statement in Chapter 1 in which Paul is setting forth for us the great, fundamental facts of our faith in Jesus Christ. This letter to the Ephesians is really nothing more than a description of the riches that we have in Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul emphasized these riches a great deal. As he traveled about the Roman empire he came to colonies and to cities where people were spiritually and materially impoverished – they were poverty-stricken people. Many of them were slaves. They had nothing of this world's goods. They were depressed, discouraged, beset with fears and anxieties, jealousies and hostilities. They were under the grip of superstition and filled with the dread of the future. They had no hope of life beyond death. And it was the apostle's great joy to unfold to them the riches available to them in Jesus Christ – riches which, if accepted as facts, would free them, would transform them and make them over into wholly different people, would bring them into a sense of joy and love and faith and radiant experience. That happened again and again. So the apostle gloried in these exceeding great riches in Jesus Christ.

The epistle to the Ephesians ought to be a treasure store to which we go repeatedly anytime we get discouraged.

I remember reading years ago about an old Navajo Indian who had become rich because oil had been found on his property. He took all the money and put it in a bank. His banker became familiar with the habits of this old gentleman. Every once in a while the Indian would show up at the bank and say to the banker, "Grass all gone, sheep all sick, water holes dry." The banker wouldn't say a word – he knew what needed to be done. He'd bring the old man inside and seat him in the vault. Then he'd bring out several bags of silver dollars and say, "These are yours." The old man would

spend about an hour in there looking at his money, stacking up the dollars and counting them. Then he'd come out and say, "Grass all green, sheep all well, water holes all full." He was simply reviewing his resources, that's all.

That is where encouragement is found – when you look at the resources which are yours, the riches, the facts which undergird your faith. As we go through this letter to the Ephesians I hope you will read it in that way.

Last week we looked at the summary statement with which Paul gathers up the great themes of this letter:

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, {Eph 1:3 RSV}

Then we took a quick survey of the list of these great spiritual blessings which follows. We are going to spend more time with that in coming Sundays. If you want to keep the structure of this chapter in mind, remember that we have this summary statement, then the more detailed description of the blessings, Verses 4 through 14, and then, beginning with Verse 15, Paul's great prayer that his hearers would understand what this is all about.

There is an unusual structure in this passage to which I'd like to call your attention. From Verse 3 through Verse 14 in the Greek text (not in the English) you have one complete, unbroken sentence filled with many adjectival phrases brought in to amplify and enrich it. If you want to get the effect of it, take a deep breath and try to read it through with one breath. You will see how much Paul has crammed into this great sentence. It's almost as though he is taking a walk through a treasure chamber, like those of the Pharaohs of Egypt, describing what he sees. He starts out with the most immediate and evident fact and tells us what that is.

Then something else comes into view and he puts that in. And glory flashes upon glory here until he has this tremendously complicated sentence which includes vast and almost indescribable riches.

That is Paul's way of showing us how truth is interconnected, how you can never touch upon some of these great themes but that they lead to others, and soon you find yourself caught up with still others. That is how truth is, isn't it? Truth in nature is like that also. You can't study one subject in nature without touching upon a great many others. This is the way God builds truth. There is a rather simplifying division of this passage, however, such as is always present whenever the apostle states something like this. That is, these blessings gather about the Persons of the Trinity. There is the work of the Father, the work of the Son, and the work of the Holy Spirit.

In Verses 3-6 you have the work of the Father:

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 before him. He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. {Eph 1:3-6 RSV}

Then, in Verses 7-12, you have that which relates to the Son:

In him [the Beloved] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace which he lavished upon us. 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 as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In him, according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will, we who first hoped in Christ have been destined and appointed to live for the praise of his glory. {Eph 1:7-12 RSV}

How rich that language is concerning the Son, our relationship to him, and our present experience!

