

Ephesians - Commentaries by Charles Stanley

Pamphlets, Chosen in Christ (1:3-7)

Ephesians 1:3-7

If we look back in the depths of eternity, before the foundations of the world; God was occupied with the very thought that the Holy Spirit is speaking to our souls to-night. Yes, here we go back before our conversion; before the death of the Lord Jesus; before His incarnation; before all God's dealings with men for four thousand years; before Satan stepped into paradise; before Eve sinned. We were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. What can alter the purposes of God? Before all time began, God chose us in Him, that we should be holy, and without blame before Him in love.

Yes, He purposed to bring us into this wondrous place of acceptance. "before Him in love." Such was the love of the Father to us, in, and from, eternity. "To the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the beloved." What a place to be before Him according to the love of His heart, "In love" — "accepted in the beloved." Then "holy and without blame." And so certain, that nothing can set aside the eternal purpose of God. Nay, it is even now accomplished, "He hath made us accepted in the beloved." He hath thus blessed us in Christ. It is as true that we are accepted, that He hath made us so, as that He chose us in Christ in Him, before the foundations of the world.

And now let us dwell a moment on the relationship He predestined to have us in, "Unto the adoption of CHILDREN by Jesus Christ." 1 Oh! how far nearer to Him, than the creature place that Adam stood in, even in paradise. Far nearer than Israel stood in, as a nation. Nearer than Abraham as the friend of God. Nearer far than angels now enjoy — they stand around His throne; but Jesus is gone to prepare a place for us, where we shall sit on thrones in the unclouded light of the glory of God, so near that the angelic myriads shall stand around that place of nearness. Yes, we are predestined to enjoy that wondrous place of oneness with the Son of His love, as children (sons) — "to the praise of the glory of His grace."

And, now, if we pass on from this to 1 John 3, what joy to our hearts that nothing could satisfy the Father's love, nothing less perfect than our being like the holy One for whom we wait. Presented to Himself glorious, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing. God could have no pleasure in those sacrifices which never took away sins. But now the eternal purpose, the dearest desire of His heart, is attained in our perfect acceptance in Christ, and likeness to Him.

If we turn to Daniel 7:9, we there see the Ancient of Days, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of His head like pure wool. So in Revelation 1, we behold the Lord Jesus, and "His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow." The same emblem of spotless purity may be observed on the mount of transfiguration. "His face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light." But you may say, Can we, who have been such sinners, become like that: like Him, as He is? Yes, the same figures are used by the Spirit when He brings us to Christ. "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

It is well for our hearts to rest in the absolute purpose of God. The redemption we have is the result of those purposes. The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin. As He is, so are we in this world. Let us then look down from on high, and see the church as God sees it, as He beholds it without spot accepted in the beloved. Our hearts cannot enter into the thought of being like Him, unless they now understand how He looks upon us. In the same whiteness, and likeness. Satan may rage.

Men may arise speaking perverse things. Unbelief may say all is going to pieces. Billows may swell mountains high. Let us never forget in spite of these things, that we were chosen in Christ before them all. May we be kept waiting for Him.

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Some Papers on the Second Coming of Christ and on Prophecy, Part 2 - Questions of Interest Relating to the Coming of Christ and His Reign on Earth (1:18)

Will He be on this earth during the 1000 years. Will the church be with Him on earth? We have already seen there is no evidence in the Old Testament that the church will be on this earth during the millennium. And further, that though Christ will come to this earth in person, and be King over the earth, yet we need further light before we can fully answer the question, "Will He be on this earth during the 1000 years?" We will now turn to the New Testament.

We find that though there may be fuller revelations of the glory of Christ, yet all is in perfect harmony from Genesis to Revelation, quite as much so, though written during so many centuries, and by so many men, as if God had spoken by one writer only. The angel said to Mary, "And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb and bring forth a son, and shalt call His name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David: and He shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end" (Luke 1:31-33). Thus to simple faith His future reign over Jacob is as certain as His past incarnation. Exactly as foretold by Isaiah, the very JESUS, who was born of the Virgin Mary, shall sit on the throne of David, and every promise in the Old Testament shall be fulfilled. "And they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory." (See Matthew 24:30; Luke 21:27). They shall not see a spirit, nor will it be a spiritual coming; but the very same Jesus will come who died on the

cross, and rose again. "And when He had spoken these things, while they beheld, He was taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven, as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? THIS SAME JESUS, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:9-11). He will then surely come to this earth in person — that same Jesus. This is clear and certain. It is also as clear that He will come at the commencement of the millennium. Christ having suffered all things foretold by the prophets, Peter calls on Israel to repent. He says, "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when [or and] the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; and He shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began" (Acts 3:19-21). Yes, God hath spoken, it must come to pass. Do we read the prophets as God speaking to us? Yes, Jesus is received up to heaven, and He will remain there until the millennium, or times of refreshing, as here described.

