

EPHESIANS 1:3-14

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. ⁵ He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace ⁸ that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight ⁹ he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. ¹¹ In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, ¹² so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. ¹³ 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; ¹⁴ this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

EPHESUS WAS A WONDERFUL CITY IN THE SENSE IT WAS ON A MAIN ROUTE FOR COMMERCE.

CONSEQUENTLY IT BENEFITED GREATLY FROM THE ROMAN EMPIRE'S TRADE NETWORK.

EPHESUS WAS ALSO A DIFFICULT PLACE FOR FIRST CENTURY CHRISTIANS TO LIVE, IN THE SENSE IT WAS HARD TO AVOID THE TEMPTATION OF IDOLATRY.

THIS WAS ESPECIALLY TRUE FOR THOSE WHO WERE RAISED TO WORSHIP MANY DEITIES AND YET CAME TO FAITH IN CHRIST.

INDEED SOMETIMES THE LURE OF CULTURAL AND SOCIAL PRACTICES GOT THE BETTER OF THEM, AND THEY BEGAN TO ENGAGE IN COMPROMISES OF FAITH.

THIS IS SOMETHING MOST CHRISTIANS ARE FAMILIAR WITH. NO, WE DO NOT USUALLY WORSHIP OTHER GOD'S BUT WE DO TEND TO SLIP IN LITTLE WAYS AWAY FROM JESUS.

AFTER ALL, WHAT HARM CAN ONE OR TWO SMALL COMPROMISES MAKE? THE APOSTLE PAUL IS AMONG THOSE WHO ARGUE THAT IT CAN MAKE A GREAT DEAL OF DIFFERENCE, BECAUSE IT CAN BEGIN TO DRAW US FARTHER AWAY FROM THE LORD.

THE HEART OF THE PROBLEM FOR CHRISTIANS TODAY, IS THE SAME ONE THAT PLAGUED THE EPHESIANS AND OTHERS SINCE THE CHURCH BEGAN.

A CHRISTIAN WRITER DESCRIBES BOTH THE PROBLEM AND GOD'S SOLUTION IN THIS WAY: "HUMAN BEINGS ARE BORN BROKEN. THEY LIVE BY BEING MENDED. THE GRACE OF GOD IS THE GLUE."

THE CHILDREN'S STORY ABOUT HUMPTY DUMPTY, WHO COULD NOT BE REPAIRED BY EVEN THE MOST POWERFUL WORLDLY RESOURCES RELATES TO THIS.

I SHARED THIS A FEW YEARS AGO, BUT THE REWRITTEN VERSION OF THE OLD NURSEY RHYME IS WORTH REPEATING:

"HUMPTY DUMPTY SAT ON A WALL, HUMPTY DUMPTY HAD A GREAT FALL. AND ALL THE KING'S HORSES AND ALL THE KING'S MEN, COULDN'T PUT HUMPTY TOGETHER AGAIN.

THEN THE REAL KING CAME TO HIS AID, BROUGHT RECONCILIATION, AND NOT A BAND-AID. JESUS BROUGHT NEW BIRTH AND A NEW CREATION, MADE HUMPTY WHOLE AND BROUGHT JUBILATION.

PLACED HUMPTY BACK ON THE WALL, THEN GAVE HUMPTY A BRAND NEW CALL. AMBASSADOR OF CHRIST IS HIS NEW NAME, HEALING THE BROKEN IS NOW HIS GAME.

IF YOU FIND YOURSELF BROKEN AT THE FOOT OF A WALL, TO THE KING OF KINGS YOU SHOULD GIVE A CALL. AND JUST LIKE HUMPTY DUMPTY OF OLD, CHRIST WILL COME AND MAKE YOU WHOLE.”

YES, JESUS IS THE ONE WHO CAN AND DOES PUT HUMPTY DUMPTY- I.E. MEN AND WOMEN AND CHILDREN BROKEN BY SIN, BACK TOGETHER AGAIN.

SPIRITUALLY WE ARE BORN BROKEN BY THE INBORN SIN THAT HARBORS A PLACE IN OUR HEARTS SINCE THE FALL OF ADAM AND EVE.

