

3. God's Eternal Purpose in the Church—Ephesians 1:11-23

The last lesson, *God's Eternal Purpose in Christ*, showed how God chose us in Christ to fulfill his eternal purpose (Eph 1:1-10). Now, this lesson from Eph 1:11-23 shows how the church also fulfills God's eternal purpose—calling the church the fullness of him that fills all in all (Eph 1:23). God fulfilled his eternal purpose in both Christ and the church.

Predestined according to God's Plan

Eph 1:11-12

11 In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, 12 in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.

Ephesians 1:4-5 began this discourse by showing how God chose us in Christ before the creation of the world. Paul described this as predestined to be adopted as sons through Jesus Christ. The passage reads:

4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love 5 he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will – (Eph 1:4-5).

Lesson one illustrated how we are chosen through the gospel—a plan which refutes modern ideas of predestination and retains a free moral agency for all human kind as they choose to obey the gospel. Now in Eph 1:11-12, Paul returns to explain exactly how God chose us. The predestination of God's word is according to God's plan and conforms to the purpose of his will. The purpose of his will is a mystery, purposed in Christ, according to Eph 1:9-10: "9 And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ," In is only by God's plan of salvation and in Christ that we can ever be saved. Acts 4:12 teaches: "12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

Included in Christ When They Heard the Word of Truth

Eph 1:13-14

13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession – to the praise of his glory.

God's plan includes individuals in Christ when they hear the word of truth—described as the *gospel of your salvation*—and believe it with obedient faith. At the point of obeying, Christians received the gift of the Holy Spirit as a guarantee of their inheritance. The Lord described the word of truth as the word of God in John 17:17-19:

17 Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. 18 As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. 19 For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

This word of truth instructs that those who are children are baptized into Christ in Gal 3:26-27:

26 You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, 27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

Our text also describes the word of truth as the gospel of our salvation. Of that gospel, Paul said that it is the power of God unto salvation in Rom 1:16-17:

16 I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

The gospel, the word of truth, belief, obedience, repentance, baptism, the gift of the Holy Spirit—all these are elements of the plan of salvation coming together in our text and in Acts 2:38 where the hearers cut to the heart ask what they should do: “38 Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” This plan of salvation is the one spoken of above in verse 11: “. . . according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.”

His Glorious Inheritance in the Saints

Eph 1:15-19a

15 For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, 16 I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. 17 I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. 18 I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and his incomparably great power for us who believe.

In this passage Paul expresses his prayer for the saints at Ephesus—a custom that Paul followed in most of his letters. Paul prays that the Father give them the Spirit of wisdom and revelation. Through these, Christians may know God better. These gifts, wisdom and revelation, are available to Christians today, helping them to know God better.

James tells Christians to pray for wisdom in James 1:5: “5 If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.” James, further, describes this wisdom in James 3:17: “17 But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.”

As regards to revelation, Paul tells Christians how to receive it in Eph 3:2-5:

. . . 3 that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. 4 **In reading this, then, you will be able to understand** my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. [Emphasis added.]

What Christians pray for is the insight to understand what God revealed in the scriptures. On man's part, it takes reading the scriptures to comprehend the Christ in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden, according to Col 2:2-3

2 My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

God's Power Exalted in Christ

Eph 1:19b-21

That power is like the working of his mighty strength, 20 which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 21 far above all rule and

authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.

The greatest spiritual blessing is the power that God extended when he raised Christ from the dead. The fact that Christ is now above all things destroys the foundation of the millennial arguments, which teach that there will be a future earthly reign. According to this passage, Christ already reigns above all things, having been raised to this exalted position. He is now above all things in this age and the one to come. He is complete with nothing lacking.

Christ the Head over Everything for the Church

Eph 1:22-23

22 And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

Just as Christ is complete with nothing lacking, so is his church. A church that is the fullness of Christ does not need the enhancements and modifications of denominationalism and sectarianism with their additions to God's purpose and revelation. Indeed, the one body is as binding as the one Lord is binding. This plan of salvation conceived by God before the foundation of the world is unalterable. Eph 4:3-6, which summarizes the single nature of God's plan of salvation, commands religious unity in the 21st century world:

3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit— just as you were called to one hope when you were called— 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Study Questions from the Scriptures

1. Eph 1:1-10: In whom is God's eternal purpose fulfilled?
2. Eph 1:11-23: In what is God's eternal purpose fulfilled?
3. Eph 1:11-12: By what plan were we chosen? According to whose will were we chosen?
4. Ephesians 1:4-5: In whom did God choose us? When did he choose us? What did we become?
5. Acts 4:12: Where is salvation found? In whose name are we saved?
6. Eph 1:13-14: When were we included in Christ? What is the word of truth? What is our guarantee of salvation?
7. John 17:17-19: Whose word is truth?
8. Gal 3:26-27: How do we get into Christ?
9. Rom 1:16-17: What is the power of God for salvation?
- 10 Acts 2:38: What is God's plan of salvation?
11. Eph 1:15-19a: For what two things did Paul pray for on behalf of the Ephesians?
12. James 1:5: What are we to do for wisdom?
13. James 3:17: What is wisdom from heaven?
14. Eph 3:2-5: How do we gain insight into the mystery of Christ?
15. Col 2:2-3: Where are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden?
16. Eph 1:19b-21: To where was Christ raised? What is he over?
17. Eph 1:22-23: What is under Christ's feet? What is the fullness of Christ?
18. Eph 4:3-6: What are seven things upon which the unity of the faith depends?