

# **The Spirit's Assurance, Ephesians 1:11-14**

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## **Introduction**

Good morning, my name is Brad and I'm one of the pastors here. Speaking of family, we are currently in the midst of a six-month emphasis on one of our five core identities as a church: the identity of family.

Thanks to our Deaconess of Arts, Hayley Moss, along with David Yeiser, we now have rich artwork for this emphasis. Tammy Stayton gave us the idea of a pitcher and basin to serve as the logo for the family identity. This points us to the moment when Jesus served his disciples by washing their feet, and then told them to do the same for one another. May it remind us to serve one another by washing one another with the word, caring for and counseling one another.

Guiding this emphasis is a sermon series in the letter of Ephesians, which we have subtitled, "Into the Fullness of Christ". We hope that this image, taken in the mountains of Ethiopia, has the effect of drawing you into the fullness of the scene, just as we are being drawn as a family deeper and deeper into the fullness of Christ.

Since we skipped ahead last week in order for Trey to echo Paul's prayer in his last sermon as a pastor, today we're moving back in the passage. So I invite you to turn in your Bibles with me to Ephesians 1:11-14, which you can find on page 976 if you're using one of the Bibles in the chairs. The title of today's sermon is "The Spirit's Assurance," and there are two ways to put the main idea, depending on how you translate the passage: "God gives all of himself for you" and "God wants all of you for himself". Here's how that will break down and apply to us today as we move verse by verse:

- 1) The Spirit delivers your blessings—so welcome him - vv. 11-12
- 2) The Spirit seals your salvation—so trust him - v. 13
- 3) The Spirit guarantees your future—so await him - v. 14<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), Loc 2296

With that said, if you are able, please stand with me to honor the reading of God's word. Again, today's passage is Ephesians 1:11-14. Church, hear the word of the Lord:

*<sup>11</sup> In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, <sup>12</sup> so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. <sup>13</sup> In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, <sup>14</sup> who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory. Ephesians 1:11-14*

The Lord has spoken to us. [Congregation:] *Thanks be to God!* You may be seated.

## **Exposition**

Last week Jason asked me to teach at Men's Formation Training about the importance of knowing and sharing our stories. Where we started was at the beginning of the Bible, which is itself one great story. It begins in Genesis where God has a perfect relationship of *trust* with the first man and woman. Then consider how that relationship was forever fractured: the serpent enters the garden and tempts the woman to *distrust* God.

*Did God actually say, "You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?...God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil. Genesis 3:1, 5*

And for the first time she begins to consider God as *untrustworthy*, as holding back something good from her.

There are a number of common ways to describe what's at the heart of sin:

- It can be described as pride, a self-absorbed rebellion—and indeed it is.
- It can be described as unbelief, an absence of faith—and indeed it is.
- In their book *The Relational Soul*, authors Rich Plass and Jim Cofield also describe sin as "reactive mistrust".<sup>2</sup> Since we are created as relational beings, our capacity for relationships is based on our ability to trust. What sin does, is it fractures our ability to trust at the deepest level. This has massive implications.

A way that we might map this out is with an iceberg:

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<sup>2</sup> Richard Plass and James Cofield, *The Relational Soul: Moving From False Self to Deep Connection* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2014), 32



What we are usually most attentive to in our lives is with what's on the surface, which usually means two things: what we believe and how we behave. What we are much less attentive to (and sometimes completely unaware of), is what's under the surface of the iceberg; to put it simply: our story.

For example, a Christian is struggling to have confidence in his salvation. He understands the gospel and applies it to himself daily. He even holds it out to others with confidence that it is true for *them*—but not himself. Why? Well, there may be more at play than just a lack of knowing the right thing and doing the right thing. Although his fractured capacity to trust is being renewed by God, perhaps unresolved parts of his story are affecting him—without him even knowing.

As Paul wrote his letter to the church at Ephesus, he knew their stories came with a lot of baggage. And so it makes sense that, according to The Bible Project, Ephesians basically summarizes the *gospel story* in chapters 1-3 and then describes how it should reshape every part of *our story* in chapters 4-6.<sup>3</sup> Here's how Paul does that from the very beginning: he shows how committed God is to healing our capacity to trust, to being in a relationship where he holds nothing back from us, and we hold nothing back from him. Consider how we've broken down this the longest, most glorious sentence in the Bible in three sermons:

- The Father's Plan - vv. 3-6
- The Son's Mission - vv. 7-10
- The Spirit's Assurance - vv. 11-14

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<sup>3</sup> The Bible Project, "Overview: Ephesians," <https://bibleproject.com/explore/ephesians/>

What this means is *God's all in*. There is no part of him held back in reshaping your story. *God gives all of himself for you*. Let's see what that means uniquely today through the Person of the Holy Spirit.