Finally, in Verses 13 and 14, you have the work of the Holy Spirit:

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, which is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory. {Eph 1:13-14 RSV}

Remember that these are all available to us in the realm which Paul calls "the heavenlies." As we saw last week, that is not heaven; it does not mean going to heaven when you die. We get such distorted concepts of heaven! I confess to you that heaven, as most people envision it, is not an attractive place to me – damp, rainy clouds, unstrung harps out of tune, white robes, and all that. A good travel folder could make West Texas look preferable to heaven. And yet most people think that this is what Paul is talking about when he speaks of *the heavenlies*.

No, "in the heavenlies" is a reference to the invisible realities of our life now. It reaches on into eternity, yes, but it is something to be experienced now, in the inner life. That is what he is talking about – your thought-life, your attitudes, your inner life where you live, where you feel conflict and pressure, struggle and disaster – that is part of the heavenlies. It is where we are exposed to the attack of the principalities and powers which are mentioned in Chapter 6, those dark spirits in high places who get to us, and depress us, and frighten us, and make us anxious or hostile or angry. The heavenlies is the realm of conflict, but also the realm where God can release us and deliver us, where the Spirit of God reaches us at the seat of our intellect and our emotions and our will. It is the realm of those deep, surging urges which rise within us and create either a restlessness or a sense of peace, depending on the source from which they come. So don't read this as though it were something out in space somewhere. These blessings are yours in your inner experience, now, if you are in Jesus Christ.

Obviously, all of this, as we saw last week, comes to us in one great package "in Christ." If you are not a Christian you cannot possibly claim these benefits. They are not yours, they don't belong to you. You cannot buy them, you cannot discover them, you cannot sign up for a course

about them in a university. You can't send away ten dollars in the mail and get a pamphlet that will lead you to them. There is no way you can appropriate them unless you are in Christ. But if you are "in Christ" there is nothing to keep you from having all of them, every moment of every day. That is why it is so important that we discover what they are.

You see, these are much more than mere doctrinal ambiguities, mere theological ideas. They are facts, foundational truths which undergird us in every moment of our life. And, unless you understand those facts, you can't utilize them, you can't benefit from them. In that way they are like natural laws. The laws of nature operate regardless of how we feel – they are impersonal in that respect.

I've been doing a bit of electrical work in an addition to my home, and I've discovered that electricity follows a pattern of its own and takes no notice of how I feel at the moment. That can be a shocking experience! It is not in the slightest degree impressed with my position as a pastor of Peninsula Bible Church. It doesn't hesitate to retaliate for any violation of its laws that I commit. It is up to me to discover how it works, and then to respect it, if I want to utilize it.

The same thing is true of these great facts. They will do you not a particle of good if you don't discover what they are and believe them enough to operate on the basis of them. That is why we are having this study together.

We couldn't possibly cover in one message all that is wrapped up in these great truths, and I don't want to attempt it. We want to take our time going through this passage so that we might grasp these fundamental facts. So I would like to center this morning on the two great facts which are mentioned here concerning the work of the Father.

1. Take this first statement:

... he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. {Eph 1:4 RSV}

Here we are dealing with what theologians call the doctrine of election, i.e., the fact that God chose us to become Christians and to be in Christ before the very foundation of the world. If you begin to try to understand that truth,

your mind will boggle. That is a fantastic statement, isn't it? We struggle with it, we question it, and therefore I submit to you that we really don't believe it, because oftentimes it doesn't show up in our actions, which is where the proof of our belief comes. We say, "How could this be? How could God choose us, and yet still offer a choice that we must make?" And thus we sense the struggle between the doctrines of the free will of man and the sovereign election of God.

Many have wrestled with this great truth and have tried to explain it with various suggestions:

- Some say, "Well, God can foresee the future, so he looks down and sees that we are going to make a choice, and on the basis of seeing what we will determine to do he then says, 'All right, I'll elect them to be part of my process.'" That sounds very simplistic, and it is, because it is not what the Scriptures say.
- Some say, "Well, God sees what we will be when we become Christians. He sees the value that we will have toward him, and so he chooses us on that basis." Again, nothing could be more unscriptural than that idea!

