

**GOD SAVES SINNERS IN CHRIST
TO PROVOKE OUR PRAISE II
Ephesians 1:8b-14**

INTRODUCTION

A. Describe an occasion when your delight in or admiration for a person or thing caused you to speak and/or act in an out-of-the-ordinary way.

Examples:

The speech and actions of a young man in love with a young woman.

The speech and actions of a Packer fan.

The speech and actions of any hobbieist when talking about their hobby or when pursuing it.

B. Is it possible for you to find joy in someone or something of which you know little or nothing? What is the relationship between knowing/understanding and enjoying someone or something?

You cannot enjoy those people or things of which you are ignorant. Our enjoyment of persons and things generally grows as we learn more of them, especially as we learn more of what makes the person or object admirable to us. If you have a favorite athlete the more you know of his or her exploits, the more joy you find in him or her.

C. Jonathon Edwards, the great American pastor and theologian who lived in the first half of the 1700's said this about the fact that God made us to glorify him, "God is glorified not only by His glory's being seen, but by its being rejoiced in. When those that see it delight in it, God is more glorified than if they only see it. His glory is then received by the whole soul, both by the understanding and by the heart." What is Edwards saying about how it is that we come to glorify God?

God is praised and glorified as he ought to be only when we both understand his greatness and find pleasure in it. You cannot delight in God if you know nothing of him. You must know who God is and what

he has done before you will ever delight in him. However, simply knowing the truth about God is not the goal. We want to know about God so that we will revel in God and in this way do what God made us to do, glorify him.

God's goal for us, the reason he made us, the reason we are breathing right now, is so that we would understand with our minds his greatness and then be glad in what we understand and so declare his praise with our lips and our lives. This is the reason Paul wrote his little letter to the Ephesians, especially this is the purpose behind this opening prayer of praise in chapter 1:3-14. Paul praises God for all that he has done for us in and through the person of Christ. Thus this prayer of praise both records his delight in God and the causes of that delight. Clearly his aim is that we would also see the beauty he sees in God's saving sinners in Christ and then be happy because of it and thus glorify and praise God out of our joy in him. So as we examine the second half of Paul's opening prayer of praise our aim will be to understand and rejoice in his glorious grace as Paul sets it forth.

STUDY

Notice in vv. 6, 7 & 8 that Paul makes clear that the motive of God in all that he does in saving sinners in Christ is his grace. He chooses, predestines, redeems and forgives for the praise of his grace and according to the riches of his grace which he lavished on us.

1. In v. 9 another thing that God does for us because of his grace is to make known to us the "mystery of his will". What does he mean by this phrase? See Romans 16:25-27 & Ephesians 3:4-5.

God, for long ages of human history, did not plainly tell human beings what he was doing in the world. Among the Jewish people he gave them hints and suggestions and shadows but throughout long ages of human history God's will for the universe, his plan for everything was known only to himself. But then, at exactly the right moment he sent his son into the world and he lived and died and rose and ascended in exact fulfillment of the Triune God's perfect plan. Then, also according to God's will the HS was sent and he revealed to the apostles exactly what God had done in Christ and exactly what he was

going to do in Christ and they in turn have told us and the HS, by their word recorded in this book, has made the will of God, which for a long time was unknown, now known to us.

2. Why did God make the “mystery of his will” known to us, according to v. 9?

He revealed the mystery of his will to us because God delights to have mercy upon unworthy sinners, because it pleases him to show his grace and love in Christ, he decided to reveal to sinful men his eternal plan. Notice it is his pleasure to do so and this is what he always purposed to do in and through the person and work of Jesus.

3. According to v. 10, what is that plan?

First, his plan encompasses every moment of human history. Everything that has happened, is happening and will happen in this universe is going according to this plan which God has now cheerfully made known to us. God is moving all of history towards his appointed conclusion, his fullness of times. What is that plan? God’s eternal plan, which was kept hidden for millennium by God, is “to unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and things upon the earth.”

4. The verb translated “to unite” is used only one other time in the Bible, in Romans 13:9, “For the commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,’ and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” This is the way the word is most often used. It usually describes what a speaker or author does at the end of the speech or essay when he or she “sums” up the arguments he has put forward and shows the main point. It means to gather up the various parts of an argument or story in summary form and show how all the parts form a unified whole. What are some conclusions we might draw about what it means for Christ to “sum up” everything in heaven and on the earth? What will the end of all things look like?

The point in Paul’s use of the word here is this: the whole universe is in disorder and chaos, disunited and without a unified purpose. God’s

plan, the end to which all history is moving is to have Jesus, who is the Christ, sum up and unite all that is disordered and disunited and without any coherent purpose and bring it all together into one united, purposeful creation. Nothing works as it ought because of sin and God’s curse on the world due to sin. And, notice, it is not only the earth but also heaven itself that is disordered and disunited. The reason for this is that some of the spiritual creatures which God made have rebelled against him. Satan and all his demonic host, who live in the heavenly places has brought disorder into the heavens as well. Thus, at the end of all things, Jesus will bring everything into its true and unified purpose, which can only be realized as everything is rightly related to God and to everything else in creation as God intended. This can only happen when sin and evil and all beings that do evil and God’s curse on the world due to sin are finally and forever removed from the created order. The Lord Jesus Christ is that person who will one day fully eradicate all evil and bring all things into right relation to God the Father and so heaven and earth will be one.

