

Building Biblical
COMMUNITY *in* CHRIST

What's So Great About Being A Christian?

Part 3

Ephesians 1:7-12

In the early 1970's I had the joy of working with some of the missions in downtown Chicago. I was told that in one of those missions, a drunkard had come a few years earlier. He heard the message, ate the meal and went to bed. He never woke up. He died in poverty and with no friends. What he did not know was that he had an inheritance of nearly 4.5 million dollars in England. Family members had searched for him but without success. They had no address. Here was a man with immense wealth, but he died in extreme poverty.

This is not unlike many Christians who are relatively clueless about the great wealth they have in Christ. We live like spiritual paupers, all the while being heirs of great wealth beyond our imagination.

Just what are these benefits, enrichments that we have in Christ? So far we have seen that *we are blessed* (verse 3). This is a general statement that encapsulates all that Paul is going to tell us in the following verses.

Secondly, *we are chosen* (verse 4). But notice: This is not chosen *from among* others or chosen *before* others or even chosen *in preference* to others who are not chosen. Paul says that we are chosen *in* someone and *for* something. God does not choose some *to be placed into Christ* and others *not to be placed into Christ*. Our election does not concern how we *become* Christians, but rather what we have been called to *as* Christians. The emphasis is on what we are to be once we are "in Christ," i.e. holy and blameless.

Thirdly, *we are predestined* (verse 5). Again, Paul is not saying that God decides that certain individuals will have the ultimate destiny of salvation and that other individuals will have the ultimate destiny of damnation. Paul is speaking to believers in this passage, those who have already "hoped in Christ" (verses 12-13). Paul *is* saying that for those who have believed in Christ, their ultimate destiny of being made like Christ has been determined

beforehand (Romans 8:29). This gives assurance and comfort, because we know that God will complete in us what he has begun.

Fourth, *we are adopted* (verse 5). We have been born into God's family as we respond to God's grace by faith; but then we are also declared adult children with all the rights and privileges that that entails. I had someone call this past week and ask, "What are the benefits of adoption? Why do we need to be *adopted* into God's family if we are already *born* into God's family?" Very good question. We'll be trying to give answer to that as we look at this passage today.

Today, however, we come to three more truths that explain why it is so great to be a Christian. And all three of these are explained in verses 7-12. What we see here is also very fitting as a conclusion to what we have heard this past week about missions. Our theme has been, "Let the nations be heard!" As we look at these verses today, we'll see that God has a plan for the nations. And as we understand this plan of the ages, we'll get off our "spiritual duff" and wholeheartedly join in on the program of the ages that God is bringing to its fulfillment.

We have freedom (7, 8).

Notice what Paul says in verses 7-8:

7 In him we have redemption through his bloodⁱ, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace 8 that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding.

The word "redemption" in the NT conveys to us just one aspect of the four-fold aspect of Christ's saving work on the cross.ⁱⁱ "Redemption" speaks of God freeing us from bondage to sin and to Satan. In fact, there are three New Testament words that together paint a picture of the redemption that we have in Christ. One word speaks of being bought *in* the slave market of sin. Another word speaks of being bought *out of* the slave market of sin. And a third word speaks of being *set free* from the slave market of sin. It is this third word that Paul uses here, emphasizing the freedom that is now ours in Christ.ⁱⁱⁱ

It was a festive occasion when a victorious general would return to the city of Rome. He would ride at the head of a great triumphal procession, leading

behind him not only the troops that served under him, but also the spoils of the conquered land as well as a large number of captives. It was a moment anticipated by the slave owner who desired to increase the number of his slaves. After the triumphal military procession into the city, the slaves would be taken to the slave market and there, one by one, put on a slave block for all to see. They would be examined and tested by the prospective buyers and then purchased into a life of slavery.