You see, it *is* true that we are chosen of God. In John 6, Jesus said so himself. He said, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him," {John 6:44 RSV}. That's putting it plainly, isn't it? You can't come to Christ unless you are drawn by the Father. God has to initiate the activity. Ah, yes, but in Matthew 11 Jesus made his appeal directly to the will of the individual, saying, "Come unto me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," {cf, Matt 11:28 RSV}. And that means it's up to you. You can never become a Christian until you choose to come. So both of these facts are true.

And though we can't reconcile them in our puny intellects, nevertheless we can accept them as facts and realize that it is true that we must choose. The good news is offered to us, but if we don't respond we will never obtain

the benefit of it. But if we do respond, if we come to Christ, if we believe in him, then we discover a great fact: God began the process, it was he who chose us, and we have been drawn to him by his Spirit at work in our spirit. That is amazing, isn't it? But it is the first thing that Paul wants us to know.

And then we struggle with the timing of this: "before the foundation of the world." Before we existed, before we ever took form seminally, let alone actually, we were chosen in him. Before there was an earth, no matter how far back in time you put it – billions of years, squillions of years into the past – yet the statement stands that you and I, as the very persons we are among the billions of people we could have been, were chosen in him. How could that be? Do you see how that boggles the mind? We must realize that we are dealing with an Eternal Being, one with whom there is not past or future, but only an eternal present, only one great *now* who therefore reads our future as clearly as he does the past, who determines all things by the counsel of his will, as the next verse has it, and brings them to pass so that they all work together to accomplish what he wants done. And we can only sit in amazed wonder and say, "Lord, how great thou art!"

"Chosen in him before the foundation of the world!" Do you see what that does for our sense of identity as Christians? We are not afterthoughts in God's working. We are not accidental members of his body. There are no second class citizens in the church of Jesus Christ; we are all equal, chosen of the Father, selected to be members of his family, added to the new creation, the new order that God is producing in this world. What a fantastic privilege! It is not because of anything in us, as we'll see in a moment, but because of everything in him.

The purpose of all this is that we are to be holy and blameless. God says that he chose us for that reason, that we might be holy and blameless!

Now, I'd like to ask a question: How many of you here are holy? Raise your hands, would you? Yes, we do have a few. Well, what's the matter with the rest of you?

I submit to you that these great facts are so revolutionary, so radical, that we hesitate to believe them! We hesitate to apply them to ourselves despite the fact that they are true. The reason we hesitate is that we have such distorted ideas of what these words mean. We think that holiness is sanctimoniousness and that it results from a kind of theological de-worming process we must go through, and we don't want to claim that for ourselves. But it is not that at all. As we have seen in our studies in Leviticus, *holiness* means "wholeness," and *wholeness* means "to be restored to the originally intended functioning," to be put to the proper use, that's all. Physical wholeness prevails when the body works the way it was supposed to. And when your whole being functions the way it was intended to do, you are holy.

Now how many of you have had your whole being restored to proper functioning? You may not always function properly, but you have the capacity to do so. Ah, that's better! There are even more holy people here than I thought! It is when we begin to understand these words that we can apply them and accept them.

Now let's look at the other one, *blameless*. Most people refuse to think of themselves as blameless because they know that they have done many things for which they ought properly to be blamed. That is, they have made choices, deliberately, against light, against knowledge of the results. They have purposely done that which they knew they ought not to have done. They could have done otherwise but didn't. And who is not in that boat? Therefore they feel they are to be blamed. But they are confusing this word with another, because it is not sinless. Never having done anything wrong is sinlessness. But you can be sinful and still be blameless. Do you know how? By handling your sin in the right way.

If you did something that injured someone else, and the full result of it was not visible to you when you did it but afterward you saw how much you had hurt the person, and you acknowledged it, apologized to them, did what you could to restore it, then there would be nothing further you could do, would there? And from that point on you would be blame-

less. You would not be *sinless* – you still did it – but you also did all you could to handle it rightly.

