

## **Union with Christ**

### ***Paul's Letter to the Ephesians***

## **How the Father Loves**

### ***Ephesians 1:3 – 14***

*BCACF Jan 2015*

#### **Introduction: The Heart of God the Father**

My son John was born last September, after a marathon 55 hours of labor, 3 shifts of doctors, 2 hours of pushing, and a last minute C section. Obviously, Ming was exhausted, and I was probably the most tired I had ever been, so when the nurses started to lift John out, I wasn't sure how I would feel. I walked over to the table where the pediatrician was cleaning him, and the first thing I thought was, "Yup, he's got my nose." He was crying pretty loudly. Now some babies recognize their mommy and daddy's voices from the time they're in the womb. I guess that's what happened there, because when I started talking to him, he stopped crying. At that moment, I felt my heart sing. I thought, You're my son!, and I felt deeply connected to him. In my mind, I started writing him a poem about where his name comes from and why we think it's meaningful. When we left the hospital, and I found that I could watch him for hours and not be bored. I'd wait for him to open his eyes, and then I'd wait for him to smile. I've even found that I cannot kiss him enough, and though I didn't think I would call my son "cute," indeed I think he is "cute." In fact, one time Ming complained that I was holding him too much. She once said, "Hey, give him to me, the boy needs to eat!!!" And, "I hold him just to nurse him, but you get to play with him all the time!"

Now as I reflected on that episode, it hit me that part of the reason I had such strong feelings for my son is that for about eight years, I have done ministry to at-risk kids. And what I've seen has broken my heart. Some of them have no parents, most have no dad's, some have no one to give them a basic sense of love and structure and encouragement and order. But I felt like I could never do that much, because they weren't my children. They were outside of me and my family. But all those years of working with at-risk kids grew in me a desire to be a good dad to my own children. When John was born, it felt like all my feelings for the at-risk kids I knew could finally be expressed. And I had this thought: To the extent that I can do things right as a dad by the Spirit of God, if only I could love each and every one of the kids I have ever known through my son John, that I could somehow bring them inside my family through John and that by loving John I could be loving them.

What I cannot do is exactly what God does. God is already a family in Himself. God the Father is Father to His one and only Son, Jesus, by the Spirit. And though you and I start off being outside of Him, and outside His family, He desires to bring inside His family by inviting us into Jesus. He says, 'Come to My Son, Jesus. Join your life to his, absolutely, with no holds barred.' Look at the phrase 'in Christ.' The phrase "in him" or "in Christ" or "in the Beloved" occurs 12 times (v.1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 10, 12, 13, 13) in the first 14 verses alone! To the faithful in Christ Jesus. God has blessed you in Christ. He chose you in Christ. He adopted you through Jesus. He is gathering all things in heaven and earth in Christ. God the Father relates to everything in the universe in and through Christ. It's almost as if Jesus is a physical place. He is the sole representative of the Father, not a passive baby but as the mature Son of God in human flesh.

#### **Relevance**

Right away this liberates from a problem and challenges us to come outside of ourselves. The problem is that your picture of God as Father is probably colored by how your dad or apa (Korean), or ba (Chinese), or tatay (Tagalog) or o-tosan (Japanese) treated you. For example, with my dad all that mattered was whether I got straight A's. Dad, I got 5 A's and 1 B: 'A is for average. B is for below average. Do better next time.' Dad, I got 5 A's and an A minus: 'Why the minus? Do better next time.' And then I had to do it again and again! At home, he either had no expression on his face, or an angry expression. And, he was fairly distant. He didn't tell stories about himself; I didn't know things about his life until my senior year in college. For that reason, I thought of God as either stoic or angry, and distant. I had to change my performance oriented view of God, as if God were always angry about my report card. Now, John and Zoe have me as their dad. So they're going to be shaped by my limitations, and my quirky sense of humor. So they might grow up subconsciously thinking that God is going to sit on them and fart on them or something! I'm sure they'll need some healing from that! For some of you, maybe your dad is great, so God feels approachable and warm to you. Even so, there are always ways in which God is fuller and more complete as the Father of Jesus. For some of you, perhaps your dad didn't communicate a whole lot, so God feels silent to

you. Or maybe your dad was proud and concerned about himself, so you think of God as concerned about Himself. We all do this to some extent. But if and when you do that, then you're not experiencing God as the Father He really is. You're experiencing *your dad* as if he were God. Let me say that again: You may not be experiencing God as the Father He really is; you're experiencing *your dad* as if *he* were God.