But nowhere have we yet found such a thought as that He will be merely an earthly potentate, dwelling on this earth. His glorious reign on earth is only a part of His dominion and glory. Now, as Paul found it impossible to utter the things that he heard, "When he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful [or possible] for a man to utter" (2 Cor. 12:4), so we believe there are future glories of Christ, which do not yet appear to us, and therefore of which we cannot write or speak — even glories of Jesus, as Man, which He will share with the church. As we further read, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us... Beloved, now are we the children of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as he is" (1 John 3:2). While this is so, yet we may enter a little into the distinct heavenly blessing and glory of the church, very peculiar and quite distinct from, or even in contrast with, the earthly glory of Israel on earth. Let us now turn to further unfoldings of the purposes of God, "The riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints."

In the first eight verses of Ephesians 1, we have the complete salvation of each saint predestined for the heavenly glory. If you are a believer, beloved reader, here is your complete salvation. But what a contrast to every blessing promised to Israel. God our Father takes the place of their Jehovah. They will indeed be blest in earthly places. We now worship the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ. All is of God, He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love. What a salvation! And more than this, having predestined us unto the adoption of CHILDREN by Jesus Christ to Himself. To the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved, or brought us into the same favor in the Beloved. And Christ has accomplished this eternal purpose of our God and Father, "In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." What a salvation of God our Father, by and in Jesus Christ our Lord. It would be very sweet to our souls to go over each part of this salvation, and thus give "thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light" (Col. 1:12). You will notice in Ephesians 1:9 to the end, the heavenly inheritance is opened up to us, so far as we can bear it now. Our Father makes known to us the mystery of His will what He hath purposed in Himself. "That in the dispensation of the fullness of times, He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth, even in Him."

Mark, we are not here spoken of as His inheritance, but "in whom also we have obtained an inheritance" (Eph. 1:11). And further, the purpose of God is to gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth, even in Him. At present believers are sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession unto the praise of His glory. The purchase is paid, but the redemption of the inheritance has not yet taken place. Now what is that inheritance but all things in heaven and earth? Alas, not those in hell or in the lake of fire. They have rejected the riches of His grace until it is forever too late. The apostle says, "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him; the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints (Eph. 1:17-18). And what is that revelation? God has raised Jesus far above all the heavens, "and hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1:22-23). We see not yet all things put under Him (Heb. 2:8-9); but we see Him crowned with glory, having tasted death for all things. We further see when all things shall be put under Him (1 Cor. 15:24-28).

Oh how vast the inheritance. He who created all things in the heavens and the earth shall reign over all (Col. 1:16,18). View those vast heavens, all the works of His hands. Is it not impossible to describe that which is infinite? Oh the glory of that grace that has made us co-heirs with the Son. Faith knows no difficulties, with God all things are possible: distance inconceivable disappears. Jacob at the foot of the ladder can see Jehovah at the top. Jesus above all heavens is seen by the dying martyr Stephen. In a moment He appears in glory to the persecutor, Saul. Absent from the body, the spirit of every believer who departs is present with the Lord. This is all beyond a mortal's ken, but clearly revealed in the wondrous Word of God.

Soon that morn will break, far too bright for mortal eyes. This earth is indeed a part, a wondrous part, of His inheritance. Here sin has run its course. Here the greatest event, the very central act of eternity, has been accomplished, the atoning death of the cross for my sins; and here shall the Saviour shine in His glory. But you will see this earth will be far short of being the center and the circumference of His glorious inheritance, and the glory given to Him as man, is given to us. Oh, the riches of His glory.

If we look at the heavenly millennial glory of the church, the bride, we see the same wondrous connection between the heavenly and the earthly during the millennium (Rev. 21). But the church is heavenly, "Descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God: and her light [or shining] like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal." And yet the administration is evidently connected with Israel and the earth (Rev 21:10-12).

From all these scriptures we may learn that the reign of Christ and His bride will be over the heavens and the earth; so that the parable of ruling over ten cities, or five, is just to show this, that the reward will be in proportion to the diligence in serving Him. This must not be confounded with our salvation, perfect and eternal, of God, in Christ Jesus.

Oh the riches of the glory of God!

The epistle to the Ephesians is a wondrous treasury of certainties. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places [or in the heavenlies] in Christ." There is no effort here or attainment of our own. It is all of God, who hath thus blessed us. This is, true of all the holy ones at Ephesus, and of all the faithful in Christ Jesus. Do you really believe that this is true of you? that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has thus, blest you? that in Christ you are forever blest? We may not know it, we may not enjoy this rich sovereign grace; but it is true. It is of God, and what is of God cannot fail—cannot cease or change, for He changeth not.

"According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love." This is very strong consolation, that God, as God, hath thus blest us in Christ according to His eternal purpose. It is not as we have chosen Him, but according as He hath chosen us; and that not after we believed, but before the foundation of the world. Geologists may talk about a few millions of years of this world's history as seen in the crust of the earth; but long before anything they know about (for it is little they know about that eternity in which God created the heavens and the earth), before the foundations of the earth, however far back in eternity that may be, oh think, holy believer, thou wast chosen in Christ.

And what was God's purpose in this choice? "That we should be holy and without blame before Him in love." He said, as it were, I see that family of fallen Adam, dead in trespasses and sins, children of wrath; but I will have them before me in Christ, holy and unblameable in love. And He hath thus blest us. This is one of the certainties before God in Christ.

