

The Golden Chain: To the Praise of his glorious grace
a message based on
Ephesians 1:3-14

In addition to that reading, I'd like us to answer a question together with the words of our catechism.

Q. What do you believe concerning “the holy catholic church”?

**All: I believe that the Son of God
through his Spirit and Word,**

out of the entire human race,

from the beginning of the world to its end,

Women: gathers, protects, and preserves for himself

Men: a community chosen for eternal life

All: and united in true faith.

**And of this community I am and always will be
a living member (Q & A. 54, Heidelberg Catechism).**

Followers of Jesus:

I have heard of people who were so aware of their sins and the hold those sins had on them still – how certain sins seem to take on a life of their own and control them – they were so keenly aware of this that they refused to partake of the Lord's Supper. “I am so unworthy,” was their answer. “I don't deserve a break like that.” Do you know anyone like that? I have heard of people who continued to attend services, but who fundamentally had a disagreement with God, because of their life's circumstances – the loss of a loved one, the loss of a job, the loss of health or some other essential – so they never could quite get themselves to be convinced that God loved them just the way they are. Their very relationship with God was fractured as from the damage an earthquake leaves behind.

Issues like these are so very real to so many people, and they hinder their thoughts of God. More specifically, they cause people to answer this question in the negative. The question is: “Are you sure? Are you certain?” Are you sure God loves you? Are you sure you are saved from your sin? Are you certain that when you die, God will let you into his heaven? I believe with all my heart that it is God's intention that we be sure about our relationship with him. This is expressed by John, the apostle, using the word “know.” When he uses

that word, he means this to be inside the realm of our experience.

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life (1 John 5:13).

Do you believe in the Son of God, that he came to save you from your sins? Do you know, that because of this, you have, right now within you the life of God, eternal life?

Paul, the apostles, writes of something he knows, something which for many of us has been a matter of confusion or questions, rather than certainty. This is not meant to confuse. Paul did not sit down one day and say to himself, "Let's have some fun. How can I write about something that will bring confusion to the minds of my readers?" No, Paul was a pastor as well as a missionary, and he often speaks with tenderness and great love for those he writes to.

What is it that has brought such confusion? It is the biblical teaching, the long word which is "predestination" (a word not found in the Bible) the more precise biblical word is "predestined."

In love he [God] predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will - to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves (Eph 1:5-6).

R.C. Sproul is known as a great teacher. Like all good ones, he breaks down the word so as to simplify it for us, to make it understandable. The word "predestination" is made up of two words.

Pre which means "before" or "something that takes place prior to"

Destination which means "a point toward which we are moving but have not yet reached" (R.C. Sproul).

A simple illustration will suffice. It rains a lot on Vancouver Island in November, so in order to get away we purchase plain tickets to some destination down south. If people ask what our plans are for the month of November, we reply that we have plans to go down south. We're not down south yet; but that's where we're headed.

When did our destination get planned, and by whom? Was it before, or prior to our conception, or perhaps before our date of birth? Was it before the day when we could say, "I get it! I too believe in Jesus"? When was our destination planned? Ephesians 1 gives the answer to that.

For he [God] chose us in him [in our Lord Jesus Christ] *before the creation of the world...* (Eph 1:4).

In Romans 8 Paul uses a different word to describe this plan of God.

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son (Rom 8:29).

There we have another "before" like word, a word like "pre," only the word is "fore," which is a shortened form of "before." God knew before, or prior to, exactly who would become his children. God said it like this to Moses, and to many others.

"I know you by name and you have found favor with me!" (Ex 33:12).

Joel Nederhood in his book of meditations, writes of what Jesus concluded the night he washed the feet of his disciples. Jesus knew at that moment that he had come from God, and was returning to God, and for that reason he accomplished the feat of a common slave. Do we realize, Nederhood asks (and this surprised me when I read it), that we can conclude the same thing? We came from God, and our destiny is to return to God! "We are not the product of a chance mixing of genes... God knows us by name; once we exist in God's mind, he arranges our lives to insure that we will be born at precisely the time we should be born, with exactly the characteristics we should have. God controls every experience of our lives as he prepares us for eternity in his presence" (Joel Nederhood, "Children of Our Heavenly Father"). Luke, the gospel writer, traces the genealogy of Jesus back through the mother of Jesus. Jesus was the son, so it was supposed, of Joseph. At the end of the list, this is what he writes.