So if you have an image of God that is not anchored in Jesus, you have an image of God that is not trustworthy. And if you're going to respond to God, which I encourage you to do, you need to have some understanding of God. Who is He? And therefore, who are you?

### Context:

The passage we're looking at together is pure rocket fuel. It's called Ephesians and it's what Paul would say if you sat him down and said, 'Tell me about Jesus and your experience of him.' If you didn't come to him with a problem to solve or a question to answer, and you just let him talk, this is what you'd get: Ephesians. All the other letters he wrote were responses to problems or questions, even Romans, but not this one. This is what Paul really wants everyone to know. *You* are invited! I'll make three simple points about this section. First, God is including you. Second, God is excluding your sin. Third, God wants you to bear the character of His family.

### FIRST: God Includes You

It's important to answer the question, 'Who does God invite into His family?' Does God really want *you*? And *you*? And *you*? YES!!! Now I want to explain why I know that. Because in Ephesians 1:3 – 14, Paul says things like, 'He chose us in him before the foundation of the world... He predestined us to adoption' (v.4 – 5). So I asked this question: Are some people excluded by God from being part of His family? Does the fact that God chose 'us' in v.3 and 4 for salvation also mean that God has not chosen others in some way? Of course, I'm aware that I read this as a Christian. And Paul was writing to Christians. So when I'm discussing this with people who do not identify themselves as Christians or followers of Jesus, what can I say about this? Can I say anything? Well, the *chiasm* helps me answer that. Here is Ephesians 1:3 – 14.

<sup>1:3</sup> **Blessed** be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
who has blessed us with every **spiritual blessing** in the heavenly places in Christ,  
<sup>4</sup> just as **He chose us in him** before the foundation of the world,  
**that we would be holy and blameless** before Him  
in love <sup>5</sup> **He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ** to Himself,

**according to the kind intention of His will,** <sup>6</sup> to the praise of the glory  
**of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us** in the beloved  
<sup>7</sup> in him we have **redemption** through his blood,  
the **forgiveness** of our trespasses, according to the riches  
**of His grace** <sup>8</sup> **which He lavished on us** in all wisdom and insight

<sup>9</sup> He made known to us the mystery of **His will, according to His kind intention** which He purposed  
**in him** <sup>10</sup> with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times,  
that is, the summing up of **all things** in Christ,  
**things** in the heavens and things on the earth  
**in him** <sup>11</sup> also we have obtained an inheritance,

having been **predestined** according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will,  
<sup>12</sup> to the end **that we** who were the first to hope in Christ **would be to the praise of His glory**  
<sup>13</sup> in him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation--**having also  
believed, you were sealed in him with the Holy Spirit of promise,**  
<sup>14</sup> who is given as a pledge of our **inheritance**, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession,  
to the **praise of His glory.**

It's a W on its side. I used to read Ephesians 1:3 – 14 in a *linear* fashion, because in modern Western literature, you read left to right, top to bottom. And usually, what comes first is the main point, and qualifies everything that comes after it. But Ephesians is not modern Western literature. Writers and poets back in the day often spoke or wrote in a structure like this: a chiasm. In a chiasm, the first point matches the last point. The second point matches the second to last point, and so on, until you get to the center. The *center* is the main point. In this case, the center has two points side by side. If we put it in summary form, Ephesians 1:3 – 14 would look like this:

Blessed be God  
 We have every spiritual blessing  
 He chose us in him  
 That we would be holy and blameless  
 He predestined us to adoption  
 According to the kind intention of His will  
 Grace freely bestowed  
 Redemption by his blood  
 Forgiveness of our trespasses  
 Grace lavished upon us  
 According to the kind intention of His will  
 In him is an administration [household]  
 All things summed up in Christ  
 Things in heaven and on earth  
 In him we have an inheritance  
 He predestined us according to His purpose  
 That we would be to the praise of His glory  
 You were sealed in him by the Spirit, having believed  
 We have an inheritance  
 Praise be to God

Now does this happen elsewhere in Scripture? Yes. Paul uses a double chiasmic structure in 1 Corinthians 1:17 – 2:2.<sup>1</sup> Matthew’s Gospel appears to be structured in the same chiasmic way, with a double point at the center of Mt.12:46 – 13:58.<sup>2</sup> And finally, Paul structures Ephesians 2:11 – 22 in a single pointed chiasm, so we can be confident that Paul wanted Ephesians to be poetic.

