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Proper 10 • Ephesians 1:3–16 • July 12, 2015

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Here is a passage of great comfort that is a blessing and help in times of hardship and times of plenty. Paul thoroughly grounds the promises of predestination to salvation

in the gospel of Jesus Christ and thereby assures us of the durability of the promise in the face of the troubles and difficulties of this present age.

God has given us great blessings in Christ Jesus and great spiritual blessings in the heavenly places. While it is difficult to know precisely what these blessings in heaven are, the implication is that they are vastly superior to the blessings we have in this life. God has chosen us in Christ from the foundation of the world. God who has invested so much in us that he chooses us from the beginning will keep his promises to us. Paul emphasizes the holiness and blamelessness of those adopted by God. God has done all of this because of the riches of Christ's work on the cross, where he has redeemed us and forgiven us all things. God is rich toward us both according to his grace and according to the gifts he lavishes on us, including wisdom and understanding. The Messiah Jesus is the secret Paul speaks about, a secret openly declared which the world can neither appreciate nor apprehend. And all things will be reconciled in Christ Jesus and manifestly brought together under his eventual rule.

We are also predestined by God through the Messiah, and he does as he wills. Our life is therefore a manifestation of his praise and glory. We also have both belief in the Messiah and the seal of the Holy Spirit, the guarantee that we are God's own people, for his praise and glory. Paul then gives thanks for those who have faith in Christ and love for the saints, by implication those in the above paragraphs, and he never stops giving thanks for the Ephesians as he prays for them.

This is a text in which the law is implied but not expressed clearly. The implication arises out of those who are not in the group mentioned as predestined, and those who do not have faith manifesting love as mentioned in the final verse. The *why* of this is something we cannot answer. The verses presented emphasize the great work God has done in our lives, first by selecting us from the beginning, second by redeeming us in Christ Jesus and third by providing us lives of faith in him to love our neighbors. Paul just keeps piling on the good news here.

Here we have a clear possibility for using this paradigm for preaching the text. The righteousness of God in Christ Jesus has provided us with the abundant assurances and benefits of being God's special people, chosen by him from the beginning. These benefits have their manifest fulfillment at the cross, where the long-term plans of God are revealed and fulfilled for those with eyes to see by faith, but where those who choose not to believe see nothing worthwhile and have their hearts hardened. It is through the durability of these promises applied to us that we find both the faithfulness and strength to love our neighbors, marking us as those distinctive people God has chosen from the beginning.

A good way I have found to deal with the issue of predestination is through emphasis on the durability of God's promises to us, and this is a good text to illustrate this. God works mightily to save us and has done so through many plans and promises that he has set out and fulfilled to do so. We can therefore have faith and rely on God, who has done so much and brought us so far to continue to fulfill his promises to us in Christ Jesus. This durability of the promises is a good way for more existentially minded people to apprehend and appreciate what the eternity of God really means for us.

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