The idea is the same with our offenses against God. What can you do about your sins, your evil? You can't go back and straighten it all out, no, but you can accept his forgiveness. You can acknowledge your need. You can put it back into his capable hands to straighten out the results. And when you've done that, you're blameless!

How many blameless people are here today? Yes, that's better. And that is what God has chosen us to do – to learn this wonderful process of being whole and blameless.

Notice that these things are to be reckoned true even though we don't feel that way. That is the way it is in nature also.

You get up in the morning and look at the sun and say, "The sun rose this morning." It looks as though the sun were traveling around the earth. But you know better than that, don't you? You look out across the landscape and it looks flat, and you say, "The earth must be flat." No, you know better. Even though you can't see that the earth is round and revolves around the sun, you have learned to accept these facts despite your feelings.

That is exactly what we are called on to do here. Accept the fact that God chose you in Christ to make you holy and blameless. And as you walk before him in his prescribed way, that is what you are. And then rejoice in that great fact.

2. Now look at the second great aspect which is recorded of the work of the Father, and which is related to the first,

He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. {Eph 1:5-6 RSV}

Here is a partial explanation of how God takes care of all the past failures and the shame of our lives, in order to produce someone who is holy and blameless. It is by means of a change of family relationship. "He destined us to be sons," or, literally, he "foreordained us to

sonship standing," or, as the Authorized Version puts it, to "adoption" as sons.

We are familiar with the process of adoption. Adoption means leaving one family and joining another, leaving behind all that was involved in the first family and assuming the name, the characteristics, the resources, the history of another family. And this is the way Paul describes this relationship.

We all belong initially to the family of Adam. We leave it, in Christ, and, thereafter, we belong to a new family, the family of Jesus Christ. We are no longer part of the family of Adam. Now that doesn't mean that we are not human; it means that we no longer need to be possessed by fallen Adamic characteristics. We are still exposed to temptations to believe in them and to act that way, but we don't have to – that's the point. We've been transferred into a new family.

And, more than that, the emphasis is upon living as a full-grown, mature, responsible son. We are not put into this family as mere babes; we are put in as mature, grown-up children. As soon as we grasp the truth we can exercise it. In other words, to put it very simply, we are to live exactly as Jesus lived. He was a Son, the Son of the Father, and, as such, a certain way of life was his. And now we have it too, in him, living exactly as he did.

This is how Jesus described his own life: In John 6, he said, "I live by means of the Father," {cf, John 6:57}. That is, "The Father is my resource, my wisdom, my strength, my power. The Father is the secret of how I act, and what I do, and where I go. The Father is living in me, and working in me. And in everything I do, it is not I; it is the Father." He went on to say, "And as I live by means of the Father; so he who eats me [that is a beautiful figure for partaking of Christ, trusting in Christ] will live by means of me," {John 6:57 RSV}. That is the secret of the Christian life. What a beautiful way to live! By the same method that Jesus lived, in the same way that he arrested the attention of humanity – this is the way that we are called upon to live. We have been made sons in him, like him, so as to share his life. It is this, you see, that pleases the Father. Isn't that amazing?

The rest of the statement deals with the *why* and *how* of this:

- Why should this be so?

Most of us struggle with believing it because we say, “Why me? Why should he see anything in me which would motivate him to do that?” And, of course, that is our problem.

It isn’t that he sees anything in us. We make a serious error when we think that there is something in us which God is after. No, it is not anything in us. The ground of his choice is the kind of God he is. There are three elements of it here:

- “He destined us in love to be his sons ...”
- “According to the purpose of his will, ...”
- “To the praise of his glorious grace ...”

It is entirely God, isn’t it? His love began it, so he purposed it, literally, according to “the good pleasure” of his will, i.e., it gives him pleasure to do so, and all to the final end that it results in joy, in praising him, throughout all creation – “to the praise of the glory of his grace.”

