

## **Union With Christ** *Paul's Letter to the Ephesians*

### **Our Security by the Spirit** *Ephesians 1:11 – 14*

#### **Introduction: The Sure Family Inheritance**

One of my favorite children in the Cooley Apartments in East Palo Alto was a ten year old girl named Nora Gonzales. Nora has a vivid imagination, and one of her favorite stories is Frances Hodgson Burnett's *A Little Princess*, which she and I watched on video. Now in that story, young Sara Crewe, who also has a very vivid imagination, is sent to a boarding school in New York while her father is sent to the battlefields of World War I. Her mother had already passed away. Before he leaves, the gentle Mr. Crewe tells Sara, "You are my little princess." Sarah has a secure inheritance: she has a beautiful gold locket. Inside that locket is a picture of her father and mother, and it reminds her that she will always be her father's precious little daughter. Then Mr. Crewe leaves, and little Sara falls into the not-so-gentle hands of Miss Minchin the governess, who of course is overweight and frowns all the time. Now during her stay there, Sara makes several friends, and with her vivid imagination she begins telling stories to all the girls there. She tells them all little girls are little princesses. But Miss Minchin crosses her arms and says, "Sara, no more of your stories." Then word comes to the boarding school: Mr. Crewe was lost in the field of battle, so Sara no longer has no family or family inheritance. Is it true? Does Sara really have nothing? Ms. Minchin sure thinks so. She snatches Sara's pendant and throws her into the attic. Sara cries hopelessly. Where is her inheritance as her father's little princess? But the inheritance, symbolized by her pendant, cannot be destroyed. In a daring plot by all the girls in the school, Sara gains her pendant again. And true to form, after many days in that attic, Sara escapes and runs to this house where she discovers a man recovering from amnesia. It's her father! And just as Miss Minchin comes leading the police to take Sara away, Mr. Crewe snaps out of his amnesia and cries out, "Sara!!" And in the end, Miss Minchin becomes a lowly chimney sweep, and Sara is given her father, her father's love, and her father's family inheritance. And he says to her, "You are my little princess."

That is the theme of Ephesians 1:11-14: We also have a safe and sure family inheritance. Right now it is the love of God our Father, and in Eternity it will be whole earth. We will inherit everything He owns. That inheritance is kind of like that pendant. That pendant held a picture of Sara's father. Our pendant, so to speak, is the Spirit of God living in us if we have faith in Jesus Christ. The Spirit holds a picture of God our Father.

In this great poem in Ephesians 1:3-14, we've learned how the Father loves us by adopting us into His family. We've also learned how the Son loves us by purchasing us into that family by redemption. We then found that we are invited into God's family household which is built by the apostles in Jesus. Now we'll learn how the Spirit loves us by safeguarding our family inheritance until Eternity comes. So let's jump in!

#### **We Are Jesus' Inheritance: v.11-12**

What does it mean that we are enfolded into God's family? It means that we are the inheritance of Jesus Christ, as Paul says beginning with that little fragment in v.10, "In him," and in v.11-12, "also we have been made an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of His glory."

By this "we" Paul is speaking of the apostles, those men hand-picked by Jesus "who were the first to hope in Christ." That's distinguished from the "you" in v.13-14 when Paul looks to his audience, the Ephesians. Now the NASB says we have obtained an inheritance, and the NIV is more vague and says we have been chosen, but the Greek is literally, "we were made an inheritance." You might catch on quick and say, "Hey, isn't it the other way around? Isn't God *our* inheritance?" That is true. While we do have an inheritance as heirs in God's royal family, and Paul mentions that in v.13-14, there is also this twin theme that WE are the inheritance that Jesus gets from God, and that we is specifically the apostles. Both are true.

I'm going to spend more time on God being our inheritance, but let's look for a few minutes on this truth that we are Jesus' inheritance. God had said to Israel, "You are My inheritance." They were His prized possession. And now Paul says that the church is what God gives to Jesus as his inheritance, too. This gives us a tremendous insight into

who we are. We were made to be wanted and valued and fully owned by Jesus Christ. That seems like a strange thing to say, but I think we all have a deep need to belong to someone greater than ourselves. We feel that way when we fall in love, don't we? It's thrills us to no end to have that special someone say, "You're mine, I want you, you belong to me." That is how Jesus regards us. We are his inheritance. He is looking forward to the day when he can claim his bride, the church.