It is this picture that was most likely in the mind of the Apostle as he wrote of the “redemption” that we have in Christ. The Bible pictures all of humanity as being “slaves to sin.” We are kept there by the power of the Law that condemns us and shows us just how far short we fall of God’s glorious standard. But the good news is that Jesus Christ, as a triumphant general, has fulfilled the righteous demands of the Law and has conquered through His death the power of sin and guilt. He has not only *bought us in* the slave market of sin, he has *brought us out of* the slave market of sin and has *loosed us and set us free*. Through His sacrificial death, we have been delivered from the *penalty*, the *power* and one day, even from the *presence* of sin. And that spells FREEDOM!

Paul goes on to describe this freedom as the “forgiveness of sins.” That makes sense. At the heart of forgiveness is the word “give” When we “forgive” another, we release them, we freed them! And that is what God has done for you and me.

The Bible tells us that when we ask God to forgive our sins, he removes them as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12). Do you know how far that is? I brought a globe to show you that the east and west are actually further apart than the north and south. If I start here in North America and go north, eventually I get to the top of the globe at the North Pole. If I continue the same direction, I start going south. Eventually the north meets the south.

But if I start here in Oregon and keep going east, when will I start going west? Never. The psalmist says God will remove our sin from us--not as far as the north is from the south, but as far as the east is from the west. And that spells FREEDOM!

Friend, “there is more grace in God’s heart than sin in your past.”^{iv} No wonder Paul says that this forgiveness is in accordance with God’s grace lavished on us in all wisdom and understanding.

TESTIMONY: Gregg Bitgood

I have accepted the truth; I am forgiven.

I was born in the summer of 66. I grew up in a family that was secular. Church was reserved for Christmas, Easter, Weddings, and funerals. Christmas was neat, that's the day baby Jesus was born... can we open presents yet?

Easter had something to do with Jesus... but when does the Easter egg hunt start? Weddings were fun... but they always seemed to end in divorce. Funerals, well, they had something to do with people dying and then going to heaven.

That was the extent of my religious upbringing. Do to that fact alone, I was a ward of the state by the age of 10. At 12 years old, I moved to Hawaii. My grandparents retired there and they knew Jesus, but the 12 years that I spent with non-believers hardened my heart beyond what they could soften before I ran away.

Well, being in Hawaii, with low self-esteem, street values, and no job, there was only one thing to do to support my drug habit... steal. I've done it before... lots of times but never from anyone who loved me. The shame that I felt made me hate myself and I couldn't face them. Especially, when my grandmother was diagnosed with Leukemia. I dealt with it the best way I knew how... I ran away.

And I kept running---for 23 years.

I accepted Christ Jesus as my savior on October 7th of last year. It may sound a little odd but I praise God for all that He has allowed me to go through to get t Him. You all know the old saying "You don't know what you had until it's gone". Well I have a better one. "You never know what you were missing until you get it." God has been waiting for me from before there was time. Just waiting, patiently, for the scales to fall off of my eyes so that I could reciprocate his undying love. Now that I know the truth, that I am forgiven.

When I am feeling tired, I can say my prayers go to sleep instead of drinking until I pass out. When I am sleeping, I'm not haunted by things from my

past. I sleep with the ease and security of a baby knowing that one day I'll see my grandparents again.

When I wake up, I praise our Lord for giving me another day to thank Him, by allowing Jesus to be sacrificed for all of us so that we are forgiven. I can start my days off with friendly, meaningful conversations looking into the eyes of my brothers & sisters in Christ instead of at my shoes.

The Holy Spirit that is in me, has changed my eyes. On my last exam, I had 13/15 vision, but I could never see God. Now I see His works...everywhere.

Six months ago, I would have thought that you were all out of your minds if you came up to me and told me to stop punishing myself for my past. Unlimited love and forgiveness...ya right. Well, you are right.

"In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding" Ephesians 1:7-8

We have understanding (9,10)

What's so great about being a Christian? Not only do we have redemption which leads to freedom. But we also have revelation that leads to understanding. Notice what is said in verses 9-10.