Okay, so what are the implications? This is why I can say that God is inviting you and you and you. The chiasm means that the thought at the *center* – in this case, the double points of Jesus’ redemption as summing up *all things in Christ* – interprets and explains the points on the outside. Therefore, God is summing up (‘recapitulating’) *all things*, including *all people*, ‘in Christ’ or ‘under’ Christ (v.10). PERIOD. FULL STOP. That is the point of v.10 which sits in the second point of the W. And when Paul talks about ‘us,’ or ‘we,’ and ‘you’ as already in God’s family, that does not mean that other people are excluded or not invited. It just means they didn’t happen to be part of Paul’s immediate audience at the time, but they could be later! ALL THINGS IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH are affected by Jesus, and are invited by God through Jesus.

I’m going to quote from John Calvin’s commentary on John’s Gospel to show that God invites *every single person*. In John 3:17, John says Jesus came ‘not...to condemn the world; but that through him the world might be saved.’ Calvin says, ‘The word ‘world’ is again repeated, that no man may think of himself wholly excluded... showing that he here includes *all men* in the word ‘world’ *instead of restricting it to comprise the elect alone*.’<sup>3</sup> And on John 3:16, Calvin says, ‘He has employed the universal term whosoever, both to invite all indiscriminately to partake of life, and to cut off every excuse from unbelievers... He invites *all men without exception* to the faith of Christ, which is nothing else than an entrance into life.’<sup>4</sup> Now that does not explain everything there is to explain about

<sup>1</sup> See Kenneth Bailey, *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes: Cultural Studies in 1 Corinthians* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011). All of 1 Corinthians is chiasmic, showing that Paul is a master at writing literature this way; see my outlines online at [http://nagasawafamily.org/paul\\_1corinthians.chiasmic.structure.mako.pdf](http://nagasawafamily.org/paul_1corinthians.chiasmic.structure.mako.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> See my paper, *The Chiasmic Structure of Matthew’s Gospel*, <http://nagasawafamily.org/matthew-chiasm.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on John’s Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949) I, New Translation IV, p.75

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, I, p.25, New Translation IV, p.32. In two other places, Calvin sees God inviting every single person to Himself. On John 1:29 ‘the Lamb...which taketh away the sin of the world’ Calvin comments, ‘And when he says the sin of the world he extends his favor indiscriminately to the whole human race.’ (*Commentary on John’s Gospel*, Eerdmans, 1949 I, p.64, New Translation IV, p.32). On Matthew 26:28 and Mark 14:24, ‘blood... shed for many for the remission of sins,’ Calvin explains, ‘By the word ‘many’ He means not a part of the world only, but the whole human race.’ (*Harmony II*, Eerdmans, 1949, p.214 and New Translation, III, p.139)

these words. If you want an even deeper and more thorough explanation, you can ask me later about Romans 9 – 11. But it does give me confidence that we can indeed say that God invites everyone into His family.

### **SECOND: God Excludes Your Sin**

The second point we can see in this passage is that God has overcome the biggest obstacle to bringing you into His family. The obstacle is the sin that is in our blood. You know how you'd just be walking along on campus on a beautiful clear day, enjoying the sun, feeling great, and even letting your heart rise to meet God. And then, all of a sudden, some wicked thought comes into your mind. 'He got a higher grade than me. She's more dressed up than me. He's more popular with the girls than me. She's got a better boyfriend than me. He has more money than me.' What just happened there? When I said that your heart was rising to God, I meant that you were orbiting God like the planets orbit the sun. But you wanted to be the sun, and make everything else revolve around you. You just gave in to sin in you. That's the thing we act on that makes us resist God, His love, and His vision for His family. Then sinning becomes addictive. We like putting ourselves at the center of our own universe.

Illus: My daughter Zoe likes Taylor Swift, and in general, I do, too. But her latest song, *Blank Space* describes a manipulative girl. I don't assume that it's Taylor Swift herself, but the girl character singing the song has walked pretty far down that road of corruption. Here are some of the lyrics.