Furthermore, this was no accident. We are not second prize. We were wanted by God from the beginning of time, since in v.11 we were predestined. He already said that in v.5, so why does Paul repeat this point? I think it's because we do a lot of things to be desirable. We think that we are chosen after we do something to impress someone else. But usually that creates a barrier for show, a kind of thick wall of pride that makes you attractive on the outside, but quite unattractive on the inside. So let this sink into you. You are so precious, you are Jesus' inheritance.

(Predestination, or God's choice, is always hard to understand, but it is put alongside our choice. This happens in two places. Once in the rest of v.11, when Paul says that we "were the first to hope in Christ," in other words, we let him define our security and our confidence, which is what hope means biblically. Then our choice is mentioned a second time in v.13, "In him you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation, having also believed." So we believed in the gospel, which certainly involves our choice. God's choice and our choice are put together here.)

#### **We Have Obtained An Inheritance: v.13-14**

On the other hand, we have also obtained an inheritance. God gives *us* something, too. In v.13-14, Paul speaks to us, "In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit, 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." There in v.14, Paul refers to "our inheritance." What is our inheritance? Usually we think of an inheritance as something we get when a rich relative passes away. We usually think of it as monetary. But the inheritance that God gives us is not really like that. It's much, more more.

First of all, our inheritance has a future component. This is what is emphasized in v.14. There is a present component which is emphasized in v.18, but right now, what Paul appears to be talking about is yet future. One facet of our inheritance is incredible wealth. The entire world will be given to those of us who believe in Jesus when Jesus comes again. In ancient Israel, there was a role called the "goel," the kinsman redeemer, who would restore any ancestral land that they had lost. Often what happened in Old Testament times was that a Jew would be financially strapped, so he would sell his inheritance of land for a time. In reality it was a loan because the land was supposed to return to him. If he wasn't able to buy it back, however, someone in his family bought back his inheritance. That person, spoken of in Leviticus 25:18-28, was the kinsman redeemer. He bought back your lost inheritance. Christ is the fulfillment of the kinsman redeemer, buying back our lost inheritance, which is all of God's love and the whole world. Adam lost the world, but Jesus bought it back for us. We're going to own the whole world. And not this world as it is, but a transformed world.

Here is how Isaiah, one of the greatest of poets, has described that world:

The wilderness and the desert will be glad,  
And the Arabah will rejoice and blossom  
Like the crocus it will blossom profusely  
And rejoice with the rejoicing and shout of joy.  
The glory of Lebanon [magnificent forests] will be given to it  
The majesty of Carmel and Sharon.  
They will see the glory of the LORD, the majesty of our God.  
Encourage the exhausted, and strengthen the feeble  
Say to those with anxious heart, "Take courage, fear not.  
Behold, your God will come with vengeance  
The recompense of God will come, but He will save you."  
Then the eyes of the blind will be opened,  
And the ears of the deaf will be unstopped.  
Then the lame will leap like a deer,

And the tongue of the dumb will shout for joy.  
 For waters will break forth in the wilderness,  
 And streams in the Arabah.  
 And the scorched land will become a pool,  
 And the thirsty ground springs of water  
 In the haunt of jackals, its resting place,  
 Grass becomes reeds and rushes.  
 And a highway will be there, a roadway,  
 And it will be called the Way of Holiness  
 The unclean will not travel on it,  
 But it will be for him who walks [in that] way  
 And fools will not wander on it  
 No lion will be there,  
 Nor will any vicious beast go up on it  
 These will not be found there.  
 But the redeemed will walk there  
 And the ransomed of the LORD will return,  
 And come with joyful shouting to Zion,  
 With everlasting joy upon their heads.  
 They will find gladness and joy,  
 And sorrow and sighing will flee away. (Isa.35:1-10)