SIN IS HOW WE DESCRIBE HUMAN BROKENNESS AND OUR CONTINUAL FAILURE TO BE WHO GOD CREATED US TO BE- THOSE MADE IN GOD’S OWN IMAGE.

THE SALVATION JESUS PROVIDES INCLUDES HIM GATHERING UP THE BROKEN PIECES OF OUR NATURE.

JESUS PUTS US BACK TOGETHER PIECE BY PIECE, WHICH IS ONE WAY TO EXPLAIN WHAT THE BIBLE CALLS OUR ON GOING SANCTIFICATION THROUGH CHRIST.

NOW ANYONE WHO HAS ATTEMPTED TO REPAIR AN ITEM THAT HAS BEEN BROKEN KNOWS IT CAN BE A CHALLENGE. THINGS DO NOT ALWAYS BREAK IN NICE CLEAR LINES OR IN PIECES LARGE ENOUGH TO EASILY GLUE TOGETHER.

THE SIZES OF THE PIECES OFTEN VARY. THEY CAN BE-LARGE, MEDIUM, SMALL, AND TINY ONES, AS WELL AS ONES WITH JAGGED EDGES THAT RESIST RESTORATION.

SOMETIMES WE ENCOUNTER PIECES THAT WILL NOT FIT BACK IN PLACE EASILY, IF AT ALL.

SIMILARLY, WE DO NOT ALWAYS COOPERATE WITH THE LORD IN HIS REPAIR WORK WITHIN US.

THIS IS WHY, WHILE OUR SALVATION IS SECURE THROUGH CHRIST, THE REPAIR WORK IS ON GOING.

THIS IS SOME OF WHAT PAUL TRIED TO CONVEY TO THE EPHESIANS WHO STRUGGLED WITH SINFULNESS AND WORRIED THAT IT COULD MEAN THEY WERE NOT SAVED.

HE TOLD THEM THAT COMPROMISE WITH FAITH BY SEEKING TO FIND SOME KIND OF ASSURANCE THEY COULD EARN OR SECURE MORE FIRMLY THEIR SALVATION WAS WRONG.

THE APOSTLE REMINDS THEM THAT IT IS THE GRACE OF GOD THROUGH HIS SON WHO SAVES US.

HE ASSURES THEM THAT JESUS’ SACRIFICE ON THE CROSS WAS NOT AN ACCIDENT BUT PART OF GOD’S PLAN.

IN THIS PASSAGE WE ARE TOLD GOD CHOSE TO SAVE US LONG BEFORE CREATION CAME INTO BEING.

THE LETTER FURTHER STATES THAT IF CHRISTIANS ARE LOOKING FOR REASSURANCE, OR EVEN INSURANCE FOR THEIR SALVATION-THEY ALREADY HAVE IT.

THE HOLY SPIRIT IS GIVEN BY GOD TO CHRISTIANS, NOT ONLY TO COMFORT AND GUIDE, BUT ALSO AS A SIGN OF OUR PLACE IN GOD’S FAMILY AND KINGDOM.

WE DO NOT NEED TO WIN GOD’S FAVOR. WE ARE ALREADY FAVORED BY HIS GRACE GIVEN TO US IN JESUS, AND IMBEDDED WITHIN US THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT.

THEREFORE IT IS FUTILE FOR US TO TRY TO BE MORE SAVED THAN WE OR ANYONE ELSE REDEEMED THROUGH CHRIST ALREADY IS.

BUT WHAT WE CAN AND SHOULD DO AS CHRISTIANS IS- TO WORK WITH THE GOD TO BE CHILDREN WHO REFLECT OUR BROTHER JESUS.

YES, WE ARE STILL SINNERS, BUT WE ARE ALSO SAVED BY BEING REBORN IN CHRIST AND ADOPTED INTO GOD’S FAMILY.

AS EPHESIANS 1:4-5 EXPLAINS: “GOD CHOSE US IN CHRIST BEFORE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD TO BE HOLY AND BLAMELESS BEFORE HIM IN LOVE.

HE DESTINED US FOR ADOPTION AS HIS CHILDREN THROUGH CHRIST, ACCORDING TO THE GOOD PLEASURE OF HIS WILL.”

SO IT IS TO JESUS WE NEED TO LOOK, SO WE CAN WORK WITH GOD WHOSE SPIRIT IS WORKING WITHIN, AND THROUGH, US.