## 1) The Spirit Delivers Your Blessings—So Welcome Him - vv. 11-12

This brings us to our first point of application: the Spirit delivers your blessings—so welcome him. Read with me the beginning of verse 11:

***11 In him we have obtained an inheritance, Ephesians 1:11a***

Now, Paul is still unpacking here what he began in verse 3, that God the Father “has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places”. What in the world does that mean?!

Well, if you remember, a few sermons back I used something from our everyday lives to help us understand how this works: Jesus is kind of like Amazon. Because Jesus has done the work of building our salvation by his life, death, and resurrection, he makes it possible that any blessing the Father orders for us can be delivered immediately to the front door of our lives. If that's Jesus' role, then the Holy Spirit's role is like the actual delivery person who rings your doorbell and hands you the package.

And here Paul describes this package the Spirit delivers as an “inheritance”. Now there are two ways we can take this based on how we translate these words:

- One way is just as we've read it this morning, that we are *recipients* of an inheritance. This is reflected throughout the Old Testament in the statement, “The Lord is my portion”<sup>4</sup> (or my inheritance)—in other words, ‘The greatest thing I've ever gotten is God.’ Hence, the first way to put today's main idea: God gives all of himself for you.
- But another way we can translate verse 11 goes like this: “*In him we are also an inheritance*”.<sup>5</sup> This idea is even more present in the Old Testament as it describes God's relationship to the people he saved, the Jews. We read in Deuteronomy 4:20,

***20 But the Lord has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace, out of Egypt, to be a people of his own inheritance, as you are this day. Deuteronomy 4:20***

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<sup>4</sup> Psalm 16:5; 73:26; 119:57; 142:5; Numbers 18:20; Lamentations 3:24

<sup>5</sup> Ephesians 1:11, CSB

Hence, option number two of today's main idea: God wants all of you for himself. Now which one is it, right?! Is God my inheritance? Or am I his inheritance? Well, when you consider how a relationship works, especially, for example, a marriage relationship, it's both!<sup>6</sup>

But what makes this mind-blowing relationship possible, Paul continues in verse 11, is this:

*having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, Ephesians 1:11*

The relationship wasn't possible because of anything the Ephesians had done, but because of what God had done. Remember what Paul has said already: the Father planned it out, and the Son pulled it off.

The Father's will from eternity past would work itself out perfectly over the course of hundreds of years, beginning with him choosing a people to inherit, and to be their inheritance. Why start there? Why not just go straight from the garden of Eden to the cross of Calvary? Why this crazy, hard-to-understand Old Testament? Here's why, Paul says in verse 12,

*<sup>12</sup> so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.*

So that we—the Jews—Paul says, the ones through whom and to whom the Christ came, might recognize the Father's plan all along and fall on our faces giving all the glory to God alone—*it had nothing to do with us!* If that's the effect it would have on the Jews (instead of arrogance), what kind of message would that send to a bunch of pagan Gentiles in Ephesus?<sup>7</sup> Well, the same message it sends to a bunch of South End'ers when we fall on our faces instead of acting like we earned this inheritance: YOU'RE WELCOME HERE TOO!

So, when the Spirit comes to deliver the Father's blessings, don't ignore the doorbell—welcome him! When he knocks with truth or conviction or command, don't leave his package for the porch-pirates. Paul will later say in chapter 4, "do not grieve

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<sup>6</sup> Arnold, Loc 2091, 2112; Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove: IVP, 1989), 62

<sup>7</sup> Foulkes, 63

the Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”<sup>8</sup> This is a verse that I think we often misunderstand. Let me explain.

I once was seeking to speak truth in love to someone whom I cared about deeply. However, this person was not having it. Over and over his response was, “I’m just a piece of junk.” Suddenly I experienced an overwhelming grief that left me sobbing. I think the Spirit was giving me a tiny taste of what he experiences when he shows up to deliver one of the Father’s blessings and we refuse him. It’s not so much that he’s angry, but grieved.

So church, let’s not grieve him, let’s welcome him.