That's the world we will live in. How do you feel knowing that you will inherit the world? Not the world as it is, but a world transformed and healed by God. This has got to free us up from one of the grossest sins of our day and age: materialism. One Old Testament character, our ancient forefather of the faith, Abraham, also learned this. God had promised the land of Canaan to his children as an inheritance. And Abraham knew that God would be faithful, so when there was some conflict with his nephew Lot, Abraham shared his future land with Lot. Abraham said, "Look, is not the whole land before you? Please separate from me, and go to the left or the right. Wherever you go, that will be yours." (Gen.13:1-13 paraphrased) We can afford to be generous in the same way. The whole world will be ours one day, so we can be generous with it now. Don't fall into materialism. And I don't mean the materialism that's really obvious, the mad running around trying to acquire lots and lots of money. I mean the materialism that's really subtle, the kind that passes itself off as reasonable and healthy. The kind that says, "Maybe I should be a little more financially secure." Or, "Maybe I should live in a better neighborhood." There will be time for that when we get our inheritance. But for now, our call is to be totally available to Jesus, and allow him to make any sacrifice through us he pleases.

A second facet of our inheritance is incredible victory. Evil and suffering will be done away with. War will be no more, as we will beat our swords into plowshares. Poverty and homelessness will be no more. Racism will be no more. Satan will be cast into the lake of fire. Every person in the Bible looked forward to that time. Those who have rejected Jesus will have their choice sealed forever. Isaiah also says at the end of his book, "Then they shall go forth and look on the corpses of the men who have transgressed against Me. For their worm shall not die, and their fire shall not be quenched; and they shall be an abhorrence to all mankind." (Isa.66:24) There will be no more persecution or people mocking Christians. God's victory on our behalf will be total.

Another facet of our inheritance is incredible privilege. Paul says we will judge angels (1 Cor.6:1-3), possibly meaning that we will be put in charge of them. Jesus says in a parable that we will be in charge of cities (Lk.19:11-27), possibly making healthy urban development for the first time in human history based on God's pattern of the New Jerusalem. In Revelation, we will be vessels through which the glory of God pours out light for all the world (Rev.22:5). There won't be a need for electricity, nuclear power, or coal burning because we will be the light bearers. The role we will play in that eternal world to come is unimaginable. We will be privileged beyond belief.

And the most important facet of our inheritance is incredible intimacy with God and with each other. We'll see God face to face. It'll be like meeting a great pen pal face to face, but of course better. On the one hand, it'll feel simple, like coming home from school, walking through the door, and crossing the threshold. Everything will be familiar. The scents and smells and sight of home will feel familiar. But on the other hand, it'll feel new. God will wipe every last tear from our eyes, personally. God will answer all our questions, personally. God will say, "Well done, my faithful servant. Welcome home." And all the believers throughout all of history will be there, the heroes and heroines that we've looked up to, our Christian friends who we've gone through life with and struggled with and

supported, and the younger men and women that we've disciplined. The great family of God that is sharing in this rich inheritance with us will all be there. And we'll have all the time in the world for eternal joy and eternal conversation.

To anyone who has ever wondered what will happen to us when we die, the Christian can answer, "I'm going to receive my inheritance from God." I hope that we grasp just a little bit more of the inheritance that's coming to us, because we have no reason to personally fear death. There may be complications for people we leave behind; I'm not saying it would be easy for them! But for us, there is no reason why we need to fear death for ourselves. And what's more, knowing that we have this inheritance coming to us gives us more reason to be patient in the here and now. We can be generous in the here and now because we've got the whole world coming. We can endure pain and suffering because we've got a victory coming. We can be humble and seem insignificant now because we've got mountains of significance and meaning coming. And we can be patient with people, understanding, and forgiving now because we've got incredible intimacy coming that will fulfill us to no end. Does that raise your heart in hope? Set your eyes on the future that's waiting!

### **Our Inheritance Secure Because of the Spirit: v.13-14**

Can we be sure of our future with God? YES! In fact, Paul says we have a guarantee. "You were sealed in him with the Holy Spirit of promise."

Let's start with square one. Who is the Holy Spirit? When I first heard about the Holy Spirit, I thought it was just some ghost-like being. In Ephesus in about 51 AD, when Paul arrived for the first time, he encountered some people who asked the same thing. In Acts 19:1-7, during this encounter, they asked, "Huh? We haven't heard about the Holy Spirit." Paul had to tell the Ephesians about the Spirit of God for the first time. So this is not a question with an obvious answer. It's not something that we can just look around and deduce.

