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The Work of the Holy Spirit

Ephesians 1:11-14

Intro: Has anybody paid attention to the news over the last week? I'm not much of a news hound but there seems to be a lot of talk about an indictment or something. Everyone seems to be talking about it from broadcast news to internet news sites. The major networks have run with it so all the other outlets are harping on it. It's kind of funny – the main-stream media was ecstatic over it at first, until they realized there's not much to go on but it's still something to talk about. The media isn't above beating a dead horse. Besides, it breaks the monotony of all the rest of the bad news that they need to ignore and deflect from. And, it's the kind of thing that interests the people of this world.

Well, in **Eph 1**, Paul has presented the greatest news story that's ever been told. He has traced the plan of salvation to its very inception, as it began in the mind of God even before the beginning of this world; a plan which will be continued throughout all eternity. As Paul describes it, it's bigger, wiser and grander than anything we can possibly imagine. This plan has 3 phases. The 1st phase is the sovereign election of God according to which He's chosen to bless a special people with every spiritual blessing in His Son Jesus Christ. The 2nd phase is the accomplishing of that purpose through the redeeming death of Jesus. It's through this death that these specially chosen people have forgiveness of sins and are brought under the lordship of Christ.

The final phase—our focus today—concerns the work of the Holy Spirit by which those who've been chosen by the Father and redeemed by the Lord Jesus Christ are actually “linked up” to salvation. The theological term for this is “application.” The work of the Holy Spirit is to apply the benefits of Christ's work effectively to the lives of believers.

There seems to be some disagreement as to Paul's precise meaning in **v11** so we will take a little time to hash it out.

11 – At first glance, the verse appears to be straightforward. In Jesus Christ, we have obtained an inheritance. Last week we discussed how all things will be brought together (ultimately resolved) again in Christ – either through

Jesus as Savior or Jesus as Judge. For the believer, the one who has accepted Christ's gift of salvation by faith, Jesus is not a Judge, He's the One in whom we have an inheritance. What is that inheritance? It's not just the blessings that Paul has been describing in the text but everything that comes with being associated with Christ, in this life and the life to come – which the Bible actually states is beyond what we can even imagine.

Still, there's a difference of opinion concerning the Greek in this verse-whether it's active or passive. The use of an active verb renders the translation we have before us. The use of a passive verb would translate more like, in whom we have been made an inheritance. Meaning we're as much Christ's inheritance as He is ours. Which is correct? Both are! Both are true and, in fact, one includes the other. In Christ we have a wonderful inheritance ([1 Pt 1:3-4](#)). Peter doesn't give us a lot of specifics but he tells us what we need to know: that our inheritance is incorruptible undefiled and can never be lost by us or taken away from us. In fact, it's waiting for us, reserved in heaven as we speak.

At the same time, in Christ, we are an inheritance! Think of the price God paid to purchase us and make us part of His inheritance! God the Son is the Father's love gift to us and we are the Father's love gift to His Son. In His high priestly prayer in [John 17](#), Jesus refers several times to believers as those whom the Father has given Him. In our study of Ephesians, we will see the church identified as Christ's body ([1:22-23](#)), His building ([2:19-22](#)) and His bride ([5:22-23](#)). Clearly, Christ's future inheritance is wrapped up in His church. According to [Rom 8:17](#), we are joint-heirs with Christ which means that Jesus cannot claim His ultimate inheritance apart from us!

Now, Paul goes on to enlighten us that this blessing was not an afterthought of the Father's but was actually predestined for us. Paul goes into quite some detail here when he says our inheritance was predestined according to the purpose of Him Who works all things according to the counsel of His will. Again, we're told and should always understand that the reasons for His choosing, His predetermining reside in Him, not in us. These words, appearing in one phrase as they do here, are the clearest and most sublime declaration of God's sovereignty found anywhere in Scripture. Running throughout the entire Bible and on into eternity are the parallel lines of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility. We can never hope to reconcile them both but we can believe them both because both are taught in Scripture and

we will see both in our text today.

Still, in the 2nd half of **v11**, Paul reveals 3 aspects of God's plan working together on our behalf. It begins with His purpose, which is formulated within the counsel of His will and results, finally, in His work. Any successful business person knows the difference between a dream and a plan is work! God made His plan for your life carefully according to an eternal purpose, taking counsel within the Godhead, and then He works with all wisdom – in my life, in your life; He is working right now! Our God is not a God that merely wills things to happen. He works and He works according to His will. The word counsel stands for deliberate planning and arranging; so that the ways God uses to accomplish His will and the means by which it is to be carried out have already been considered and provided for.