Nice to meet you, where you been?  
I could show you incredible things  
Magic, madness, heaven, sin  
Saw you there and I thought  
Oh my God, look at that face  
You look like my next mistake  
Love's a game, wanna play? [then she goes on]  
...  
Screaming, crying, perfect storms  
I can make all the tables turn  
Rose garden filled with thorns  
Keep you second guessing like  
"Oh my God, who is she?"  
I get drunk on jealousy  
But you'll come back each time you leave  
'Cause, darling, I'm a nightmare dressed like a daydream

So it's gonna be forever  
Or it's gonna go down in flames  
You can tell me when it's over  
If the high was worth the pain  
Got a long list of ex-lovers  
They'll tell you I'm insane  
'Cause you know I love the players  
And you love the game

'Cause we're young and we're reckless  
We'll take this way too far  
It'll leave you breathless  
Or with a nasty scar  
Got a long list of ex-lovers  
They'll tell you I'm insane  
But I've got a blank space, baby  
And I'll write your name

Boys only want love if it's torture  
Don't say I didn't say, I didn't warn ya

That's messed up! It's so self-centered. At the moment, I think most pop songs on the radio are messed up. Yet somehow we resonate with them. Maybe not all the way to the point where we're 'like animals' as Maroon 5 says in that totally male-oriented, rape-culture song, or 'like a black widow, baby' as Iggy Azalea says about manipulation. But there's something in us that connects with the cravings, the craving for revenge, the craving for revenge sex, the craving for power. That's why we need God to redeem us, according to v.7: 'redemption through his blood.'

What is redemption, and why is blood tied to it? Is it because God the Father is BLOODTHIRSTY? Did he demand blood until Jesus gave it to him? No. It's because God is a BLOOD DONOR. God donates blood; He gives life. Blood in Scripture represents life. That's why J.K. Rowling, who wrote Harry Potter with Christian imagery, tied blood to life. Unicorn blood gave life. Dragon blood healed Hagrid's face; it healed life. And human blood could carry love; it tied life to life. Rowling was working from the Old Testament – Leviticus 17:11, for example – which says that blood contains life and represents life. But it's everywhere in the Old Testament.<sup>5</sup>

Illus: How many of you read at least one article or listened to one news story last year about Ebola? In December of 2014, Time magazine named Ebola fighters the people of the year (<http://time.com/time-person-of-the-year-ebola-fighters-choice/>). Ebola makes your eyes bleed and your organs dissolve and your nurses afraid to go near you for fear of getting Ebola and your doctors despair for having no cure. One person who got Ebola said, 'It hurts like they are busting your head with an ax.' But one man named Foday Gallah, an ambulance driver, survived the sickness, almost miraculously so. So now, after he fought the disease, his blood carries an immunity. He says, 'He calls his immunity a holy gift. "I want to give my blood so a lot of people can be saved...I am going to fight Ebola with all of my might."' I think that's awesome what Foday Gallah is doing. I think it's even more awesome what Jesus is doing for you and me.

Human nature had been corrupted by Adam and Eve while they lived in the first garden land. Then God had called Israel as a chosen people to come out of Egypt into another garden land. They were supposed to be God's new humanity.

How many of you have seen the Dreamworks movie *The Prince of Egypt*, where Mariah Carey and Whitney Houston sing the duet *Miracles*? Well, when Paul thinks about God's redemption, he was thinking of that movie. Well, in reality he was thinking about the Passover and Exodus story. He structures Ephesians 1:3 – 14 on it. Notice the parallels. When Israel was in Egypt, God called them 'my firstborn son' in Exodus 4:22. Notice Paul uses the phrase 'adoption as sons' in v.5.<sup>6</sup> When God brought Israel out of Egypt, He did it with the blood of the Passover lamb in Exodus 12 – 14. Notice that Paul uses the phrase 'redemption through his blood' in v.7. When God brought Israel into the Promised Land, that land was their 'inheritance.' Notice that Paul says God gives people an 'inheritance' in v.14. This is how the symbolism worked in the Passover, so that when you read the Old Testament alongside Ephesians, you can get it. God gave back the blood of the Passover lamb, that is, the life of the Passover lamb, to Israel so they could walk through it. The blood marked the door. They walked through innocent life into a new identity and a new inheritance – a garden land.

But Israel messed up, too, because they had the same problem of the foreign power still in them. Jeremiah called it a deceitful heart (Jer.4:4; 17:1 – 10; 31:31 – 34). Ezekiel called it a heart of stone (Ezk.11:18; 36:26 – 36). There were other names for it, and God needed Israel to diagnose the disease and document it and detest it. So Micah the prophet said, 'Yes, You [Lord] will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea [not just the external enemy of the Egyptians, but the internal enemy of sin, into the depths of the sea]' (Mic.7:19). Because the problem was never just

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<sup>5</sup> In the Old Testament sacrificial system at the Temple, God was acting like a dialysis machine. He said, 'Give me your impurity. I'll give you back purity. Give me the corruption of your sin by laying your hand on the animals. And I'll give you back the uncorrupted life of the animal – its blood – so I can purify you.' But one day, into the symbolism stepped the reality. If there's a problem in us, God's solution must also come into us.