THE REASON THIS IS IMPORTANT IS BECAUSE GOD HAS CHOSEN HIS PEOPLE TO BE HOLY AND BLAMELESS, MEANING TO REFLECT HIS IMAGE WHICH INCLUDES HIS LOVE.

ANOTHER WAY OF LOOKING AT WHAT PAUL WROTE TO THE EPHESIANS IS TO THINK ABOUT DUCKS.

SCIENTISTS HAVE DETERMINED THAT DUCKLINGS IMPRINT SHORTLY AFTER HATCHING, USUALLY WITHIN 24 HOURS.

MOST OF THE TIME THE FIRST FIGURE THE BABY DUCKS BECOME AWARE OF IS THEIR MOTHER.

AND, WHEN THEY IMPRINT ON HER, AS THEY SHOULD, THEY FOLLOW HER AROUND, AND LEARN FROM HER HOW TO BE A DUCK.

INDEED INSTINCTUALLY THE HATCHINGS LEARN FROM THE MOTHER DUCK THAT THEY ARE DUCKS.

WHEN THIS HAPPENS ALL IS RIGHT IN THE WORLD OF MOTHER DUCKS AND THEIR BABIES.

HOWEVER, OCCASIONALLY A DUCKLING’S ATTENTION IS DRAWN NOT TO ITS MOTHER, BUT SOMEWHERE ELSE.

AND IF IT IMPRINTS ON A CREATURE OTHER THAN ITS MOTHER, THAT CREATES MANY PROBLEMS FOR THE DUCK AND THE WORLD AROUND IT.

FOR EXAMPLE: IF A DOG IS AROUND WHEN THE DUCK HATCHES IT SOMETIMES BELIEVES THE DOG IS ITS MOTHER.

THIS MEANS THE DUCK FOLLOWS THE DOG AROUND, THINKING IN ITS LITTLE MIND IT MUST BE A DOG.

IT IS EASY TO SEE WHERE THIS ERROR COMPLICATES THE LIFE OF THE DUCK BECAUSE IT IS NOT LIVING ACCORDING TO ITS INTENDED NATURE.

AFTER ALL, DUCKS ARE NOT DOGS AND THEY SHOULD NEVER TRY TO BE ONE, SINCE DOING SO BRINGS INEVITABLE CONFUSION AND FAILURE.

CONSEQUENTLY, PEOPLE, AND ESPECIALLY CHRISTIANS, CAN LEARN SOMETHING FROM THE WORLD OF DUCKS.

FROM THEM WE CAN LEARN WE WHO ARE MADE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD AND SHOULD REFLECT GOD’S NATURE.

WE ARE THEREFORE, MEANT TO IMPRINT ON GOD AND NOT ON ANY WORLDLY THING OR PERSON.

DOING SO LEADS US TO FOLLOW SINFUL WAYS RATHER THAN GOD’S WAY.

OF COURSE THIS WHOLE IMPRINTING THING IS HARDER FOR PEOPLE, PRECISELY BECAUSE WE ARE NOT DUCKS AND DO NOT BOND IN THE SAME WAY THEY DO.

WE ALSO HAVE MORE DEVELOPED BRAINS AND SO WE DO NOT LIVE BY INSTINCT ALONE BUT ALSO BY OUR CHOICES- BOTH REASONED AND IMPULSIVE.

THIS IS WHY WE NEED EXTRA HELP FROM GOD, WHO HAS BEEN WORKING TO BRING US BACK TO OUR NATURAL SELVES EVER SINCE WOMAN AND MAN CHOSE TO EAT THE FORBIDDEN FRUIT.

JESUS IS THE ULTIMATE AID GOD SENT INTO THE WORLD TO BOTH TEACH US HIS WILL AND OPEN THE WAY FOR FORGIVENESS.

CHRISTIANS ARE FORTUNATE TO HAVE JESUS AS A HUMAN MODEL TO FOLLOW. WE ALSO HAVE GOD’S SPIRIT WITHIN US TO SHOW US HOW TO DO SO.

OUR CALL, THEREFORE, IS TO WORK ON FOLLOWING JESUS, WHO TEACHES US HOW TO BE THE PERSON GOD INTENDED US TO BE FROM THE BEGINNING.

