

THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST

A Study of Ephesians

Study #10

The Nature of Our Inheritance (*Ephesians 1:11a; Selected Verses*)

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I. REVIEW

- A. Paul wrote this circular letter, primarily to Ephesus but also to the surrounding churches, between 60-63 A.D., while he was on house arrest in Rome.
- B. He begins the body of the letter with three chapters (as we have them) of heavy doctrine. Then, in Chapter 4, he moves into practical considerations.
- C. He opens the discussion of doctrine with an extremely long sentence (202 words in Greek, the second longest sentence of the New Testament, in fact; the longest being *Colossians 1:9-20*), detailing six great blessings God has unleashed on His children, and a call to praise Him for these blessings.
- D. In our last studies, we have looked at the first five of those blessings: namely, His election of believers from before the foundation of the world (1:4); his predestining us for adoption as sons (1:5); his redemption of us through Christ's blood (1:7-8); His revealing to us of His previously hidden will (1:9); and his predestining of us to an inheritance. Tonight, we want to take some time to examine what that inheritance looks like.

II. INTRODUCTION: THE STATE OF THE EPHESIAN CHURCH

- A. *Acts 19:19* = The text tells us that the new converts in Ephesus burned their magic books, which all told were worth roughly \$6.8 million. What I want you to note is the affluence (however misdirected or mismanaged) that characterized these people. That all together, these few believers could spend so much on magic books reveals something, not just about their ungodly priorities before salvation, but also about their material means (note also the word *prosperity* in *19:25*; and when this prosperity was threatened, a city-wide riot ensued, of the caliber that the town clerk was afraid that the Roman cohort in the city was going to intervene).
- B. *Acts 20:32-35* = As Paul addresses the Ephesian elders in Miletus, notice a recurring theme: Paul links the concept of their spiritual inheritance to a contrast with earthly, material wealth. He is careful to clarify that the example he exhibited among them was *not to covet anyone's silver, gold or clothes*. He tells them they are to work hard, as he had, to provide for the needs of others as well, and to remember that Jesus Himself instructed that the *real* blessing is in *giving...not receiving*.
- C. *1 Timothy 6:3-11, 17-19* = Instructing Timothy, whom he had left in Ephesus, Paul gives more, and very explicit, instructions on the subject of godliness and material wealth.
- D. *1 John 2:15-17* = The Apostle John, also writing to the Ephesians, specifically instructed them about the danger of desiring or loving worldly things.
- E. *Revelation 2:4* = Writing to Ephesus, Christ Himself rebukes them for abandoning their *first love*. In the overarching biblical context, it is clear that many in the Ephesian church became sidetracked by the desire for wealth and earthly prosperity. This great book ends with an amazing promise of inheritance for those who overcome (cf. *Revelation 21:1-7*). The contrast is so clear. The Ephesians (and we, by extension) were not to focus on material wealth, but on the great spiritual inheritance we have waiting for us in our future (cf. *Matthew 6:19-21*).
- F. *Ephesians 1:11a* = It is in this historical context that Paul gives an emphasis on the spiritual blessings we have in Christ, and specifically on the inheritance we obtain. This is why we want to take some time to really examine what this inheritance looks like, and what it involves.

III. THE FACT AND NATURE OF OUR INHERITANCE

- A. **The Fact of Our Inheritance.** There are numerous references in the New Testament to the fact that church-age believers are the heirs of an inheritance (cf. *Acts 20:32, 26:18; Romans 8:16-17; Galatians 3:27 – 4:7; Colossians 1:12, 3:24*).
- B. **The Nature of Our Inheritance.** There are basically three defining traits that characterize our inheritance: It is *eternal* (it will not fade away); it is *imperishable*; and it is *undefiled*.
1. *Hebrews 9:15* = Here we are told that those who have been called will receive the promise of the **eternal inheritance**. This means, essentially, that the inheritance we have is one that will affect more than a short time. Its provision is so plentiful that it will last forever. The contrast, for example, would be a monetary bequeathal, something left in a will perhaps. It is nice...but it is temporary. Once it is spent, it is gone. It won't last, because it is subject to expenditure that will deplete it. By contrast, the inheritance we have in Christ is eternal. The provision is such that it will never be depleted, exhausted or used up. It is, in that sense, an infinite, constantly renewed, wealth.
 2. *1 Peter 1:4* = Here, Peter says that our inheritance is **imperishable**, it is **undefiled**, and it **will not fade away**. These ideas have much in common with the reality of *eternality*.
 - a. First, the inheritance we have is *imperishable*. This is the essence of Jesus' teaching about our heavenly wealth (see again *Matthew 6:19-21*). There is no force that can cause it to stop existing, no rust that can destroy it, no mortality that can evict it from its place.
 - b. Second, it is *undefiled*. This means that it is honest gain. We have no need to swindle, to extort, to embezzle or to otherwise fudge the books. This inheritance is fairly won and freely given. We can take hold of it in its entirety, with a clean, clear and undefiled conscience.
 - c. Third, it *will not fade away*. This is a restatement of the idea of eternality. Time and expenditure will have no affect on the extent and availability of this provision: the amount available will always be the same, no matter how much time has passed, and no matter how much we have already spent.