Who used to always say, “I love it when a plan comes together” - Col. Hannibal Smith (A-Team). If a successful plan on a TV series was satisfying, how much more satisfying is knowing that the circumstance of your life are being arranged and brought to their ultimate fulfillment by a God who is loving, all-knowing and all-powerful! We might not necessarily love how it comes together or what we must go through to see it come together but, in the end, all the discomfort, struggle, sacrifice and even loss will prove to have been for our best. We can't know all that God knows; we can't see all that God sees and we certainly can't do all that God can do. But we do know God and we do know that He knows what's best and will do what's best and 1 day we'll understand His ways, but until then – submit!

But here's the thing – how does God accomplish all this in the life of the believer? Through the presence and power of His Holy Spirit working in us! It's the Holy Spirit who opens our eyes to understand what Christ has done for us; it's the Holy Spirit who grants us the faith to believe on Jesus; it's the Holy Spirit who moves our wills to embrace Him as our personal Savior. This effectual work by the Holy Spirit is necessary because, apart from it, no one would turn from sin to Christ. Instead, all would turn from Christ, disregarding His lordship as something to be rejected and the just demands of God something to be abhorred. Apart from the work Holy Spirit the world crucifies Christ; it doesn't accept Him or surrender to Him. This is why Jesus sent the Holy Spirit (**Jn 16:8-11**). This isn't the only work the Spirit does in our life, because God has even greater plans for us!

12 – The 2nd function of the Spirit is the glorification of Christ. Here Paul continues the thought of **v11**, saying that God’s plan for those who trust in Christ will be to the praise of His glory.” Paul is referring to himself and his companions, but the same thing is said later of all Christians. All this is to the praise of His glory (**v14**). In some ways the most important thing that can be said about the Holy Spirit is that it’s His job to glorify Christ, as Jesus Himself said in **Jn 15:26** and **16:13-14**. When the church forgets this it’s tends to call attention to the Holy Spirit rather than Christ and falls into unhealthy and often divisive pursuits. When the church remembers that the role of the Spirit is to glorify Christ, then all the other activities of the Holy Spirit—sanctification, inspiration, the giving of gifts are seen within that framework, and the church is drawn together around Jesus.

We can learn a practical lesson at this point. Since the work of the Holy Spirit is to glorify Christ, we may conclude that any emphasis upon the person and work of the Holy Spirit that detracts from the person and work of Christ is not of the Spirit. It is the work of another spirit, the spirit of antichrist (see 1 John 4:2-3). On the other hand, wherever Christ is exalted—in whatever way—there the third person of the Trinity is at work, and we may recognize that work and thank Him for it. Are you glorifying Jesus in the way you live? If not, then you’re not cooperating with the work of the Holy Spirit in your life, since that’s what He was sent to do in Christians.

13 – In **v12**, Paul mentions we who first trusted referring to Jewish believers in general. Now he speaks to you [who] also trusted; referring to Gentile believers. These references speak to 2 wonderful truths. 1st) I said before that both God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility are seen in this text and here it is. These references in **v11** and **12** tell us that yes, God’s sovereign choice works but it doesn’t exclude human responsibility for cooperation. These individuals who were sovereignly chosen are also the ones who trusted because they heard the word of truth and believed. Yes, God is working but we have the responsibility to join in that work, to accept the truth in our own lives and then allow Him to work in us to bring the evidence of His truth to others around us.

The 2nd thing these verses reveal is the 3rd work of the Holy Spirit - that is the making of 1 new people, the church, out of those who were divided before. This theme comes in for a full treatment in **ch2** but even here it’s prominent. Paul has spoken of a future blessing of the unification of all

things under Christ [v9-10](#), and reveals the scope of these blessings in [v11-14](#), showing that the blessings given through Christ belong equally to Jewish and Gentile believers.

This was an important concept in Paul's day because of the hostility that existed between Jews and Gentiles—between Greeks and Romans, rich and poor, slaves and free men, too, for that matter. In Paul's day (as in ours) the world was sharply divided along many different lines. People were divided by distrusts and hatreds. But into this divided world came a new breed of people, people whose lives were transformed by the Holy Spirit and who were united in Christ in spite of their differences. In [ch2](#) Paul will speak of a barrier, a middle wall of separation that's been broken down by Jesus. Now those who once were rival peoples have become 1 new man and 1 body in Christ. This is a great thing! It's a great way for the Holy Spirit to glorify Jesus Christ, in whose name this new society is founded!

The 4th aspect of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in our text is the connection between the Holy Spirit and the Word of God, which Paul alludes to here in speaking of the word of truth. Just as the Holy Spirit glorifies Christ and cannot be separated from Him, so He always speak through and with the Word of God, the Bible, and is not to be separated from it. The Holy Spirit never speaks or works apart from or in conflict with Scripture.