WE NEED TO KEEP OUR EYES ON JESUS, NOT ON OURSELVES, OTHERS, OR ANY ONE OR THING ELSE.

THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW TELLS THE STORY OF PETER WALKING ON WATER-AND DOING JUST FINE UNTIL HE TOOK HIS EYES OFF JESUS, THEN HE SANK.

THE STORY IS A METAPHOR FOR OUR CHRISTIAN JOURNEY- WHEN WE LOOK AWAY FROM JESUS-WE GET INTO TROUBLE.

WHEN WE TAKE OUR EYES OFF JESUS WE FORGET WHO WE ARE AND WHOSE WE ARE AND BEGIN TO FOLLOW WORLDLY WAYS.

REMEMBER DUCKS ARE NOT SUPPOSE TO BE DOGS OR ANYTHING OTHER THAN DUCKS.

SIMILARLY, PEOPLE ARE NOT SUPPOSE TO BE ANYTHING OTHER THAN THOSE WHO REFLECT THE IMAGE OF GOD.

AND AS CHRISTIANS, WE HAVE AN EVEN A GREATER NEED TO REFLECT OUR SAVIOR WHO LIVED THE PERFECT HUMAN LIFE.

FORTUNATELY, WE HAVE THE HELP OF THE HOLY SPIRIT TO REMIND US WHEN WE ARE GOING ASTRAY, AND TO POINT US BACK TOWARDS FOLLOWING JESUS.

THUS WHILE THE ACT OF SALVATION AND THE REPAIR WORK OF SANCTIFICATION ARE GOD'S ACTIONS, WE HAVE A PART IN THE PROCESS.

WE ARE SUPPOSED TO COOPERATE WITH THE LORD WHO IS REPAIRING WHAT SIN HAS BROKEN.

REMEMBER THE BROKEN ITEM MENTIONED EARLIER? SOMETIMES WHEN WE TRY TO PUT PIECES BACK TOGETHER, THEY REFUSE TO GO OR STAY IN PLACE.

IT MAY SEEM AS IF THEY HAVE A MIND OF THEIR OWN. WELL, WE DO HAVE MINDS OF OUR OWN, AND WE HAVE FREE WILL.

WHEN IT COMES TO GOD'S WORK WITHIN US, THE PROBLEM IS- WE CONTINUE TO GO ASTRAY, OUR COOPERATION IS FLEETING, AND OUR FREE WILL KEEPS GETTING IN GOD'S WAY.

SO HOW CAN WE WORK BETTER WITH GOD? THE FIRST STEP IS TO PRAISE THE LORD. SINCERE PRAISE OPENS OUR HEARTS AND MINDS MORE FULLY TO GOD'S PRESENCE.

AND IT IS IN THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD WE BEGIN TO FIND OUR WAY BACK TO OUR INTENDED NATURE AND PURPOSE.

WHEN WE WORSHIP AND GLORIFY THE LORD IN WORDS AND ACTION, WE ARE DRAWN CLOSER TO THE ONE TRUE GOD.

PAUL SAID TO THE ATHENIANS IN ACTS 17 THAT ALL OF US NEED GOD AND SEARCH FOR HIM BECAUSE IT IS IN GOD "WE LIVE, AND MOVE, AND HAVE OUR BEING."

PRAISING GOD HELPS US TO DRAW NEAR TO THE ONE IN WHOM WE CAN FIND OUR TRUE SELVES.

LET US PRAY:

GRACIOUS GOD, WE PRAISE YOU WHO ARE OUR CREATOR AND REDEEMER, AND IN WHOSE IMAGE WE ARE MADE.

WE PRAISE YOU REALIZING THAT OUR FOCUS IS SO OFTEN AND EASILY DRAWN AWAY FROM WHERE IT SHOULD BE, AND YET YOU LOVE US STILL.

TRULY, OUR MINDS CANNOT FATHOM THE FULLNESS OF YOUR GRACE AND MERCY SHOWN TO US IN JESUS, YOUR SON.

HOW WONDERFUL ARE THE SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS WE RECEIVE THROUGH HIM.

FOR ALL THIS AND SO MUCH MORE WE GIVE YOU PRAISE O GOD, FATHER, SON, AND HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN

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