<sup>6</sup> The practice of adoption back then in the ancient and classical world was not of children. It was of adult men so a family could make that person the heir, like when Emperor Claudius adopted a young man to be his heir, and that young man took the name Nero. So Paul is not sexist here. He's using a cultural point of reference. Even though the cultural connection point is 'adoption as sons,' the deeper spiritual reality includes women – God as a Father adopts women and children to be his heirs, in the same way that Claudius adopted Nero to be heir to the throne of the Roman Empire. And, it's how God named Israel in Egypt.

being enslaved to Egypt. The problem was being enslaved to *a foreign power inside you*. You know that something is wrong inside you. You're drawn to things that are ridiculous. You know your sense of self has not been stable. You're not anchored in the goodness of God.

So the Father included you in the Son, but excluded your sin. How? Through one man doing it within himself. That's Jesus!! When Paul says 'in the beloved' at the end of v.6, he means 'in *the chosen one*.' If you want to know why I say that, look at how Matthew and Luke used those titles interchangeably. This is the same incident.

A voice out of the cloud said,

'This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased;  
listen to him!' (Matthew 17:5)

Then a voice came out of the cloud, saying,

'This is My Son, My Chosen One;  
listen to him!' (Luke 9:35)

There are more ways I could demonstrate that<sup>7</sup>, and Paul uses these terms in the same way. Do you see how the title of chosen people narrows down to Jesus as chosen one? Jesus is the beloved one, the chosen one, who represents Israel and all humanity. Even though Neo in *The Matrix* movies was called the chosen one, he couldn't do what Jesus did. Anakin Skywalker in *Star Wars* was called the chosen one, but he couldn't do what Jesus did. Adam and Eve were chosen to reject sin and evil, but we kept giving in. So Jesus came to do something for us that no one could do. Not Israel. Not you. Not me. Jesus alone redeemed human nature.

Again, here is what John Calvin said about that: 'From the moment he put on the person of a servant, he began to pay the price of liberation for our redemption...In order, however, to define the manner of salvation more surely, scripture ascribes it to Christ's death as its property and attribute. Yet there is no exclusion of the rest of the obedience which he performed in his life; as Paul comprehends the whole of it, from the beginning to the end, when he says, 'he made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross'...Nor was this without inward conflict, because he had taken our infirmities, and it was necessary to give this proof of his obedience to his Father. And it was no mean specimen of his incomparable love to us, to contend with horrible fear, and amid those dreadful torments to neglect all care of himself, that he might promote our benefit.'<sup>8</sup> Calvin himself says that it's not just Jesus' *death*. It's his *whole life, including his death and resurrection*, that saves us. His whole life was the undoing of human sin and the forging of a *new life* in himself for us and for our salvation.

What other hero does that? What other god does that? He jumped into a human body like ours. He got the disease we have. He fought it, despite the pain, the struggle, the misunderstanding he faced, the loneliness, and outside of himself the poverty, the police brutality, and the evils that we face, too. Now he has the immunity. Jesus jumped into the plight of his people, because he loved us, and he's the only one who could get us out. He can get it out of us because he got it out of himself.

Illus: So how do we feel about the Father, who was with Jesus on this incredible mission? Here's a distant parallel. This past summer, one of the big changes in my kids was that my son John, who is 14, started to really push himself physically. He wanted to go to the YMCA, so we would go as a family. He started to play a lot of basketball. He wanted to lift weights a little bit, so I've started teaching him. But he also would challenge his sister Zoe, who is 12. He would say to her, 'You're lazy. You're fat.' Now no 12 year old girl needs to be called that. So I sat him down and said, 'John, I'm glad you're pushing yourself hard. I'm glad that you can be tough with yourself. But Zoe is not

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<sup>7</sup> Additionally, (1) the Jewish rulers call Jesus *the Chosen One* when they mock him (Lk.23:35), showing that Jews were comfortable calling the Messiah by that title. (2) The quotation from Isaiah's Servant Song marking Jesus out as 'My Servant whom I have *chosen*, My *beloved* in whom my soul is well-pleased' (Mt.12:18) also ties together the titles of *chosen one* and *beloved one*. (3) Because of the literary and thematic connection between the baptism and the transfiguration, the pronouncement at Jesus' baptism from the Father that Jesus is the *beloved Son* (Mt.3:13 – 17; Lk.3:21 – 22) also attests to Jesus being the *chosen one*. This attests to the Jewish view already present that the Messiah would represent Israel in himself.