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the God Who Exists in Three Persons. He is called the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ (Rom.8:9) equally. How God can be three in one is beyond what we can explain. However, we can still try to understand the Spirit better. Throughout the Scriptures, the Spirit of God is involved in breathing life from God into people. In Genesis 1, when God was creating life, the Spirit brooded and then God spoke life into being. In Genesis 2, when God created Adam out of earth, God breathed into Adam and he became alive. After the Fall, God restored certain people to a very unique relationship with Himself by putting His Spirit upon that person. So Moses had God's Spirit upon him. Joshua and King David had God's Spirit anointing them. Having God's Spirit gave people supernatural life. Sometimes people were stronger than they were before. Sometimes they spoke more eloquently than before. Sometimes they were smarter than before. The Spirit lets power from God flow into us, so that God can accomplish something incredible through us. Jesus taught about the Holy Spirit taking on a very specific role after him. Jesus said that the Spirit would come to permanently live inside every person who comes to faith in him, and then the Spirit would begin to reproduce the character of Jesus in each person. So, after the resurrection, Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit into the 11 apostles after the resurrection (Jn.20) and fifty days later, all 120 disciples received the Spirit. At that time, God began to display the life of Christ again, but in every single believer. It was like lots of Jesuses running around! That is why the early Christians got the name "Christian." They were "little Christs," which is what that name meant. They were just like Jesus because Jesus was living in them by the Spirit. That is the basic summary of what the Holy Spirit does. There are a few other things, but they are all subsumed in that one basic goal.

Now in this case, Paul focuses on how permanent the Holy Spirit is in us. He says that the Holy Spirit seals us into Jesus. What does that mean? First and foremost, it meant *ownership*. Whoever makes the seal is making a claim to ownership over the thing sealed. In the ancient world, when a sack or a crate or a package was closed, it was sealed with some hot wax dripped onto it. Then a stamp was made on it, leaving the mark of the owner. Secondly, it means *preservation*. No one was supposed to break the seal except the owner. Or, if a sealed package was dispatched, no one was supposed to break the seal except the rightful recipient. Everyone was supposed to respect the authority invested in that seal. Thirdly, it also meant *protection*. I read that Alexander the Great once sent an emissary bearing his seal to Egypt. The man traveled without weapons or military escort. His only protection was the seal of the great conqueror. When he met the ruler of Egypt, the mighty king stood in his royal splendor with the army of Egypt behind him. The emissary ordered the king, "Cease hostilities against Alexander's interest." Hoping to save face, the king said he would consider this and let him know. Alexander's man drew a circle in the dirt around the king's feet and said, "Do not leave this circle without informing me of your response." The king of

Egypt had an entire army at his back. The emissary was alone and unarmed. Yet the Egyptian could not touch him because he wore the seal of Alexander. To touch him was to touch Alexander. To anger him was to anger Alexander. Realizing this, the king said, "Tell Alexander he has his request." Isn't that amazing? We have God's protection in the spiritual realm because God's Spirit lives in us.

So what does it mean that the Spirit is our seal? It means these three things: God owns us, God preserves us, God protects us. All three. No one is going to mess with that seal. No one can break it. No one is going to challenge God to remove that seal, provided that that person has *truly* made a commitment to be identified with Jesus, and not just a weak, half-hearted response to a watered down message. And look where we are sealed: in Jesus. Paul says in the latter half of v.13 that after the decisive moment when we first placed our faith in Christ, "having also believed, you were sealed in him with the Holy Spirit of promise."

I think God did this very deliberately. When the Romans sealed Jesus into the tomb, they stamped the seal of the Roman Emperor on the stone (Matthew 27:66). That seal said that Caesar owned that tomb, Caesar was preserving the tomb and keeping it off limits by protecting it with Roman guards and Roman law. No one dared break the seal and enter that tomb for fear of death. But God broke through that seal because God is greater than Caesar. And to protect us, now God seals us INTO JESUS, not into a box, not into a tomb, not into an envelope, but into Jesus! We are sealed into Jesus' living resurrection life. That's why Jesus takes us out of the tomb, beyond death, beyond any other power, and seats us on the heavenly throne where he himself is seated (Eph.2:5-6). Ain't nobody's going to break God's seal! The Holy Spirit is the royal emblem of God that cannot be broken.

