



ephesians

a church becoming

Sunday, September 22, 2024

Ephesians 1:13-14

Last week we talked a little bit about Paul's famous run-on sentence in the opening of the book of Ephesians. He is so passionate about the Gospel that he just goes on and on and on and on. And in his exposition, he makes it very clear that everything we have - our salvation, our identity, and our future hope - is grounded in Christ. Paul emphasizes that we've been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, chosen before the foundation of the world. He wants us to grasp the depth of God's grace and the incredible riches that are ours through faith in Jesus. That upon salvation - in that simple yet profound action - we actually move immediately from being slaves to sons and daughters: part of the family of God. But not just sons and daughters, now also co-heirs with Christ! This is why Paul is soooooo excited and can't contain himself. And part of the reason he expresses this is to remind the Ephesians that their true identity and acceptance is actually found in Christ and not in the things that are done for Christ.

Paul now opens up this next, and final part of his lengthy run-on sentence by emphasizing this great trust that we have in God: a trust that comes through hearing and believing the Gospel. He explains that this trust is solidified because we are sealed with the Holy Spirit, who guarantees our inheritance in Christ.

If you have your Bibles, please turn with me to:

Ephesians 1:13-14

'In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.'

This whole section—not just these two verses—but the entire passage from verses 3-14 actually hinges on the first part of verse 13: 'In whom you trusted.' What Paul is saying here is that everything he has just described - the spiritual blessings, the election, the adoption and the redemption

becomes a reality for us as we place our trust in Jesus Christ. But then he follows that up by saying that those who believe in Christ are sealed with the Holy Spirit. It's important to understand that Paul uses these two distinct words - trust and belief - intentionally here. While belief refers to the initial acceptance of the gospel, trust reflects the ongoing, deeper reliance on Christ that follows belief.

Now, when we talk about salvation, three common terms we see in the Bible are Belief, Faith and Trust. And it's important that we understand that although these three terms are similar, there are subtle differences between them that help us see the connection and progression between each of them.

To help me explain these, I'm going to use the example of a roller coaster.

(Preamble Yukon Striker...)

Belief is recognizing that the rollercoaster is actually safe and can take people through the ride. Whereas Trust is not only believing that this ride is safe and fully functional, but now your belief is acted upon by putting yourself in the seat. And now you become completely reliant and dependant upon the rollercoaster to carry you through every twist, turn, and drop.

Belief is looking at the coaster and knowing that it is safe. Trust is putting your butt in the seat of the coaster and relying on it to be safe.

So, where is faith in all of this?

In this analogy, faith would be represented by the line-up. It's the journey where you're moving from belief towards trust, inching closer as you take steps based on your belief, until you're ready to fully rely on the rollercoaster. Faith is what compels you to take that final step of putting your belief into action. Faith acts as a bridge that helps move us towards greater levels of trust.

It's the same way with Christianity isn't it?

Belief is the starting point - when you acknowledge the truth of who Jesus is, what He has done, and that He offers salvation. You believe that Christ died for your sins and rose again therefore, defeating sin and death.

Trust comes when you make that decision to follow Jesus, to surrender your life to Him, and to depend on Him for your future. It's when you step into the 'seat' of salvation and rely on Christ to carry you through every aspect of your life, knowing that He is in control.

And Faith? Faith is the journey that connects belief and trust. In our Christian walk, faith not only helps us take that first step of believing Jesus for salvation, but it also continues to deepen our trust as we rely on Him in every aspect of our lives. Faith is not just a one-time event; it's the ongoing journey that continually moves us closer to Christ, helping us grow deeper in our trust and reliance on Him every day.

This tension between belief and trust isn't limited to salvation though - it's something we encounter throughout the Christian life, and it calls for continued levels of faith in various areas.

We see this in:

Prayer: We believe in the power of prayer, but trusting God with the outcome - especially when it's delayed or not what we expected - requires faith.

Seasons of Testing and Trials: We believe that God is good, but relying on Him to bring us through difficult seasons without knowing how or when things will improve challenges our faith.

Obedience to the Will of God: We believe that God's commands are for our good, but fully trusting Him enough to obey - especially when His will runs counter to our desires - requires a deep reliance on His wisdom.

And perhaps one of the most challenging areas for many Christians is in the realm of finances. This is where the tension between belief and trust really hits home, and why so many struggle with the concept of giving and tithing.