<sup>8</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes* 2.16.5

lazy. I don't want her to be lifting weights; she'd too young. That's why she does the treadmill and situps. I'm her coach, not you. And she's not fat. Do not say that. You are trying to be motivating but you're being mean.' But he kept on doing that, saying that he wants her to challenge him. I said it two more times to him. I tried to help him understand that you and your sister have been friends, but at your ages you're starting to be different. But he kept on doing it. Finally, on the fourth time, I said, 'John, if you need your sister to compete with you, *that is your weakness.*' Notice what's going on. Am I against John? No, I'm *for* him. I'm *excluding* his sin. He finally got it. The next day, John went to the backyard to play basketball. He said to Zoe, 'Do you want to play?' Zoe said no. She has always been kind of uncoordinated and self-conscious. It's hard for Zoe to try new things when it comes to sports. John said, 'You know if you come to Boston Latin next year, you'll have gym, and they'll make you play basketball.' Zoe said okay. And she went out back and dribbled the ball and tried making baskets. The next day, before John went to school, I said to him, 'John, I'm really proud of you. I'm really glad you were able to encourage your sister and not make fun of her. And look at what happened. Zoe tried playing basketball. You know how hard it is for her to try things she knows she's not good at.'

But again, the Father acted first in and through Jesus. Throughout Jesus' life, the Father was cheering for Jesus. The letter to the Hebrews tells us that the Son had to learn obedience (Heb.5:8). So twice the Father opened the heavens to say with a booming voice, 'This is MY BOY!!!' Okay, really: 'This is My Son, My beloved, My chosen one.' Why? Because Jesus was succeeding at working out the weakness in himself. At Gethsemane the night before he was crucified, Jesus prayed, 'If there's any other way to perfect the antidote to sin in my blood... okay there's not... so not my will but yours be done.' Especially at Gethsemane, when Jesus was feeling weak, the Father said, 'TRUE, THERE IS NO OTHER WAY TO DEFEAT THE SIN IN YOURSELF. BUT I WILL HELP YOU. YOU ARE NOT ALONE.' And in Luke's Gospel, the Father sends an angel to strengthen Jesus. And even on the cross, even though Jesus was forsaken to the Gentiles because the Jews rejected him, like his predecessor King David long ago was forsaken to the Gentiles because the Jews rejected him, too, still the Father did not forsake Jesus in an absolute sense. He was with Jesus, always, and helped Jesus finally defeat it when Jesus said, 'It is finished!' The Father, and the Son, and the Spirit did all that for us, so when Jesus rose from the dead, he rose with a purified humanity that includes you, so you can share in him.

Illus: There's this short exercise [or video clip] that illustrates this. In Jar #1, labeled human, has an ink stain. It is not clear as it should be. It represents you and me with the corruption of sin in us. So Jar #2 has the same thing. Now in Jar #3, labeled God, is clear liquid. When God in the person of His Son entered into Mary's womb, he became human and took to himself a human nature just like ours. Throughout his life and death and resurrection, he purified that human nature. [Pour the clear liquid from Jar #3 into Jar #1; it will turn clear, too]. Now Jesus can pour himself into us by his Spirit. [Pour the clear liquid from Jar #1 to Jar #2; it will turn clear, too].

What if you feel like you've messed up? Like you're too far gone? Well, for all the messed up stuff you and I did, for all the ways we acted on those cravings, or even just had the cravings at all, Jesus gives us 'the forgiveness of our trespasses' in the second part of v.7. Not from a distance by changing his mind about us, but by changing *us*, by pouring *himself into us*. All the ways you said 'yes' to the cravings, God forgives!! All the ways we caved, God forgives!! He knows everything you've done. Especially the things you've tried to keep secret!! But He's never been against *you*. He's against your *sinfulness*. God excludes your sinfulness. First in the humanity of Jesus, then in you by the Spirit. GOD HAS ALWAYS HAD A SPECIAL PLACE FOR YOU, AND THAT PLACE IS IN JESUS!!!

