

Ephesians

Ephesians 1:11 - Confidence in our calling

In **verse 9**, Paul writes about the “mystery of God’s will,” which he describes in **verse 10** as the gathering together of everything in the heavens and the earth at a set time for the launch of the **Great Reset** by Jesus Christ. A great RE-creation is coming, when everything will be sorted out by Jesus, and our entire history will be mended, healed and restored back to what we and this entire creation were meant to be.

But how do we know this is true? Well, Paul gets into that in **verse 11**, in a rather startling statement, that “because we are united to Christ **we have received an inheritance from God**” (from the New Living Translation). So this is something that’s already happened to us. But what does it mean? Well, putting it together with the previous verse about the great re-creation the whole world will inherit and experience one day, does it mean that it’s already started in us? And if that’s the case, then we know the promised Great Reset is true because **we’re already experiencing it**. And the reason we’re already experiencing it is because it came to us personally “from God” (verse 11).

So what we’re saying here is that God has people in this era of his amazing plan who are already experiencing the future re-creation by Jesus in their physical lifetimes now. With that in mind, then, how do we know that **we’re** among those people that God chose? And can we **confidently** say we are too? Can we, as the sub-title above says, have “confidence in our calling”?

Well, Jesus did say in **John 6:44**, that “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.” Put the other way round, it’s because the Father himself draws people that they come to Jesus. It’s only because of the Father calling us, then, that any of us become Christians. And the reason he has for us becoming Christians is **to receive this inheritance from him in our lifetimes now** - as an advance party, so to speak - for the Great Reset that’s coming in the future for everyone.

Now this may take some convincing, because if you’re anything like me I have serious doubts at times that God chose me. Where’s the clear and obvious evidence? But, fortunately, it looks like Paul took that into account here in Ephesians, because many of those he was writing to were Gentile Greeks who had no idea at all about God choosing people to play a part in his plan now.

The challenge for Paul, then, was how to get it across to Gentiles, in their terms, that God had personally selected them for an advance experience of the world that Jesus would be instituting one day. So what he did was use a most unusual Greek word for “receiving an inheritance” back in **Ephesians 1:11** - it was *eklērōthēmen* (ek-lairo-they-mun), which simply means “obtaining an inheritance,” but it’s only used twice in the entire New Testament, so what did Paul have in mind, then?

Well, there’s a clue in the five letters - *klērō* - in *eklērōthēmen*. Which may raise an eyebrow or two because *klērō* comes from the word *klērōs*, meaning an object used in the casting or drawing of lots. So in this inheritance we’ve received from God we now have this picture of **drawing of lots** included.

So what was Paul getting at? Well, we know he used words that would ring a familiar bell in a Greek ear, and the word *klērō* would certainly do that, because the casting of lots was a familiar practice in Greek culture. In figuring out, for instance, who was the right chap for an important job, the Greeks would write the names of all the candidates on pebbles or small pieces of wood, throw them into a pot, give it a jolly good shake, then tip it and the name that fell out first would be the person chosen.

And this wasn’t just the luck of the draw either. The Greeks firmly believed that the name chosen, or the decision made, by the casting of lots was the will of the gods. Which may sound a bit primitive and superstitious to us now, but not so strange in scripture, because in choosing a replacement for Judas Iscariot, “they **drew lots**,” in **Acts 1:26**, “and the lot fell to Matthias.” And as far as the apostles were concerned, they had no doubts either that Matthias was the will and choice of God.

So Paul was using a concept that was familiar to Jews as well - and very much so, because on arrival in Canaan the twelve tribes of Israel were each assigned an area of land **by the casting of lots** (Numbers 26:53-56). The Dutch artist Gerard Hoet imagines this very scene: a blindfolded man has his arm deep in a pot to pick out a name, with Joshua staring down at him like a stern referee, because whatever land the lots came up with for each tribe was the will of God. This was no random luck of the draw. God was making it clear that the inheritance each tribe received was his absolute, irreversible choice.

And here’s Paul painting that same picture for us, and to get that same point across too, that we are no random choice either. Just as God portioned out a share of Canaanite land to each tribe of Israel, he’s portioned out a share in his plan to each of those he picked out for this time now.