Ultimately though, it's not a money issue - it's a trust issue.

We live in a time when money is tight. Costs are rising while wages struggle to keep up. Many families have both spouses working just to cover the basics like mortgage/rent, food, and transportation. For a lot of us, there simply isn't much left over, and it's easy to think there isn't enough to give to God. I get that. But even though that's our reality, the issue is deeper than finances - it's actually about trusting God.

When we give, there's often a fear that it will lead to financial lack. But it's in those moments that we actually experience a deeper sense of trust in God's provision.

Our belief transitions into trust as our faith is tested.

When we give despite our fears, we declare that we trust Him to provide. We acknowledge that God's provision isn't limited by our circumstances but His sovereignty.

Perhaps this is why God says to the Israelites of old to test Him in this as the only way to move from belief to trust is to actually step out in faith and give, even when it feels uncomfortable.

You see, God invites His people to test Him in their giving, not because He needs their money, but because He knows the potential grip that wealth can have on the human heart. When we give, especially when it feels like there's not enough, it forces us to confront that very tension between trusting in our resources and trusting in God.

So could it be that God calls us to give, not to create lack, but to create space for faith?

Could it be that giving is God's way of training our hearts to rely on Him more deeply, reminding us that He is our ultimate source, not the money in our bank accounts? When we trust Him with what we have, we break the power that money can hold over us, and in doing so, we open ourselves up to experiencing God's provision and faithfulness in ways we might never have seen otherwise.

I can't speak for you, but I know that this is true for me and my family. And time and time again, we find ourselves in positions where we see God come through in amazing ways.

Just this week I was chatting with one of my kids who will remain nameless and they were telling me that they were 'broke' and I pried them as to why. Their answer left me speechless - 'I gave God a little extra from my last pay check.' How amazing is it to embrace sacrifice and to be able to give knowing that it will result in sacrifice but that there will be joy in your heart for that gift given to the Lord. Oh that I would view my giving to the Lord in such a depth!!

So, Paul goes on to say that we are to place our trust in God in all areas of life but first and foremost in salvation. Why? Because as he says, 'you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance...'

Ok so watch this. Not only can we place our trust in Christ because of what He did on the cross, but now we learn that the Holy Spirit acts as a personal guarantor for the future. And this isn't the first time in Biblical history where humanity is reminded of this either. We see a very similar example in the relationship that God had with Abraham. In Genesis 15 both God and Abraham were preparing to walk through a covenant relationship together. This covenant was referred to as the Covenant of Pieces where small sacrificial animals were torn in two and laid on either side of a path. Next, the two people entering the covenant would walk down between the halves of animals together as if to say:

'May this be done to us if we do not keep our oath.'

Which was their way of keeping each other accountable to the oath that they were promising each other.

However, in Genesis 15, when God entered this covenant with Abraham, He caused Abraham to fall asleep, and God passed through the sacrificial animals, alone. This act signified that the covenant rested entirely on God's faithfulness - not on Abraham's ability to keep it. God was saying, in essence, 'If I fail to keep my promise, may I be like these animals.' But God never fails, and the entire covenant depended on His unfailing faithfulness.

Now, when Paul talks about the Holy Spirit here in verses 13-14, we see a similar dynamic. The Holy Spirit is described as the seal and the guarantee of our inheritance. This means that our salvation, like the covenant with Abraham, depends entirely on God's faithfulness not ours. We don't have to worry about whether we're capable of keeping it all together because God has already made the promise and sealed it with His Spirit. Just as Abraham didn't walk the covenant line, we too are not responsible for securing our inheritance - God has done it for us.

In both scenarios, God takes full responsibility for the covenant. With Abraham, He walked the line alone, symbolizing that the fulfillment of the promise depended solely on Him. And in our salvation, He seals us with the Holy Spirit, guaranteeing that He will bring His promises to completion. Nothing depended on Abraham's ability, and nothing depends on our ability - it all depends on God's faithfulness.

In the same way we trust God for our salvation, sealed and guaranteed by His Spirit, we can trust Him with every other area of our lives. Whether it's our finances, our struggles, or our future, the same God who made and kept the covenant with Abraham and sealed us with the Holy Spirit will

remain faithful to us in every way. He has proven time and again that He alone is sufficient.

Josh Hageman

Lead Pastor

Kingsview Community Church

Stoney Creek, ON

www.kingsviewchurch.com

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