5. What difference does it make to you and in your life to know that one day all things will be united in Christ?

While life often feels disjointed and disunited now, yet one day it will fit perfectly together. Everything has meaning because one day every part of this history and this creation will be woven together into a unified, God-glorifying way. Everything belongs to and will be united by Christ. The reason that you and I can be happy, all the time, is because we know how the story is going to end. God has told us that the one who shed his blood to redeem and forgive us and the one who made it just for God to choose us and predestine us to be his adopted children is the one who is going to bring order to this chaotic universe in which we live. This one who is our friend and brother, who loved us enough to die for us, is the most important person in the universe and will one day make every sad thing untrue.

6. According to v. 11 what else are we predestined to in Christ (compare v.5)? What is significant about that?

We are predestined to be God’s heirs. We will one day fulfill that original mandate given to Adam and Eve to perfectly image forth the

glory of God and to have dominion over his creation. That is what an heir does. The heir is given control over the property and possessions of his benefactor. He manages the estate. So, in Christ, God has made us his heirs, which means that in that future world we will possess all things and rule over this world as God's representatives. We will one day possess the universe and rule over angels and manage all of creation to the glory of our benefactor.

7. According to v. 11, on what basis can we be sure that we will be his heirs?

The only reason I can have any confidence that all things are going to end well for me is because in eternity past, before I was born, God determined that I should be his heir. According to the last part of v.11, this God who determined to make me his heir is the one who in the past and right now works out everything according to his purpose, according to the counsel of his will. It is his will that I be his heir. It would be hard to imagine how you could more clearly or forcefully make the point that everything that has happened and everything that is now happening and everything that will happen in the universe is due to God's predetermined plan and has God himself as the ultimate cause or agent. In two verses God is going to talk about human choosing. However, what this verse says is that God's choices and God's actions are ultimate, that is, he is the cause of everything, including all human choices. The choices and actions of men and demons and angels are not ultimate. God's will and God's work are ultimate in this universe and if they are not then you can have no assurance that things are going to end well. Paul wants you and I to be happy and the only way we can be happy is if we know that everything that is happening is happening because God has willed it and God has performed it. If you are paying attention to what Paul is saying you are feeling the pressure to rescue God from being accused of doing evil. You are feeling the pressure to explain how human choices matter. These are important questions, but Paul does not feel any need to explain these things at this point. He wants you to be in awe of this God. He wants you to rest secure in the love of this God. He wants you to know that your future does not rest in your vacillating and fickle will but in a sovereign God's love for you. You are not at the mercy of evil people or demons. You need to know that the God

who decided in advance that you would be his heir is the God who is irresistibly working out his plan, his purpose, his will. No one and nothing can successfully resist him. In fact, all those who do resist him will one day see that all their resistance only served to advance his cause and his purposes in this world. As Satan discovered in the book of Job and as he discovered in the crucifixion of Jesus, all who do evil will know that the evil they do and for which they will be held accountable served God's good purposes in the world and advanced his plan.

8. How does it impact you to consider that God determined long before you were born that you would be his heir and that he is working out everything in the universe to make sure you gain your inheritance?

9. What does Paul say is true of them and about them in vv. 13-14 (NOTE, use either the NIV translation of v. 14 or the footnote in the margin of the ESV)?

They heard the gospel of truth and salvation. They believed the gospel they heard. They were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise who is God's down payment, his guarantee of our inheritance until that final day when he fully takes possession of his possession, which is the church.

10. Will there be anyone in heaven who has not heard the gospel and believed it? How do vv.11-14 answer that question?

No one will be an heir of God who has not heard the gospel and who has not trusted in the Christ revealed in that gospel. No human can be a part of that future unified-in-Jesus-universe without hearing and believing the good news that God sent his Son into the world as a man to obey his law perfectly for his people and to suffer the death that his people deserve and to rise from the dead to guarantee the future resurrection of his people.

11. According to Esther 8:8 &10 and Jeremiah 32:10-11 what is the literal function of a "seal"?

The seal confirms the authenticity of a document, its legal authority and the authorship. The seal clearly identifies the document as coming from the king and belonging to the king or as a legal and binding document.

12. How is a “seal/mark” used in Ezekiel 9:4-6 and Revelation 7:2-4 & 9:3-4?

Here the mark/seal identifies who belongs to God so that when the judgment comes they will not be killed or harmed. The seal shows whom God “owns.”

13. In light of the fact that this context is talking about our future, when Christ returns and in light of the function of a seal in the rest of the bible, what does it mean that the HS seals believers?

The HS is God’s mark of ownership upon us, his seal that we are under his authority and belong to him, which marks us out as those who will be saved and not destroyed at the end of all things.

14. What is the function of a down payment or a deposit on a purchase?

We make a deposit on a purchase to show that we intend to complete the purchase. We make a down payment on a piece of property as the proof, the guarantee that we intend to pay all the money to the bank.

15. The word translated “possession” in the ESV, v. 14, is used in the OT (Malachi 3:17, Joshua 6:17, 1 Samuel 15:9, etc.) to describe people, like Rahab the prostitute, who were not destroyed in God’s judgment but kept alive to become his people, his treasured possession. How are we to understand God’s relationship to us and the giving of the HS to us in light of these two things?

At the end of all things God will take full possession of all his people to whom he has given the HS as his guarantee. We are his treasured possession and one day we will experience the fullness of what it means to belong to him. God the Father bought us by the blood of his

own son and then made the first installment on heaven by giving us the HS, which shows that one day he will take full possession of us.

16. How does it feel to know that you are a part of God’s treasured possession and one of the reasons he gave you his Holy Spirit is to guarantee that one day he will complete the purchase?