

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc. www.dtmwebsite.org

Counting On The Blessings Of God

by Dan Trygg

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ, ⁴ just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him in love, ⁵ predestining us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, ⁶ unto praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely-bestowed on us in the Beloved. ⁷ In Him we have the redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of the trespasses (stumbling-asides), according to the riches of His grace ⁸ which He lavished on us. In all wisdom and insight ⁹ making-known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him ¹⁰ unto an administration of the fullness of the times, ...all things to be summed up in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things on the earth. In Him ¹¹ also we became a heritage (allotted people), being predestined according to the purpose of the One inworking all things according to the counsel of His will, ¹² unto us to be unto the praise of His glory, we the ones having-previously-hoped in Christ. ¹³ In Him, y’all also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation-- having also believed, y’all were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴ who is a pledge/down-payment of the inheritance, with a view to the redemption of the possession, to the praise of His glory.”

Ephesians 1:3-14

As we work through the letter to the Ephesian believers, **it is important to read through the book to try to get the “big picture”**. One of the things that becomes evident is that there was no major problem that Paul was attempting to address. So often, his letters were written to correct an error, or to confront something that was unhealthy. The letter to the Ephesians appeared to have no such pressing issues. Paul had been there for three years, and had laid a good foundation. It seems a little strange that his writing was not a bit more familiar, since he would have known many people well. It may well be that this letter was meant to be circulated through “all the province of Asia”, to reach the many who had “heard the word of the Lord” as a result of his ministry (Acts 19:10). If so, this letter was written to many whom Paul did *not* personally know, but who had been impacted by his ministry.

We mentioned last time that **verse 3 is the theme verse of the letter**. **“Blessed be God ...who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ...”** ***There is a very critical word that follows this.*** This is not clearly translated in every English version, but it is vital in order to understand this whole first half of chapter one. You see, verses 3-14 are all one sentence in the original Greek. NT Greek has the ability to tie all of these phrases together in a way that we can’t in English. **The “critical word” is “according as” or “just as”**. **This word sets up a series of comparisons** that are meant to illustrate or buttress Paul’s statement in verse 3. **Basically, Paul is saying, “God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ, ...just as He did this, and He did that, and He did this, and He did that, ...and it was all according to His good will and the wealth of His grace.”** **The things that He lists were decisions God made about us who are “in Christ” long before we were born, or before we had done anything, good or bad.** These were decisions God made “before the foundation of the world”, and had nothing to do with our choices.

People have understood this passage in different ways. What is clear is that **there are three times where the idea of a choice or a decision was made by God regarding us who are in Christ**. It is also clear that **these decisions were made before the foundation of the world** (vs. 4). The question is, “What did these choices entail?” And, “How does that interpretation support what Paul is trying to accomplish in His argument?”

Some have understood this to refer to God choosing *us* to *come to Christ*. I don’t see that in this passage. I think Paul is describing something else. **Paul is saying that before the foundation of the world, God determined what the purpose, outcome and end result of Christ’s redemptive work would be for those who would respond to His grace.**

It is significant that **Paul used the word “predestine” twice in this passage**. The Greek word is *proorizō*. It is a compound word, from *pro* (meaning “before”) and *horizō* (meaning “to determine, designate, or mark out”). ***Horizō* was used in the Greek translation of the OT for the process of determining and designating parcels of land to be allotted for the various tribes of Israel** (Jos. 13:27; 15:12; 18:20; 23:4; Ezk. 47:20). The walking through, writing a description, and determining boundaries was the *horizō*. **The word meant to “draw a line around” or “designate, declare, appoint or fix”**. When the allotment was assigned, the tribe received the designated area, *and all that went with it*. In Acts 11:29, people “designated” or “marked-out” a gift of money *to be used as a contribution* for the poor in Judea. In Acts 17:31, Jesus has been “designated” by God *to be the judge* of all people, providing proof through His resurrection from the dead. He was also “designated” *to be the Son of God* in power, according to the Holy Spirit, by His resurrection (Rom. 1:4). **Our English word, “horizon”, is derived from this Greek term**. It was thought to designate the edge, limit or boundary of the earth. **When you add the prefix, *pro*, to this word, it just means to “determine, designate, or mark out something ahead of time.”**

An illustration I have used is of a land developer who purchases a farm. He sits down to *determine ahead of time* how he is going to divide up the land. He *determines ahead of time* how large the lots will be, where the streets will go, where the utilities will be laid. He may even *determine ahead of time* which model home he will build in each lot. Then, when a buyer would come to purchase a house, he or she makes a free choice to buy a home, with all its *predestined* amenities. The owner can then choose to personalize their basic home to suit their preferences and needs.