Still more so as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, "having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will"—not only before Him as God, but to Himself as children, in all the affection of eternal love to Himself. He would have a family so near Himself—nearer than any created beings, however mighty in power and wisdom. Yes, the Father predestined a family nearer to Himself than angelic hosts. Such is His eternal love to us.

"To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved," or "brought us into favor in the beloved." Yes. He hath done it. It is all of His free favor, that He hath brought us into favor in the beloved. Nothing can go beyond this, in the same unchanging, unclouded favor as the beloved Son. Let us not read this as a something to be reached, to be attained by experience, for the Father hath brought us into this favor. Boundless, unchanging favor! Well may we, with the Spirit, say, "To the praise of the glory of his grace."

But what of our sins, and the wrath justly due to us? Has God really made a provision according to His own righteous demands, so that we may with certainty know that all is settled, and every barrier removed, so that we really are in this boundless favor? Yes, all is of God, all in Christ. "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence." Yes, fearful as have been our sins, overwhelming the sense of sin and guilt, enemies by wicked works, children, of wrath as others, dead in trespasses and sins, utterly guilty, subject to the righteous judgment of a holy God—all true and all known to God. Yet in the riches of His grace He has abounded over all. How has He abounded in free favor to sinners so guilty, so vile? "In whom," in Christ, "we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins."

Mark it is in Christ, not in ourselves or anything we have done, or can do. It is in whom we have redemption through His blood. Through His infinite atonement we have eternal redemption and forgiveness of sins according to the value of that precious blood in the sight of God. Sins are all forgiven; we are brought to God. Jesus took our place and guilt on the cross, and we are now in Him, in His place in the glory. And God ever must own the righteous claims of Christ for us there. Let us not forget that God provided the Lamb, the ransom Lamb. In that Lamb God has abounded in grace to us over all our sins, and we have this wondrous redemption with all its eternal results.

But you say, I cannot feel all this? It is not what we feel, but what God says. Does not God say all this? Is not this the word of God our Father to us His children? Do you say, "I cannot believe in such free, unmerited favor to me. I am afraid it cannot be true to me?" Take care what you say. We read, when, this short parenthesis of time is passed and eternity rolls on again: "But the fearful and unbelieving.... shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death." (Rev. 21:8.) In that same eternity, when the first heaven and the first earth were passed away, "I heard a great voice out of heaven, saying, Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." Do you believe God? Then every word we have read to you is a divine certainty to your soul. Are you fearful and unbelieving? Then here is the end of your journey across time. In either case the certainty is the same, based on the word of God. We may deceive ourselves. God will not deceive us. Do you say, "I have never deserved such blessings, such certainties as we read in Eph. 1. "What have I done to merit, or to attain to such certainties?" What had the poor heathens at Ephesus done to merit these amazing blessings? or, indeed, what had the religious Jews done who murdered the Son of God? Oh, it was "God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins..... For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God. Not of works, lest any man should boast." Yes, it is what God has done, not what we have done. Even works are all of God. "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." God hath not ordained works now by which we may be saved, but He hath ordained works for those who are saved, that we should walk in them.

Perhaps you say, "I should like to know how these Ephesians were brought into these wondrous blessings?" You will notice that all these high blessings are in Christ. Now read: "In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise." (Chap. 1:13.) Have you heard the gospel, the glad tidings of your salvation, free forgiveness of sins through the atoning death of Christ; of justification from all things in Him risen from the dead: of full and eternal salvation from the guilt and power of sin? Have you believed these glad tidings; not assenting to them as general truths, but as God speaking to you, your very salvation? Now, if you have believed them, after believing ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise. Yes, sealing follows believing. If you through grace have believed God, then God hath sealed you as His, until the redemption of the purchased possession. Then all is yours: let us look over your certainties.

It is a present thing. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ hath blessed you with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ. All is yours that the God of all grace gives you. He hath chosen you in Him before the foundation of the world, that you should be holy and without blame before Him in love. He hath brought you to Himself as a child, having predestined you unto this very place of unspeakable blessing. He hath brought you into favor in the beloved—into the same unclouded favor as His beloved Son. Is not this to the praise of the., glory of His grace? You have redemption in Him through His blood—not a temporal redemption, like Israel from, Egypt, but eternal. The forgiveness of sins is not merely the forgiveness of past sins, great as is that blessing—so vast is the riches of His grace, so truly infinite the value of the redemption price, the blood of Jesus—so really were all our sins reckoned to Him on the cross, that God will not, cannot in righteousness, impute sin to us. The whole question of sin, and sins, and guilt is settled forever. And you have this blessedness on the certainty of the word of God. Mark, “in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.” It is all of God, and we have it.

If you hope to have it, then plainly you have not got it. As I said to an old man of eighty just now, “If you hope for a hat to cover your head in the cold, then you have not got it. If it is on your head you cannot hope for it.” Blessed be God, His righteousness is not only unto all, but upon all that believe. Thank God for the certainties of His word. C. S.

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