At the same time, the Scriptures are the only resource we have that reveals the mind of God ([1 Cor 2:12-14](#)). It is through the Bible, as the Holy Spirit illumines it to our minds, that God speaks of and reveals Himself. Aside from the general revelation of God in nature (which by itself saves no one), we can say that God reveals Himself in 3 ways: (1) the revelation of God in history, centered in the atoning work of Christ; (2) the revelation of God in writing, the Bible, which tells us of God's acts; and (3) the revelation of God to the mind and heart of the individual by the Holy Spirit, who interprets the written revelation to us and applies its blessings to our hearts. None of this happens apart from the Bible or the truth of the gospel. We can never give too much attention to the Bible. It's the means God uses to call and bless people, as the Holy Spirit reveals Jesus Christ and His work through its pages.

The final work of the Spirit mentioned here is His work of sealing God's people. In Paul's day, there were 3 main purposes for which a seal was

used and each one illustrates the Spirit's work: (1) a seal is used to confirm an object or document as being true or genuine, (2) a seal is used to mark a thing as one's property, and (3) a seal is used to make something fast or secure. The first may be illustrated by the seal of the United States which appears on paper currency or by the seal stamped on a passport. The second is like a nameplate on the flyleaf of a book. The third is illustrated by the seal of the Sanhedrin placed upon the tomb of Christ.

Each of these illustrates something important about the Spirit's work. The Holy Spirit verifies that the one receiving him really is God's child, as Paul says in **Rom 8:16**, The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. Of course, we receive the sealing of the Holy Spirit at the point of conversion. The sealing doesn't come before we believe and those who demand some assurance from God before they will believe treat God as if His word cannot be trusted. The sealing doesn't happen at a later date or as a second occurrence – it happens immediately when we accept Christ.

What's the significance of this sealing? For 1 thing, it speaks of a finished transaction. Even today, when important legal documents are processed, they are stamped with an official notary seal to signify the completion of the transaction - a done deal! A seal also implies ownership. God has put His seal on us because He has purchased us to be His own. "You are not your own...you were bought with a price..." (**1 Cor 6:19-20**). Finally, a seal also denotes security and protection. The Roman seal that was placed on the tomb of Jesus carried this meaning. The tomb was protected by the full weight and authority of the Roman government. That seal meant everything to the people in Jerusalem because Rome was the law of the land. Thankfully, it meant nothing to the Father or to Jesus as they happily and without hesitation, broke that seal when the stone was rolled away!

So, the believer belongs to God and is safe and protected because they are part of a finished transaction. According to Scripture, the Holy Spirit abides with the believer forever (**Jn 14:16b**). It's possible for us to grieve the Spirit and thus, miss out on the blessing of His ministry in our lives but we won't lose His presence; He'll never leave us.

14 – As part of His sealing the believer, Paul says the Holy Spirit's presence in our lives represents a guarantee of our inheritance. The KJV says

earnest, which is a fascinating word! In Paul's day, it meant the down payment to guarantee the final purchase of some commodity or piece of property. The Holy Spirit is God's first installment as a guarantee to His children that He will finish His work and eventually bring them to glory.

The redemption of the purchased possession refers to the redemption of the body at the return of Christ. This redemption is experienced in 3 stages: we have been redeemed through faith in Jesus Christ (1:7); we are being redeemed as the Spirit works in our lives to make us more like Christ; we will be fully redeemed when Jesus returns and we become like Him (1 Jn 3:2). So Paul has moved from the work of the Father in eternity past (4-6) through the work of Christ in history past (7-10) to the work of the Spirit in the immediate experience of believers (11-13) and ultimately, to the finished work of the Trinity in the culmination of all things, including the glorification of God's people.

The word translated guarantee has another, more personal meaning. It also means an engagement ring and is even still used as such in some countries. But, after all, isn't an engagement ring an assurance – a guarantee – that the promises made will be kept? This aspect of the word reveals to us that our relationship with God through Jesus Christ is not just a commercial one; it's also a personal experience of love. Jesus is the Bridegroom and His church is the bride. We know and can be confident that He will come and claim his bride because He has given us His promise and His Spirit as the engagement ring! What greater assurance could we want or need?

The last words of this great opening sentence are to the praise of His glory. It's an appropriate end, just as it was an appropriate beginning (v3). When Paul began to speak of God's blessings to us in salvation he went back before the creation of the world to God's eternal will, saying that salvation began when God chose us in Christ (v4). He then showed how that will of God unfolded itself in history, 1st in the work of Jesus in providing redemption from sin, and then in the work of the Holy Spirit in applying that work to the individual. Now, he introduces the idea of God's purpose, showing it to be that God Himself might be glorified. In other words, everything we have in Christ comes from God and returns to God, beginning in His will and ending in His glory. It's God-centered from beginning to end.