I think I saw a taste of that at Explo ‘72 in Dallas a few weeks ago. The thing above all else that impressed everyone who came to Explo was the fact that all over the city there was an outburst of joy. It was infectious. There was a spirit of cheerful happiness no matter what happened. The young people, particularly, went all over the city and met everything and everyone with a smile or a “Praise the Lord!” Even the gruff old police of Dallas were impressed by this. One policeman said, “I’ve been treated like a human being for the first time in my career,” and he couldn’t get over the fact that it was young people who were treating him this way. Another, a guard at the Cotton Bowl, said, “I’ve been shoved 22,000 times this week, and everyone said ‘Excuse me’ when they did it.” Why? Because the joy was born of God. It was not coming from the circumstances – they were unpleasant, at times. Kids were living in tents, and sleeping on the ground, and often didn’t have enough to eat. I met some who hadn’t eaten for

two or three meals, but their joy was undiminished. I watched the rain pour down upon thousands of them in the Cotton Bowl, and not one of them complained; they just enjoyed it thoroughly. That is what God is after – to increase joy.

A few days ago one of the women of this church came to me. It was an ordeal for her to come because she is in pain constantly. She told me of some of the struggle this has meant in her own life, of how she has cried out, “Why?” and has been assaulted with temptations to bitterness and resentment because she can’t do what she’d like to do. She told how this all reached a crisis about a year ago when she finally said, “Lord, I can’t take this! It’s too much for me! But, Lord, you seem to expect me to take it. No matter how much I pray, nothing seems to happen. But I just can’t do it. So I give it back to you, Lord. If I’m even going to be able to exist, you’ve got to do it. You’ve got to uphold me, and somehow you’ve got to make me able to obey you and to reflect what you want me to be.” And she said that there was born in her heart a sense of joy she couldn’t explain. But for over a year now (and that is an adequate test, isn’t it?) that joy has remained. And the radiance on her face as she told me about this was sufficient evidence that she was not trying to pull my leg. Joy, unbroken joy – the praise of God’s glorious grace – in the midst of pain and suffering, disappointment and frustration.

That is what God is after. That is what he is training us for. He has destined us to be that kind of sons, because that is the kind his Son Jesus Christ is, according to the purpose of his will.

- Finally, there is just one word on *how*, and this introduces the next section which we will take up in our next time together. How did this come to us?

It was “freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.” God “engraced” us, is the word. He came to us in Christ, he poured it all out in Christ. Jesus was sent of the Father. That is the mark of his love. He came to be poor, he came to be misunderstood, to be opposed and hated, to be spat upon, to be cruelly beaten and finally crucified, so that we might be rich.

Remember how Paul puts it in Second Corinthians 8:

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. {2 Cor 8:9 RSV}

Now, my question is: Are you enjoying your inheritance?

Do you wake in the morning and remind yourself at the beginning of the day,

- “I’m a child of the Father.
- “I’ve been chosen by him to be a member of his family.
- “He imparts to me all the richness of his life.
- “His peace, his joy, his love are my legacy, my inheritance from which I can draw every moment of life. And have them no matter what my circumstances may be.”

Do you reckon on these unseen things which are real and true? – because, if you do, when you trust in God’s grace to be your present experience, you can know of yourself what the Father said three times about his Son Jesus. God the Father, looking down at you can say, “This fellow here, this girl there, this man, this woman – this is my beloved child in whom I am well pleased.” *That* is our inheritance.

Prayer:

Our heavenly Father, we thank you for these vast truths. We pray that our understanding may be made equal to them. We can’t grasp them properly apart from the work of your Spirit, and we pray that you will open our eyes and help us to see that these things are true indeed, that they undergird our lives. And as we venture out upon them, as we dare to apply them to ourselves, you will take them and make them lead us into the liberty of the children of God, so that we will be free men and women, free despite the circumstances under which we live, and despite the people with whom we have to work. We are a free people. We thank you in Jesus’ name, Amen.

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