IV. THE PREREQUISITE TO OUR INHERITANCE

A. The Need for Imperishable Bodies

1. *1 Corinthians 15:50-53* = The basic principle is this: the *perishable* cannot inherit the *imperishable*. For this reason, in addition to the obvious prerequisite of faith in Christ (since outside of Christ we inherit nothing; see *Ephesians 1:10b-11*, note specifically "*in Him*" as the constant emphasis in *Ephesians*), the second prerequisite is a change in the state of our physical, perishable bodies.
2. *Romans 8:23-25* = Here, Paul tells us that the final *adoption as sons* that we will experience will be the redemption of our bodies. This passage links the concept of *new bodies* to our *inheritance*.

B. The Nature of Our Imperishable Bodies

1. *Philippians 3:20-21* = Paul here describes that the first hope which we are anticipating and expecting will be the transformation of our bodies into the same likeness as Christ's glorified, resurrected body (cf. *1 John 3:2-3*). This will happen by an exertion of God's power. Because of this, we know where we can look to identify what our new bodies will be like. But before we do that, let's examine Paul's words more closely.
2. *1 Corinthians 15:35-49* = This is the great New Testament passage on resurrection bodies. Although not all church-age believers will experience physical death, all *will* experience the same transformation to a new body. Here are some fundamental characteristics that describe that new body:
 - a. *It Is a "Body."* In other words, it bears some kind of resemblance to what we know of as a body. I will be transformed, but I will still be recognizably human, and recognizably *me* (cf. *Job 19:23-27*, note Job's emphasis on *my skin, my flesh, my eyes* with which *I myself* (and *not another*) will behold God.

- b. *It Is a Different Kind of Body.* And yet, the contrast between this physical, perishable body, and the new, glorified one is illustrated by the difference between the bare seed of wheat that is sown in the earth and the plant that grows from it. From this two things become evident. First, though it is connected to the form of the physical body, it is vastly different as well. Second, it is vastly *superior* to the bare grain that was sown to produce it.
 - c. *It Is of a Totally Different Kind of Glory.* Where our physical bodies are glorious (see, for example, David's reflections in *Psalms 139:13-15*), our new bodies will be on a whole different level of glory, of an entirely different caliber. The new body is *imperishable* (not perishable), it is *glorious* (not dishonorable), it is *powerful* (not weak), it is *spiritual* (not natural), it is *heavenly* (not earthy).
3. *Luke 24:30* = Our new bodies, like Christ's, will be able to take in food and drink (cf. *Matthew 26:26-29*).
 4. *John 20:19, 26* = Twice John records here that Christ entered into a room through locked doors. This indicates that glorified bodies are not bound by physical limitations or obstructions.

