

FOREORDAINED FROM THE FOUNDING OF THE WORLD

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for he has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in union with Christ, just as he chose us in union with him **before the founding of the world**, that we should be holy and without blemish before him in love. For he foreordained us to the adoption through Jesus Christ **as sons to himself**, according to the good pleasure of his will.” – *Ephesians 1:3-5*

These words the apostle Paul wrote to the first century Christians in the congregation at Ephesus while he was being held in prison for preaching the good news. This congregation was made up of mostly Gentiles who were leaving behind their worship of idols and taking up the worship of the Father of All. Up until this time, God had dealt primarily with the nation of Israel. Paul wanted these Gentiles to know that the Father truly loves and accepts these non-Israelites into his family, and that he has **always** purposed to do so. Yes, from the very beginning, “from the founding of the world,” the Father intended for earthly man to be adopted into his spiritual family in the heavens as “sons to himself.”

Note that it was not an emergency contingency plan that was introduced to remedy the default of Adam and Eve. It was the Father’s purpose “from the founding of the world;” “before the creation of the world” (*TNIV Bible*); “before the world was made” (*GNT Bible*); “before the creation of the universe” (*CJB Bible*); “before he made the world” (*NLT Bible*).

About the same time as this letter was penned to the Ephesians, Paul had also penned a letter to the congregation in Colossae. In the letter to the Colossians, Paul expounded on the “**sacred secret**” that was hidden from the past systems of things and from the past generations.” (*Colossians 1:26*) Likewise to the Ephesians, Paul revealed the sacred secret. In order to get the full impact of Paul’s letter, imagine that you are in the Ephesus congregation as the letter is read. Imagine you are one of the Christians eagerly awaiting word from this faithful apostle. As each sentence is read, know that the message is for you, to upbuild and encourage you.

The Sacred Secret of His Will

After introducing the hope of our adoption as sons of the Father, Paul wrote:

“This he caused to abound toward us in all wisdom and good sense, in that he made known to us **the sacred secret of his will**. It is according to his good pleasure which he purposed in himself for an administration at the full limit of the appointed times, namely, **to gather all things together again in the Christ, the things in the heavens and the things on the earth.**” – *Ephesians 1:8-10*

With the advent of Christ, the appointed time had arrived. The Father revealed the sacred secret of our sonship and began gathering together ‘the things in the heavens and the things on the earth’ in the Christ. Now, when the Ephesian brothers heard these words, what did they think Paul meant by ‘the gathering together of all things?’ If you were in the Ephesus congregation, what would you have thought he meant?

One interpretation is that Paul was referring to gathering together the anointed Christians who would live forever in heaven, and then gathering together the other Christians who would live forever on earth. We doubt that was the correct understanding because at that time, there was no indication of any kind that the Father intended for followers of Christ to live on earth forever. The only hope known to the early Christians was to be adopted as sons of God in the heavens. (***Romans 8:14-17, 23; Colossians 1:5; Galatians 3:26-29; Galatians 4:5-7***) It is more likely that Paul meant exactly what he wrote: that all things in heaven and all things on earth would eventually be gathered in Christ, where he was, in heaven. He goes on:

“[Yes,] in him, in union with whom we were **also assigned as heirs**, in that we were foreordained according to the purpose of him who operates all things according to the way his will counsels, that we should serve for the praise of his glory, we who have been first to hope in the Christ. But you also hoped in him after you heard the word of truth, the good news about your salvation. By means of him also, after you believed, **you were sealed with the promised holy spirit, which is a token in advance of our inheritance**, for the purpose of releasing by a ransom [God’s] own possession, to his glorious praise.” – ***Ephesians 1:10-14***

Paul refers to the small remnant of Christian Jews as those “who have been first to hope in Christ.” But he makes clear that the Gentiles who “also hoped in him” would likewise be sealed with holy spirit as a guarantee of their heavenly inheritance. It is likely these Gentile Christians that Jesus indicated he would ‘also bring who would will listen to his voice, and become one flock’ with the Jewish Christians. (***John 10:16***) He continues:

“That is why I also, since I have heard of the faith you have in the Lord Jesus and toward all the holy ones, do not cease giving thanks for you. I continue mentioning you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may **give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the accurate knowledge of him**; the eyes of your heart having been enlightened, **that you may know what is the hope to which he called you**, what the glorious riches are which he holds as an inheritance for the holy ones, and what the surpassing greatness of his power is toward us believers.” – ***Ephesians 1:15-19***