That's awesome because deep down, whether you know it or not, you are made in the image of God, and you want to be free from your sinfulness, and free to be who God made you: His image-bearer, His child. You want God's goodness. You want God's love. You want God's beauty. You want God's integrity. You want God's vision for relationship. You want God's restorative justice to be done. You want God's strength. You are meant to be a little package of God-ness, wrapped in humanity. So in Jesus is the life of God, the God-stuff, you need. He's already saved your humanity, for God and for God's family.

### **THIRD: God Wants You to Bear the Character of His Family**

That brings us to the third point. God heals us to be His family. Verse 4 and verses 12 are opposite each other in the chiasm. Paul says, 'that we would be holy and blameless before Him' in v.4 and then says, 'to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory' in v.12. Paul is really speaking of the

destination that God has marked out for all people: to be like Jesus. What does it mean to be a child in God's family? Look at Jesus. What does that mean practically? It depends on the issue. But here's a story

Illus: One of the long story threads of my life is the thread that goes from my fear to Jesus' love in the form of courage. I grew feeling a lot of fears. Maybe it came from being teased for being Asian by some non-Asian people who lived in my neighborhood. Maybe it came from being bullied and chased by bigger boys on bikes. My mom was fearful that somehow all our money would one day disappear because she grew up in poverty. So she would always say, 'What will you do if you don't have any money? Do you want a beautiful wife?' That more than anything struck fear into my heart. 'Oh my gosh!!! If I'm not successful, I'll never have a beautiful wife!! And I really wanted a beautiful wife!' My dad was fearful of racial discrimination because he had lived through the Japanese-American internment. So he was angry when I showed weakness. But when I gave my life to Jesus and entered into my adoption into God's family, He began to reshape me from my old family values into His family values.

After my freshman year in college, I had to make a major decision. I had just gone away to college, and my younger sister had just started high school. I had been praying that she would come to know Jesus. So one day she told me on the phone that she had been going to a Christian club that met every day at lunch. It was put on by a history teacher. On Mondays, this teacher would have a worship time. On Tuesdays, there would be a Bible study. On Wednesdays, he would invite a student from a nearby Bible college to come and teach a passage of the Scriptures. On Thursdays, there would be a time for discussion. And on Fridays, there'd be a movie or games or something. My sister came to know about Jesus and eventually accepted Christ that year because this teacher was so psyched about Christ and spreading God's kingdom, even at a public school! I went to meet this man, and to me, he was funny looking. He had gray hair, he wore a red plaid shirt and bright red tie. But joy was written all over his face, and I said to myself, 'I can see myself doing this. This is important work.' I said to him, 'Thank you.' He said, 'God bless you.' I took all of my sophomore year to think about the kingdom of God. The next summer, I told my parents that I MIGHT want to be a high school teacher, and I wanted to take a step in that direction to see if it fit me. They were furious. They demanded, 'Why are we sending you to Stanford, then?!' Shocked, I said, 'I don't know.' The summer of 1992 was filled with tension. My parents threatened to yank me out of school. I wanted to hold on to Stanford. The question for me at that point was, 'What would I seek first? Being completely available to follow Christ? Or following my own agenda and having a nice backup plan called a Stanford degree?' By the end of that summer, in my heart, I let go of Stanford, I let go of a cushy lifestyle, I let go of however making big money made me an 'eligible bachelor.' As best I knew how, I asked Jesus Christ to be the only King for me. I said to my parents, 'I'm not saying that I KNOW I want to teach high school. I'm just saying that I'd like the freedom to explore it. But if sending me to Stanford makes you feel like you have control over my choices, I'll leave Stanford. I'll put myself through school somewhere else. It may take longer, but it'll be okay.' I meant it. Later, they said they would keep sending me to Stanford, and that I could choose. But the significant part of that episode is that Jesus used it to change something deep in my heart. I learned something about God making me part of His family, and bearing the character of His family.

May you experience the same!!

#### Questions

1. In what sense is God inclusive? In what sense is God exclusive? How do you feel about both?
2. How does this shape your sense of identity and purpose?
  - a. If you ever felt like a burden, like an accident, unwanted, or forgotten, how does this impact you?
3. Jesus alone delivers us from, and forgives us for, the corruption of sin. What do you think about that?
  - a. To what area of your life is Jesus speaking to make you 'holy and blameless' (v.4) and 'to the praise of his glory' (v.12)?