## **2) The Spirit Seals Your Salvation—So Trust Him - v. 13**

And if you find yourself struggling to welcome him, it may be because you’re struggling to trust him. This brings us to our second point of application today: the Spirit seals your salvation—so trust him. In verse 13 Paul continues,

***13 In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, Ephesians 1:13***

Here Paul moves from those who were the *first* to hope in Christ—the Jews—to those in Ephesus who had *also* hoped in Christ—the Gentiles.<sup>9</sup> He’s making sure they understand that God’s not holding back anything good from them—all that he gives to the Jewish believer he gives to the Gentile believer. It’s not a matter of how religious your background, whether you grew up in church or not, it’s about two things: *hearing* the word of truth about Jesus and *believing* in him. Paul puts it the same way in his letter to the Romans:

***17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. Romans 10:17***<sup>10</sup>

I know this seems like Christianity 101, but consider with me for a moment how this gets at our deepest need. In the gospel God is saying to people with a fractured capacity to trust, ‘You want to be saved? Here’s what you need to do: trust me.’ What?! *That’s the very thing I cannot do!* God’s like, ‘I know, not only will my Son pay the price for your mistrust, I will give you the trust you need when you call upon my name. And, because

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<sup>8</sup> Ephesians 4:30

<sup>9</sup> Foulkes, 63

<sup>10</sup> Arnold, Loc 2151

you're going to fall back into your old doubts and fears, I'm going to seal you with the promised Holy Spirit.'

Interesting here that Paul uses the word "sealed" instead of just "saved".<sup>11</sup> What's up with that? Well, there are lots of cool ways we could talk about the analogy of a seal, but what I think Paul is mainly doing is pointing back to the Old Testament. In that day God's people had their own "seal" on their bodies to mark that they truly belonged to God. It was circumcision, the removing of the male foreskin as God had commanded.<sup>12</sup> But as God's people over and over recognized that circumcision was not enough to change their mistrusting hearts, God gave them a promise through the prophet Ezekiel. He said there will come a day when

*I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup> And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. Ezekiel 36:26-27*

So if the Old Testament believer looked for proof of God's salvation in the presence of *the holy cut*, the New Testament believer looks to the presence of *the Holy Spirit*. It's not that if you trust in Jesus you are marked in some way by the Holy Spirit—it's the Spirit *himself* who is the mark of ownership.<sup>13</sup>

So how do Gentiles in Ephesus and Gentiles in this room have any assurance that a Jewish Messiah would have us too? We don't have the ethnic blood! We don't have the covenant mark! Here's how you know, says God. For your assurance nothing less will do than *my own presence*.

Think of an official letter from a king—it has an unbroken seal that proves the Sender, that proves the contents within remain intact.<sup>14</sup> This seal is the same promised Spirit poured out first on the Jews, who

*himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, <sup>17</sup> and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. Romans 8:16-17*

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<sup>11</sup> Arnold, Loc 2173

<sup>12</sup> Romans 4:11

<sup>13</sup> Arnold, Loc 2195

<sup>14</sup> Foulkes, 64

Over the past several months I have had conversations with many of you who, like me, no matter how much you learn or how hard you try to be different, you always go back to the same ways of thinking and acting. In those conversations I have said the same thing to you that Katie has often said to me: I encourage you to be brave enough to go there, to get the help you need, to do the hard work of digging into things deep below the surface. And I have seen the same look in your eyes that Katie probably saw in mine: fear and dread at the thought of going there.

Hear this word of application: the Spirit seals your salvation—so trust him. For you that may mean recognizing that you struggle to do that because you're viewing him through a fractured capacity to trust, through the lens of past relationships and experiences that he wants to heal. Would you let him give you the courage to face what's under the surface, in the safety of a loving family? He'll be there every step of the way, you can trust him.

### **3) The Spirit Guarantees Your Future—So Await Him - v. 14**

Not only will the Holy Spirit be there every step of the way, but he will also meet us at the finish line. This brings us to our third point of application: the Spirit guarantees your future—so await him. Read with me in verse 14. Paul tells us the Holy Spirit

*is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory. Ephesians 1:14*

Once again we encounter a part of the passage that could be translated in two different ways.

- One is just as we read it, and carries the idea that the presence of the Spirit guarantees to us that we will one day receive our full inheritance as heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. We've already established what exactly that inheritance is. Yes, eternal life and new bodies and freedom from sin and death—but in a word, we get...God. It's like the little girl who went on a lavish date with her daddy—we're talking Chick-fil-a, trading the book for ice cream, and a movie. On the way home the dad asks her, "What was your favorite thing you got?" and she squeals without hesitation, "I got you!" What a wonder—God will one day give all of himself for us!
- And yet, another way we might translate the passage goes like this: [the Holy Spirit] "*who is the guarantee of our inheritance until God redeems his possession, to the praise of his glory.*" What's in view here isn't just *us* receiving



a promised inheritance, but *God*. It's him claiming us as his own, both now in part, and fully in the future.