Paul wanted these Gentiles to accurately know and have faith in their glorious inheritance, and truly understand the nature of the hope to which they were called. He tells us that there is a surpassing power that upholds this hope, a power we can have confidence in, a power that had already been demonstrated in an unprecedented way by the resurrection of Jesus:

“It is according to the operation of the mightiness of his strength, with **which he has operated in the case of the Christ when he raised him up from the dead** and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above every government and authority and power and lordship and every name named, not only in this system of things, but also in that to come. He also subjected all things under his feet, and made him head over all things **to the congregation, which is his body**, the fullness of him who fills up all things in all.” – *Ephesians 1:19-23*

Jesus is now in power, and has been in power since his resurrection when the Father ‘seated him at his right hand and gave him the authority over everything,’ including us. We, the Christian congregation, referred to as ‘his body,’ are under his lordship – directly, with no intercessor. But Paul makes mention of another authority:

“Furthermore, [it is] you [God made alive] though you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you at one time walked **according to the system of things of this world**, according to the ruler of the authority of the air, **the spirit that now operates in the sons of disobedience**. Yes, among them we all at one time conducted ourselves **in harmony with the desires of our flesh**, doing the things willed by the flesh and the thoughts, and we were **naturally children of wrath** even as the rest.” – *Ephesians 2:1-3*

This is the authority from whence we came prior to accepting the glorious good news of the Christ. It is an authority that operates in everyone who is not a child of God. Paul refers to all the others (the rest of them), not as children of God, but as “children of wrath;” not as sons of God, but as “sons of disobedience.” There is no middle ground.

These other sons are identified by their conduct and their desires. They do not seek the heavenly riches. They pursue what they know, earthly things, desires of the flesh. But they do not have to remain in that state, anymore than we did:

“But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love with which he loved us, made us alive together with the Christ, **even when we were dead in trespasses—by undeserved kindness you have been saved—** and he raised us up together and **seated us together in the heavenly places** in union with Christ Jesus, that in the

coming systems of things there might be demonstrated the surpassing riches of his undeserved kindness in his graciousness toward us in union with Christ Jesus.” – *Ephesians 2:4-7*

It is by the undeserved kindness of God that we are transferred from the kingdom of man to the Kingdom of the Heavens. In other words, there are no specific acts we must perform, no hoops to jump through, no special works, no high education. All that is required is that we accept God’s kindness – his offer of sonship – by having faith in the possibility:

“By this undeserved kindness, indeed, you have been saved **through faith**; and this not owing to you, it is God’s gift. No, **it is not owing to works**, in order that no man should have ground for boasting. For we are a product of his work and were created in union with Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared in advance for us to walk in them.” – *Ephesians 2:8-10*

Joining Together the Two Flocks

The administration God purposed would ‘gather together all things’ in the Christ. There would be no division among God’s people such as had existed when Christ first arrived:

“Therefore keep bearing in mind that **formerly** you were people of the nations as to flesh; “uncircumcision” you were called by that which is called “circumcision” made in the flesh with hands— that **you were at that particular time without Christ, alienated from the state of Israel and strangers to the covenants of the promise**, and you had no hope and were without God in the world.” – *Ephesians 2:11-12*

But that division was done away with and now both Jew and Gentile can join together as one people, one flock, one body:

“But now in union with Christ Jesus you who were once far off have come to be near by the blood of the Christ. For he is our peace, **he who made the two parties one and destroyed the wall in between that fenced them off**. By means of his flesh he abolished the enmity, the Law of commandments consisting in decrees, **that he might create the two peoples in union with himself into one new man** and make peace; and that he might fully reconcile both peoples **in one body** to God through the torture stake, because he had killed off the enmity by means of himself.” – *Ephesians 2:13-16*

The message Christ brought of the fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man is a message of peace to both the Jew and the Gentile:

“And he came and **declared the good news of peace to you, the ones far off, and peace to those near**, because through him we, both peoples, have the approach to the Father by one spirit.” – *Ephesians 2:17-18*

Both flocks were joined together as one body, one holy temple for the Father wherein His spirit would dwell:

“Certainly, therefore, you are no longer strangers and alien residents, but **you are fellow citizens of the holy ones and are members of the household of God**, and you have been built up upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, while Christ Jesus himself is the foundation cornerstone. In union with him the whole building, being harmoniously joined together, is growing into a holy temple for Jehovah. In union with him **you, too, are being built up together into a place for God to inhabit by spirit.**” – *Ephesians 2:19-22*

Paul knew of what he wrote. He reminded the brothers of his conversion and the revelation given to him by Christ Jesus (*Acts 9:1-19*), granting him a unique personal comprehension of the sacred secret. (*Ephesians 3:1-4*) He continued:

“In other generations this [secret] was not made known to the sons of men as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by spirit, **namely, that people of the nations should be joint heirs and fellow members of the body and partakers with us of the promise in union with Christ Jesus** through the good news. I became a minister of this according to the free gift of the undeserved kindness of God that was given me according to the way his power operates.” – *Ephesians 3:5-7*

Again, Paul tells us that the sacred secret of sonship – being joint heirs with Christ (*Romans 8:17*) – was unknown to previous generations, but was always the Father’s purpose!

“To me, a man less than the least of all holy ones, this undeserved kindness was given, that I should declare to the nations the good news about the unfathomable riches of the Christ and should make men see how **the sacred secret is administered which has from the indefinite past been hidden in God**, who created all things.” – *Ephesians 3:8-9*

After the great error of Adam and Eve, many in the heavenly places did not understand how God would accomplish his purpose to gather all things together in Christ:

“[This was] to the end that now to **the governments and the authorities in the heavenly places** there might be made known through the congregation the greatly diversified wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose that he formed in connection with the Christ, Jesus our Lord, by means of whom we have this freeness of speech and an approach with confidence through our faith in him.” – *Ephesians 3:10-12*

The apostle Peter also spoke about the heavenly interest in the way God would work out his purpose:

“Concerning this very salvation a **diligent inquiry and a careful search were made by the prophets** who prophesied about the undeserved kindness meant for you. They kept on investigating what particular season or what sort of [season] the spirit in them was indicating concerning Christ when it was bearing witness beforehand about the sufferings for Christ and about the glories to follow these. It was revealed to them that, not to themselves, but to you, they were ministering the things that have now been announced to you through those who have declared the good news to you with holy spirit sent forth from heaven. **Into these very things angels are desiring to peer.**” – *1 Peter 1:10-12*

Paul was thankful to be blessed with the revelation of the sacred secret. And he encouraged us to likewise be thankful and to apply ourselves toward gaining a complete understanding of the Father’s purpose:

“On account of this I bend my knees to the Father, to whom every family in heaven and on earth owes its name, to the end that he may grant you according to the riches of his glory to be made mighty in the man you are inside with power through his spirit, to have the Christ dwell through [your] faith in your hearts with love; **that you may be rooted and established on the foundation, in order that you may be thoroughly able to grasp mentally with all the holy ones what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of the Christ which surpasses knowledge**, that you may be filled with all the fullness that God gives.” – *Ephesians 3:14-19*

The spirit of the Father that dwells in each of us helps us in this endeavor:

“Now to the one who can, **according to his power which is operating in us**, do more than superabundantly beyond all the things we ask or conceive, to him be the glory by means of the congregation and by means of Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.” – *Ephesians 3:20-21*

The Oneness of the Christian Congregation

Seeing that it is the Father’s purpose that mankind be joined together as sons of God, heirs of Christ, and brothers to one another, we should each do our part in maintaining the oneness of the brotherhood:

“I, therefore, the prisoner in [the] Lord, entreat you to **walk worthily of the calling with which you were called**, with complete lowliness of mind and mildness, with long-suffering, putting up with one another in love, earnestly endeavoring to observe the oneness of the spirit in the uniting bond of peace. **One body** there is, and **one spirit**, even as you were called in the **one hope** to which you were called; **one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all [persons]**, who is over all and through all and in all.” – *Ephesians 4:1-5*

To assist us in maintaining our oneness, Jesus gave “gifts in men” (*Ephesians 4:7-10*) whose job it is to keep us focused on the accurate knowledge of Jesus and not be led astray:

“And he gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelizers, some as shepherds and teachers, with a view to the readjustment of the holy ones, for ministerial work, **for the building up of the body of the Christ, until we all attain to the oneness in the faith** and in the accurate knowledge of the Son of God, to a full-grown man, to the measure of stature that belongs to the fullness of the Christ; **in order that we should no longer be babes, tossed about as by waves and carried hither and thither by every wind of teaching by means of the trickery of men, by means of cunning in contriving error**. But speaking the truth, let us by love grow up in all things into him who is the head, Christ. From him all the body, by **being harmoniously joined together** and being made to cooperate through every joint that gives what is needed, according to the functioning of each respective member in due measure, makes for the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.” – *Ephesians 4:11-16*

Yes, the only way to avoid being ‘tossed about by the trickery of men’ is to remain steadfast in Jesus’ teaching and work toward unity, not division. Paul had to counsel the Corinthian congregation on the matter of unity because divisions had already started to develop. Instead of following the Christ, the congregation had turned to following various men. Instead of being spiritual men and women, they had returned to a fleshly state of mind. (*1Corinthians 3:1-9*) Paul warned the Ephesians against that path:

“This, therefore, I say and bear witness to in [the] Lord, that you no longer go on walking just as the nations also walk in the **unprofitableness of their minds**, while they are **in darkness mentally**, and **alienated from the life that belongs to God**, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the insensibility of their hearts. Having come to be past all moral sense, they gave themselves over to loose conduct to work uncleanness of every sort with greediness.” – *Ephesians 4:17-19*

That is not the way of true Christians:

“But you did not learn the Christ to be so, provided, indeed, that you heard him and were taught by means of him, just as truth is in Jesus, that you should **put away the old personality which conforms to your former course of conduct** and which is being corrupted according to his deceptive desires; but that you should **be made new in the force actuating your mind**, and should put on the new personality which was created according to God’s will in true righteousness and loyalty.” – *Ephesians 4:20-24*

The remainder of the letter to the Ephesians was counsel on how to behave in the congregation so that we do not destroy our unity and lose our inheritance. (*Ephesians 4:24-6:8*) The counsel can be summed up in these words:

“Therefore, **become imitators of God, as beloved children**, and go on walking in love, just as the Christ also loved you and delivered himself up for you as an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling odor.” – *Ephesians 5:1-2*

Additionally, Paul counseled that we “put on the complete suit of armor from God.” (*Ephesians 6:10*):

“Stand firm, therefore, with your **loins girded about with truth**, and having on the **breastplate of righteousness**, and with your **feet shod with the equipment of the good news of peace**. Above all things, take up the **large shield of faith**, with which your will

be able to quench all the wicked one's burning missiles. Also, accept the **helmet of salvation**, and the **sword of the spirit**, that is, God's word, while with every form of prayer and supplication your carry on prayer on every occasion in spirit." – *Ephesians 6:14-18*

Paul specifically asked the Ephesus congregation to pray for him and for all those who are making known the sacred secret of the good news.

"And to that end keep awake with all constancy and with supplication in behalf of all the holy ones, also for me, that ability to speak may be given me with the opening of my mouth, **with freeness of speech to make known the sacred secret of the good news**, for which I am acting as an ambassador in chains; that I may speak in connection with it with boldness as I ought to speak." – *Ephesians 6:18-20*

And he bid the brothers farewell saying:

"May the brothers have peace and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. May the undeserved kindness be with all those loving our Lord Jesus Christ in incorruptness." – *Ephesians 6:23-24*

If you were present when the letter was read, how would it have affected you? Would you have believed that the Father's purpose is for you to be 'adopted as one of his sons?' Would you have accepted the 'promised holy spirit, which is a token in advance of your inheritance?' Would you have abandoned your fleshly desires and focused your mind and heart on the good news of the Kingdom of the Heavens? Would you have conducted yourselves as a joint member of the body of Christ, in imitation of God? Would you have donned the complete suit of armor and joined Paul in making known the sacred secret?

If you would have done so back then, you can do it now. The message has not changed. It is the Father's purpose to gather together all things in Christ by adopting faithful mankind, of all races, as His sons and heirs of the heavenly kingdom – the Sacred Secret! That continues to be the Father's purpose since "the founding of the world."

We welcome your comments.

"Elaia Luchnia"