And that seal of the Spirit was put on us at one particular moment and one moment only. Paul does not say, "As you continue believing, you are sealed," or "To the extent that you keep believing, you are sealed." He speaks of a one time event in the past perfect tense. "Having believed in the gospel" AT ONE SPECIFIC TIME, "we were sealed" in Christ AT ONE SPECIFIC TIME. Paul reinforces this once and for all sealing in Ephesians 4:30 when he says, "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." I realize that we still need to continue in faith, as Paul says in Colossians, but on the basis of this text, I must conclude that God does something else in the spiritual realm that seals me permanently into Jesus. He makes the basis of my future security more than just my choice alone.

Jesus put it this way in John 6:39-40: "And this is the will of Him who sent me, that of all that He has given me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in him may have eternal life, and I myself will raise him up on the last day." In John 10:27-29, Jesus says, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. And I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand." Finally, in John 17:12, Jesus claimed responsibility for the disciples: "While I was with them, I was keeping them." HALLELUJAH!

Let's look at this even more closely. Why else can we be secure in who we are in Christ? How can we be sure about the inheritance we're going to get? Because the Spirit is also "given as a pledge of our inheritance." The word pledge is "arrabon." It means first an installment, guarantee, deposit, down-payment, pledge. So in other words, first you get the arrabon. Later, you'll get the whole thing. Today, a down-payment on a house is your promise of a full payment. Back then, the arrabon was a regular feature of the Greek business world, and we have many Greek commercial documents about this (e.g. a woman sells a cow and receives so many drachmae as an arrabon). It was possibly first a Hebrew word that became Greek through Phoenician traders. It was a part of the purchase price of anything, paid in advance as a guarantee that the rest would be paid later. Thus, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in us is a guarantee and a down-payment that God will fulfill the promise.

An engagement ring is like an arrabon. It's a promise of a full wedding and marriage relationship. When I proposed to Ming, I decorated her room. I put down a glass vase with an orange lily and surrounded it with thorns and dead leaves, twigs, and branches. Next to it I put a sign that said, "Like a lily among the thorns, so is my darling Ming among the maidens. -Song of Solomon 2:2" And I got ivy plants and lots of flowers and draped them around a chair. When I walked her in there, I sat her down on the chair, then I got down on one knee. I was nervous, because even though we had talked before about getting married, and even though I knew she would say "Yes," I still felt totally vulnerable getting down on my knee and offering her my life. Luckily, she didn't wait too long before saying "Yes!" Then I took the engagement ring from my clammy hands and put it on her finger. I swear that my heart and

stomach were spinning when I did that. That engagement ring is a guarantee, a deposit, a pledge of something more to come. In this case, I could only give a small ring. But God gives Himself, in the person of His Spirit. **HERE IS THE INCREDIBLY THOROUGH CARE OF GOD. GOD PLEDGES HIMSELF TO US AS A FORESHADOWING OF HOW HE WILL PLEDGE HIMSELF TO US ETERNALLY. HE SEALS US INTO HIMSELF WITH HIMSELF. GOD'S CARE SURPASSES ANYTHING WE HAVE EVER KNOWN, AND THE WAY GOD LOVES US BY ENVELOPING US WITHIN HIMSELF IS SOMETHING WHICH EVEN NOW BRINGS US UNSPEAKABLE INTIMACY.**

If you're anything like me, you're wondering when we'll get this inheritance. When, when, when?? The Greek phrase that Paul uses is "with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory." When we are finally redeemed, which in this case means that time when Jesus comes to get us and take us home. We are God's own possession. God's already paid the price for us, and He's given each of us a seal and a pledge by putting His Spirit into us. So one day very soon, when His purposes are finished in this space and time, He will come back and bring us home.

That is what you need to do to get this relationship with God and this inheritance He gives. You need to listen to the message of truth and believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ which brings salvation. You need to stop boasting in yourself and thinking that you're good enough. That is garbage. Toss it out and be done with it. Nothing you can do can put you in good standing with God because He sees it all for what it is: You're just comparing yourself with other people and being judgmental about them in areas where He Himself is merciful to them. So not only is that an insult to other people, it's an insult to God and His sole right to sit alone on the Judge's bench without you trying to squeeze on there. If you have not yet come to Jesus Christ and humbled yourself before him, trusting him alone to make you right with God, you can do so right now!