9 And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, 10 to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment-to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.^v

My youngest, Justin, loves to read Hardy Boy mystery books. Every now and then, we'll stop by the Salvation Army to see if they have any more in the series on sale. Just about everybody loves a mystery, following the suspense as the plot unfolds.

There is a certain similarity between that type of mystery and what Paul is saying here. But there are differences too. The word "mystery" in the New Testament sense simply means truth previously hidden but now revealed. Of course, Paul goes on and tells us just what this mystery is that is now

revealed— “to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.”

Another New Testament passage which gives us helpful insight here is 1 Corinthians 2:6-10 –

We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. 7 No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. 8 None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. 9 However, as it is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him"- 10 but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit.

From the beginning of time God’s design has been to exist in harmonious relationship with mankind as well as all of creation. We know, however, that the willful intrusion of sin worked havoc, not only with mankind’s relationship to God, but also with the entire balance of the cosmos. Though through the prophecies of the Old Testament and its sacrificial system we catch glimpses of God’s ultimate plan to salvage his creation, we are left with many unanswered questions.

But in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ God’s plan to restore all things becomes clear. We see here the display of God’s “secret wisdom,” that which was previously hidden but now revealed. But many didn’t catch it, including the religious and political authorities responsible for Jesus’ death. And guess who else didn’t catch it? The demons themselves!

Can’t you just hear them now? Christ is being led out to be crucified. They are screaming with joy “We’ve won, we’ve won!” And when Jesus’ final breath expired, they must have yelled, “The victory, it is finally ours! The Messiah is dead...gone forever!”

But of course the story doesn’t end there. On that first Easter Sunday morning, Christ arose from the dead, proving that he has the final word about the destiny of man and of the universe. Amazing...the very death that the demons thought conclusively demonstrated their victory, in reality brought both sin, Satan and his demons utter defeat.

But this is not the final chapter in this unfolding mystery of God's will. That chapter will be written when all things are brought under the authority of Christ. And when Paul says "all things in heaven and on earth," that is precisely what he means. That's why C.S. Lewis says that ours is a universe where "every square inch, every split second, is claimed by God and counterclaimed by God."^{vi} But when will this take place? When the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ (Revelation 11:15).

You see, our God (as Randy Alcorn describes him) is the "ultimate salvage artist."^{vii} He goes on to say this:

"God doesn't throw away his handiwork and start from scratch – instead, he uses the same canvas to repair and make more beautiful the painting marred by the vandal. The vandal doesn't get the satisfaction of destroying his rival's masterpiece. On the contrary, God makes an even greater masterpiece out of what his enemy sought to destroy...Satan seeks to destroy the earth. God seeks to restore and renew the earth, rule it, and hand it back over to his children. God will win the battle for us and for the earth."^{viii}

The salvation God has given to us touches not only our soul, but also our body, and even beyond that – it touches all of creation!^{ix} As the well-known hymn puts it: "Jesus who died shall be satisfied, and earth and heaven be one."

Paul is telling us in these verses that you and I have received revelation of God's purposes in history leading to understanding. But this understanding is not sterile; it should lead us to action. When you and I fully grasp the victory over sin, Satan and death that Christ secured on the cross, and that based on that victory, God is most certainly going to reconcile everything in heaven and on earth under Christ, we cannot help but be motivated to share this Good News with others. And we do so with a fresh perspective; not only looking back at the cross, but also looking ahead to the consummation of all things in Christ.

We have an inheritance (11-12)

As believers, not only do we have redemption that brings freedom and

revelation that gives understanding of God's purposes in history; we also have been declared heirs who have been promised an inheritance (verses 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.

Paul again emphasizes that as believers we are "chosen." But this is not at all the word that he uses in verse 3 of this chapter. The word here, used only one time in the New Testament, is best translated "we were made heirs."^x

This brings me back to the question I was asked this week about the necessity of adoption into God's family. Remember, no baby can directly inherit his parents' wealth. Even if you want to open a savings account for a baby at the bank, you have to go through an enormous amount of red tape. You'll have to name a trustee to make the transactions. The baby will also have to have a social security number, even though she has never worked.