... the son of Enosh, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God (Luke 3:38).

We have come from God, and will return to God! Or as John would write, describing again what is supposed to be in the realm of our experience, what we know...

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is

what we are! (1 John 3:1).

When God lavishes us with love, it's not like taking out a salt shaker and sprinkling a little love into our hearts. He lavishes us with his love. He pours it on! He does not hold back!

In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons [and daughters] through Jesus Christ...

Say that with me: "I AM A CHILD OF GOD." Say it again! How does that feel to speak the truth like that? Isn't it great, isn't it the most fantastic thing that has every happened to us? To be able to say that we are children of God, with no shame, no uncertainty, nothing but assurance that this is so, this is what we are meant to know!

The only things required of us, according to Ephesians 1, the only thing we are to do is respond in faith; all we need do is believe it! (And this faith that we're talking about is itself a gift from God, according to Ephesians 2:8). Everything else written in this chapter is what God does. It all starts with him, originates with him, is planned by him and put into action.

What have we been predestined *to*? What is our destination to be in the end? This is something we can already involve ourselves in, responding to what God has started. When Paul writes these wonderful words he keeps coming back to one word that says it all. The word is "praise."

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ... (vs 3)

... to the praise of his glorious grace which he has freely given us in the one he loves (vs 6)

... in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory... (vs 12)

... to the praise of his glory (vs 14).

This is our destination people of God, to praise the LORD! Psalm 103 is one, long extended call to praise God.

Praise the LORD, O my soul;

all my inmost being, praise his holy name.

Praise the LORD, O my soul,

and forget not all his benefits... (Ps 103:1-2).

We get busy, we get distracted, and we forget what we're here for, what our destiny is. We forget to praise the LORD! When we join in praising the LORD, we are joining our voices with the earth and the heavens. The heavens declare the glory of God (Ps 19:1), and the heaven of heavens, the place where God's throne room can be entered, also joins together in constant praise to the LORD. And with the inhabitants of heaven we call "angels," those people who have gone before us also join in celebration of the true and the living God.

**Praise the LORD, you his angels,
you mighty ones who do his bidding,
who obey his word.
Praise the LORD, all his heavenly hosts,
you servants who do his will.
Praise the LORD, all his works
everywhere in his dominion (Ps 103:20-22).**

There is much more, though, for which we are destined.

... every spiritual blessing in Christ (vs 3).

The number one spiritual blessing is found in the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. Did we notice that in the first fourteen verses of Ephesians 1, Christ is mentioned in every verse but two (verses 8 & 14)? In Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col 2:3)! In Christ we believers are complete (Col 2:10)! He is our all in all! It is because of Christ that we have so many reasons to praise God.

There are so many reasons to praise God's glorious grace!

He chose us to be holy and blameless in his sight (vs 4).

Do we know what God sees when he looks at us? He has put us into Christ, so this is what he sees: he sees holy, blameless, spotless, cleansed, without stain, without wrinkle, without blemish, a radiant church (5:27)! This is our destiny! It's not because of our own actions, deeds, or thoughts. It's because of Jesus!

I am not making this up! It's right here in the Bible. This is why it is called good news. It almost seems unbelievable, doesn't it? Isn't there going to be some fine print somewhere, printed really small that will clarify things and take this all away? No!

There are so many reasons to praise God's glorious grace! We are recipients of his grace, and the fact is:

God loves us

What kind of love does God love with? This is agape love, the sort of love that has No conditions! No, God loves us if we do this first; no, God loves us and he also has some requirements we first have to meet; no God loves us, but if we blow it and mess up, he'll stop loving us. No "ifs," "ands," "buts"! This is to say nothing of the rest of the story from Ephesians 1.

Recipients of his wisdom and understanding

Compare this with what's with those who have not yet experienced this destination. In chapter 4 these are said to be *futile in their thinking, darkened in their understanding, separated from the life of God, hearts hardened, sensitivity lost, given over to sensuality* (4:17-19). We believers still struggle in wisdom and understanding but we're not any where near as far gone as those who don't have experience in this destination! And this is just to skim over this amazing list of what we've been destined for!