The word “guarantee” or “deposit” carries the idea of a down payment. When we lay hold of something so desirable to us that we must have it, but we can't yet afford it, what do we do? We make a down payment:

- 'I want this house—so here's my best down payment and I'll work to pay off the rest.'
- 'I want this person to be my bride—so here's the best engagement ring I can afford and I'll live the rest of my life trying to prove how much she's worth.'

That might seem a little too earthy, a little too romantic, but—*that's the same thing God is doing right here*. He's saying, 'I want these people so much that I'm going to make a down payment—my own Spirit—as an undeniable guarantee to them and to everyone else that someday I'm coming back to claim my prize.

- I'm preparing a place right now for them, so that where I am they may be also.<sup>15</sup>
- No eye had seen, no ear had heard, no heart had conceived what I prepared for them in my first coming—just imagine my second coming.<sup>16</sup>
- One day my new creation will come down like a bride adorned for her husband, and I'll finally announce from my throne, “Behold, my dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. <sup>4</sup>He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”<sup>17</sup>

Well, you might say, we can't think that way—we'll just be full of ourselves. Really? Look at Paul's last phrase: “to the praise of his glory.” You hold in one hand the Lenten reality of your dust, and in the other hand the love of God for you, and you know what you'll do? PRAISE HIS GLORY!

Church, the Spirit guarantees your future—so await him. Here's what I mean by that. Katie and I lived out our courtship and engagement over the course of almost two years—on separate continents. Now, I wouldn't recommend that, unless you just enjoy pain! It was so painful because the longer we were in a relationship, the more we

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<sup>15</sup> John 14:3

<sup>16</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:9

<sup>17</sup> Revelation 2:3-4

longed to be together. It didn't matter the experience—when either of us had a good day, we longed to share in the joys of it together; when either of us had a bad day, we longed to share in the sorrows of it together. What this taught us was *how to long*. How to let all of life lead not to loathing, but longing.

As Christians we need to learn how to turn every experience in life into longing, longing for the day we will finally see Jesus face-to-face. This, I believe, is how we await him. Church, let's wait well.

## Conclusion

As we bring to a close our time in the longest, most glorious sentence in the Bible, my prayer has been that Paul's intention for it would strike us dead in the heart, much the way it surely did for the churches in and around Ephesus. There are some of you here today who are struggling to have confidence in your salvation, in God's love for you. If it's not you today, then it's only a matter of time until it will be you. What could be at play might not just be on the surface—some truth you need to believe more or some way you need to behave differently. It could go deep below the surface, where sin has fractured your capacity to trust.

That's what it was for Eve, on that tragic day when she began to believe that God was holding something good back from her. But, Paul says to us, look at what God has done to heal our capacity to trust—he has held back none of himself from us. This great sentence isn't just Trinitarian for the sake of being Trinitarian—God is showing us that he's all in: Father, Son, and Spirit. Here's another way to put this:



- The Father didn't just make a plan to adopt what's on the surface, but to adopt all of you.
- The Son didn't just finish a mission to redeem what's on the surface, but to redeem all of you.

- The Spirit didn't just set a seal to inherit what's on the surface, but to inherit all of you.

*God gives all of himself for you! And God wants all of you for himself!*

Tell that to the enemy when he whispers, "God's holding out on you."

And when the Holy Spirit starts working his story down into our story, here's what our response should look like:

- Welcome him
- Trust him
- Await him

And wherever you are in relationship to Jesus today, you can respond in these ways right now. Jesus said, "when I am lifted up, [I] will draw all people to myself"<sup>18</sup>—and Jesus has been lifted up throughout this gathering, so by his Spirit he is drawing each of us to himself. And he has made a way for your hard heart to respond and be made new.

On the night that he was betrayed, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it, he broke it and said to his disciples, "This is my body, which is broken for you; eat this in remembrance of me." He also took a cup of wine, and after blessing it, gave it to his disciples and said, "This cup is the new covenant marked by the shedding of my blood. For as often as you eat this bread and drink from this cup, you announce the Lord's death until he returns." **Today we are announcing that Jesus Christ can heal our trust in God both now and forever.**

Our tradition here at Antioch is to come forward and break off a piece of bread and dip it in the juice. There will be stations here in the front; gluten-free bread will be available to your right. If you're a baptized believer, come and remember who you are and whose you are. If you're a believer but not yet baptized, before coming to the table, we would love to help you first come and declare your faith publicly through baptism. If you're not a Christian, this sacred symbol is not for you, but rather than taking communion, we encourage you to take Christ. He has made himself available to you this very moment. There will be pastors in the back to talk and pray with you about any need you have. Let's pray.

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<sup>18</sup> John 12:32

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