Or, we may order a new car. We can *determine ahead of time* certain features that we may desire, but *other* aspects of our car have already been *determined ahead of time* by the engineers, designers and car manufacturers. Or, we may be a farmer, who *decides ahead of time* to plant corn in one field, and soybeans in another. Or, we may join a club that has a *previously designated purpose*. Or we take a class that has a *previously determined syllabus*. We don't change the content or purpose of the club or class. They change us.

One final illustration that would have been very evident to Paul and his audience. If you were a slave, you were assigned a role or job in the master's service. You were given clothing, equipment, training and responsibilities that corresponded to your role. If you were a field worker, your gear and life experience would be very different from that of a house servant. Who would decide? The master. Think of the story of Joseph, in Genesis 41. He went from a slave in prison to the second greatest person in the land of Egypt in one day! Who decided this? Pharaoh. This new position came with all the accoutrements of great wealth and power. He did not go back to his prison cell. He did not put on his old clothes. Because of the decision of this one man (and God behind the man), everything about his life changed. He was given a new home, a wife from a highly respected family, great wealth, power and prestige.

So, we come to Ephesians 1:3, "Blessed be God, ...who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly-places in Christ, ...JUST AS..., just as WHAT? Just as He chose us IN HIM before the foundation of the world, ... us to be holy and blameless before Him. What this is saying is that, before God ever created the world, He looked ahead to those who would be in Christ and chose that they would be holy and blameless before Him. Of course, the crux of the debate about this passage is "Did God chose us *to be* in HIM (Christ)", or "Did He choose the ones in Christ *to be* holy and blameless"? Look again at the wording. He chose us IN HIM, ...us *to be* holy and blameless. The fact that Paul used "us" *again* ('us to be') makes it impossible to take the "to be" and try to bring it back to the first "us". You can't say that it says, "He chose us *to be* in HIM". It is indefensible! It says, "He chose us IN HIM, ...US *to be* holy and blameless."

What about the other "predestining" phrases? "...predestining us unto adoption-as-sons" (vs. 5). On the surface, this may seem to indicate that He made us His children, but that is *not* what it is saying. Who are the "US"? The ones IN HIM, i.e., in Christ. They are *already* the ones "in Christ", about whom God is making this determination. Remember the duty assignments of the master to the slave, or the pharaoh to Joseph? God determined, before the foundation of the world, that the ones IN CHRIST would *not* be relegated to being slaves or servants. He determined this *beforehand*, ...before there were any persons created or born..., that the ones IN HIM would be adopted by Him to be full-fledged heirs! Again, our distance from first century culture makes this difficult to understand. In the world of Jesus' day, a Roman father may have numerous children, but he would *choose* to adopt certain ones to become heirs to his estate. These adopted children would be given full legal authority as heirs, while the other natural children did not have those rights. The father could also adopt someone who was not a physical descendant to be an heir. So, you could be a child by genetic birth, but not be an heir. And someone who was not even part of the family could become an heir, and an overlord of the family possessions and relations. So, in eternity, before God created the world, He determined that the ones born again IN CHRIST would be made full heirs, by being adopted as children of God.

"...in Whom also we received an inheritance *being predestined...* ¹² unto us to be unto the praise of His glory..." (vss. 11,12). The alternative translation is "in Whom we became a heritage". This refers to us becoming a people for God, ...a theme that is found throughout the Old and New Testaments. God is looking for a people for His own possession, ...a people through whom He could manifest or express His glory (Deut. 4:20; 7:6; 14:2; Tit. 2:14). Peter expressed it so well in his first epistle, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; ¹⁰ for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy" (1 Pet. 2:9-19). So, whether Paul intended to say that we received an inheritance or that we are the inheritance, God has determined to make us to be to the praise of His glory. Before time began, before there were any people, God decided that those in HIM, in Jesus, would be to the praise of His glory. In my citation of the passage, I left out the last part of verse 11, just so we could more clearly see the relationship between the act of pre-determination and the end result that was intended to come from that decision. It is like the cream filling in the Oreo cookie, however, a vital part of the whole. God, the One making this decision, is also the One who is "inworking all things according to the counsel of His will". He will get it done. In the end, ...and on into eternity forever and ever..., we *will be* to the praise of His glory. He has decided it, He is working it out, and He gets the glory.