V. WHAT IS OUR INHERITANCE?

- A. **Salvation.** (*Hebrews 1:14*) We are those who *inherit salvation*. These means that spiritual *and physical* salvation are promised to us.
- B. **The Promises of God.** (*Hebrews 6:12*) Through faith and patience, we *inherit the promises*. Think of the promises made by God. Peter says they are *precious and magnificent* (*2 Peter 1:4*). They are ours! Every promise God made, He will keep. He will fulfill them, not for everyone, but for you!
- C. **A Blessing.** (*1 Peter 3:9*) God has called us for the very purpose of inheriting a blessing! As Paul says in *Ephesians*, every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies is ours in Christ (cf. *Ephesians 1:3*).
- D. **The Kingdom of God.** Several passages make it plain that we will be inheriting God's new, imperishable kingdom (cf. *1 Corinthians 6:9-10, 15:50; Galatians 5:21; Ephesians 5:5*). What does this mean? What is this kingdom? And how, or in what way, are we to inherit it?
 1. *The Promise of a New Kingdom.* The Old Testament prophets often spoke and wrote about a new kingdom that was being promised, over which Messiah would rule.
 - a. *Isaiah 2:1-4* = Isaiah talks extensively about this new kingdom, and the conditions within it; often he discusses the condition of Israel within this new kingdom (*Isaiah 4:1-6; 9:6-7; 11:11-16*), sometimes he discusses the condition of other nations (*11:1-5; 19:19-25*)...and sometimes even the state of nature (*11:6-10*).
 - b. *Isaiah 65:17-25* = Here Isaiah explicitly promises the coming of a new heavens and a new earth, and also gives some details about the millennial reign of Christ over this present earth.
 - c. *Daniel 2:1-45, 7:1-27* = These two visions from Daniel essentially describe the same truths. At the end of the age of earthly kingdoms, which will culminate with the antichrist (the little horn) establishing the ultimate earthly kingdom, uniting the world under one government (as Satan attempted to do in Babylon at Shinar in Genesis 11), the *Ancient of Days* will establish *His* kingdom (*7:9-10*), and it will be handed over to the *Son of Man* to rule (*7:13-14*). But this kingdom will be the possession of the *saints of the Highest One* (*7:18, 22, 27*). And Daniel himself is promised resurrection and an allotted portion or inheritance in that kingdom as well (see *Daniel 12:13*).
 - d. *Revelation 11:15-17* = During the seven-year tribulation, the seventh trumpet begins the end. *Revelation 13:1* gives us a restatement of the prophecies mentioned above from Daniel, and *Revelation 17:3-14* gives us the fulfillment of those prophecies. In chapter 18, Babylon falls, in chapter 19, the Messiah of Israel returns to the earth physically with His resurrected saints, and in chapter 20 Satan is bound and the first phase of the kingdom foreseen by Isaiah and prophesied by Daniel is established (*Revelation 20:4-6*). Finally, following the first 1,000 years, Satan is released, leads a final rebellion, and is consigned to the lake of fire along with all sinners of all time and the demons.

- e. *Revelation 21:1 – 22:6* = And here is the final re-creation of all heaven and earth, and the establishing of the new Jerusalem as their capitol. Note especially *21:7*: “He who overcomes will *inherit* these things.”

VI. CONCLUSION

- A. What is your hope fixed on? On the uncertainty of riches, like the Ephesian church? Or on God? I know that you know what the right answer should be. But the point of these questions is not to see if you can identify the right answer. Rather, it is to discover, in all humility and transparency, the *real* and *true* answer. Then, if the *real* answer and the *right* answer aren't the same, at least you will know where to make adjustments.
- B. Are you in love with this world? Do you cling to the trappings it offers as your source of a comfortable life? Do you understand that there is a reason these things are called *trappings*? Have they *trapped* your thinking, and changed your priorities by fixing your attention on what is temporal, rather than on your eternal, imperishable inheritance?
- C. When you consider the reality that you will be given a new, eternal body, what does that do for your heart? Is it hard to consider, hard to understand, hard to imagine, hard to believe?
- D. The Apostle John says that the knowledge God has given us, specifically that our bodies will be transformed into conformity with Christ's resurrected body, should give us hope, a hope that is fixed on Him (*1 John 3:2-3*). Do you have hope? As you sit here listening, are you filled with dread, uncertainty and the pessimistic awareness of impending doom? Or are you filled instead with hope, fixed on the promises that a faithful God has made to you?
- E. John also says that this fixed hope should cause us to purify ourselves, like He is pure. Was Christ pure? How, or in what way? If that is your standard, how is your life measuring up? If you believe it is *not* measuring up, does that create in you despair or resignation that you will *never* measure up? Or are you willing, instead, to make whatever adjustments the Spirit initiates, with the hope that you *can*, in fact, live the way Christ wants you to live? Will you commit to starting that anew, today?
- F. When we were children, we often daydreamt about our futures. Would we have a job that made us wealthy? Would we live in a big house? How many kids would we have? What city would we live in? These daydreams were pleasant, even though they were probably idealistic and unrealistic. But God has revealed some very specific things about your future. And while there is plenty left to the imagination, how often do you spend during your day, daydreaming about your life when the kingdom comes? How often do these pleasant ponderings either keep you awake at night, or else send you into restful, peaceful sleep? Is your hope really fixed on these things, or are they just pretty words on a page?
- G. Does what God has revealed about the future of things affect how you relate to the world around you, and specifically to unbelievers? How? Give examples.

VII. PRAYER