But when you and I were born into God's family, we were not simply given new birth, becoming God's spiritual children; no, we were adopted as *full-grown* children with all the inherent rights and privileges that that entails. And we expectantly await that day when Christ will say, "*Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world*" (Matthew 25:34).

And you and I are called to live every day in light of that inheritance. It is this that should define us, not our past. As I've been reading through the Gospels lately, I've been struck with the fact that Jesus never interviewed people about their past. That's certainly why such notorious sinners are mentioned in the ancestral genealogies of the Messiah himself. In God's eyes, our history is not nearly so important as our destiny. Is that how you view yourself? Or are you paralyzed by your past? Your destiny in Christ is what should define your identity, not your history in sin. And your destiny is a rich inheritance that surpasses your wildest dreams.

I recently read a great story about Henry Ford. It seems that he had a niece who was getting married. And long before the wedding, the niece and her fiancé wondered anxiously about what Uncle Henry, one of the richest men

in America at that time, would get them for a wedding gift. Would it be a car? That would make sense. Or perhaps he would surprise them with a house or a trip around the world!

When the time came to open the presents, they searched for Uncle Henry's gift trying not to appear too obvious. Finally they found it. It was a small package. As they tore into it they were surprised to find...a Bible. Trying hard not to appear too disappointed, they put it with the other gifts and went on with life.

Some months later, a knock came at the door. It was uncle Henry. After a bit of small talk, he asked them what they thought of this gift. They assured him that they loved it and read it often together. "O really?" said Henry. "May I see it please?" After a prolonged, embarrassing search, they found the Bible and brought it to him. Henry leafed through it and said, "It seems that you have not really taken advantage of my gift." And from the Bible's pages he pulled a check made out to them for \$100,000, tore it in pieces and left."^{xi}

What's so great about being a Christian? We have redemption that brings freedom. We have revelation that gives understanding. We anticipate the consummation of all things and the reception of our full inheritance. Are you taking full advantage of all that you have in Christ?

Notes

ⁱ Cf. "Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sin." Hebrews. 9:22; "The soul that sins, it shall die." Ezekial 18:4.

ⁱⁱ *Redemption* is the answer to our bondage to sin; *sacrifice* is the answer to our guilt; *propitiation* is the answer to God's wrath against sin; and *reconciliation* is the answer to God's alienation from us.

ⁱⁱⁱ It was a festive occasion when a victorious general would return to the city of Rome. He would ride at the head of a great triumphal procession, leading behind him not only the troops that served under him, but also the spoils of the conquered land as well as a large number of captives. It was a moment anticipated by the slave owner who desired to increase the number of his slaves. After the triumphal military procession into the city, the slaves would be taken to the slave market and there, one by one, put on a slave block for

all to see. They would be examined and tested by the prospective buyers and then purchased into a life of slavery.

^{iv} Erwin Lutzer, pastor of Moody Memorial Church, Chicago, Illinois.

^v Based on this verse, some speculate that all people will eventually be saved. Is that what Paul is saying? Markus Barth believes so: "The Church...is Christ's living and growing body. The Church includes by this definition virtually all who are still unbelievers...Jesus Christ is not only 'head of the Church.' He is as much...head also of every man, whether that man believes in Christ or not." Markus Barth, *Broken Wall*, cited by John R. W. Stott, *God's New Society* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity, 1979), p 42.

^{vi} Randy Alcorn, *Heaven* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 2004), 100.

^{vii} Randy Alcorn, 89.

^{viii} Randy Alcorn, 100.

^{ix} Cf. such passages as Hebrews 2:8-9; Philippians 2:10-11; Romans 8:22-25; Colossians 1:16-20.

^x Cf. the NLT which reads: "*Furthermore, because of Christ, we have received an inheritance from God...*"

^{xi} Clipped from sermon on Romans 5:1-5 by Brad Harper, Feb 12, 1995.