Paul's imagery of the casting of lots, then, would give those Greeks confidence - and in their terms that God had truly picked them. And hopefully it helps us too, imagining God stamping his divine will on us as the ones he's called for this time now. If there'd been a literal casting of lots, then, to find out who God had chosen for this age now, the lot would have fallen to us, with as much of God's authority behind it as "the lot that fell to Matthias."

And Paul wrote even more to help build our confidence in God calling us - in another little gem he added in **Ephesians 1:11**, that the inheritance we've received, or the portion we now share in God's plan that God picked us out for, was "**predestined.**"

The Greek word Paul uses is *prooristhentes* (pro-or-reez-then-tays), the *pro* meaning "before" and the root word *horizo* meaning "to determine." God choosing us, then, was thoroughly determined ahead of time. And to capture what that means, those same two root words are used in **Acts 4:28** to describe what Herod and Pontius Pilate thought were their own sneaky plans "to conspire against Jesus" (verse 27), but in fact they were only doing, quote, "what **God's power and will had decided beforehand should happen.**"

Neither Herod or Pilate had any say in what they did. It was purely God's doing. But here in Ephesians Paul applies the same Greek root word to us, that we didn't have any say in our calling either. It too was decided beforehand - "before the creation of the world" in our case (Ephesians 1:4). God, therefore, allotted us a place in his plan for this time now without us even knowing it - and therefore without us doing anything to deserve it too.

God selecting us, then, didn't in any way depend on our goodness, our abilities, or even our response. But nor, amazingly, did our limitations handicap his choice either. The reason he chose us, as Paul phrases it in **verse 11**, was simply and purely based on "the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will" (NIV).

The Greek word Paul chose for "purpose" was *prothesin* (proth-uh-sin). It comes from the root word to "set before oneself." It conjures up a lovely picture of God laying out his whole plan before him, spreading it out like an architect's blueprint, and looking the whole thing over, including the section covering those he would call through the ages - like who would be the first man made in his image, who would be the man to kick off the blessing of all nations, who would be the twelve disciples, who would make up the church and the bride of Christ, and all of it tying in with why he made us and put us on this planet in the first place.

So all that was left for God to do next was, as **verse 11** phrases it, “work out everything according to the counsel of his will.” The Greek word Paul used for “work” or “works” was *energountos* (en-air-go-un-tos), which means “to energize,” creating this picture of God firing up the great machine of his plan, and filling it with his power so that everything from that point on functions exactly “according to the counsel of his will.” The Greek Paul uses for “counsel” is *boulē* (boo-lay), also used in Acts 2:23 as “God’s set purpose and foreknowledge.” It gets the point across that everything we humans do ties in with God’s predetermined plan. God doesn’t base what he does on what we do. It’s the other way round: what we do is based on what he planned for us to do.

And since we’re part of his great plan, then it’s that same energy of his that now powers us to fulfill exactly what he planned for us. Because that’s the “counsel of his will.” The Greek for “will” here is *thelema* (thel-eema), which describes God’s will as **his heartfelt pleasure** - so what God predetermined for our lives (that’s his counsel) was also his great pleasure (that’s his will). Calling us for this time now, then, was a joy he anticipated and a joy he now has in making it happen.

This could still seem hard to believe, though, because what obvious things in our estimation is God doing in and through us that even remotely tie in with playing a part in the re-creation of the world? But Paul’s whole point here is that God put his hand in the pot and chose us. So it doesn’t matter if we’re little people only able to do little things, or we can’t do what the great names in the history of Christianity have done, or we don’t seem to have much to offer as far as gifts and talents, or that our physical and mental state ranges between feeble and non-existent, because for some amazing reason our name was on a ball God chose for this time now. And it was - and is - his great pleasure to choose and enable weaklings to fulfill his purpose.

So what we’re going through in this life is what God picked us out for. Our names were picked out of the pot for the thing we are now doing. To us it may not seem much, but God clearly saw something in us that fitted in with his plan for today. Israel wasn’t exactly great shakes either, but God didn’t choose them for their greatness. He chose them because he loved them and to show the world that no matter how weak and pathetic we are, God sticks to his promises ((Deuteronomy 7:7-9).

Whatever circumstances we find ourselves in, therefore, we can rest assured we were chosen for just this part. And if it isn’t a big part, so what? It was good enough for God before the foundation of the world, and it’s still good enough for him today. But if it’s still evidence we’re looking for, that God really did call us, then Paul has another little gem coming up next....