

Ephesians 1:8-11

God's future plans and our place in them

Introduction

Now another blessing which is ours in Christ Jesus. In Him, God has disclosed what He intends to do in the future, and our particular part in that future. Once again, centre and focus is in His Son – every blessing is in Him, we are chosen in Him, we are God's sons through Him, redeemed through Him, and our future is bound up in Him. All that God intends to do with the universe has its focus and aim in Him. And in that future, God's people are going to enjoy inheritance in Him.

Very complicated passage. Various ways it can be taken. Not going to go into tortuous explanations and fine shades of meaning. Will expound most likely interpretation as simply as I can.

God's purpose for the future

God has made known to us His plans for this world and the universe, in His Son. Paul speaks of this plan as **the mystery of His will** (Ephesians 1:9). Need to be very careful about meaning of "mystery". Does not mean a dark secret known only to a few.  $\mu\upsilon\sigma\tau\eta\rho\iota\omicron\nu$  means something which human mind can never guess at or imagine.

Men's minds are darkened by their sin. (1 Corinthians 2:14). In confusion about future. But what men could never guess at by intellect, God has disclosed and made known. Open secret. Publicly declared. Not something we learn of behind closed doors when no one else is looking. It has been publicly declared, though only the spiritually minded can see it and appreciate it and enjoy it. Minds of men, however brilliant, however great their IQ, are spiritually dark. Blinded by the god of this world. Natural man does not understand the things of God. But to those illuminated by the Holy Spirit, who are spiritually minded, God's plan is disclosed, welcomed and understood. God not only gives truth, but spiritual wisdom to understand and love it.

What is this mystery now revealed? What is this open secret about the future? God's plans for future of this world and universe centre in His Son. **When the times will have reached their fulfilment** and when Christ returns in glory, **bring all things in heaven and on earth together**, brought together, united, summed up, gathered together, **all under one head, even Christ** (Ephesians 1:10).

History has meaning and purpose. It is moving to a glorious goal. Already Christ is head of His body, the church, but one day all things will acknowledge His headship. Whole argument presupposes that there is disharmony and discord in the world and universe. But in fullness of time, at consummation of all things, this discord will be replaced by unity under Christ. Bible traces disharmony back to the Fall and entrance of sin into the world. At once there was discord among men. In wrong relationship with God and fellow men.

Human history is an endless account of dispute, quarrelling, bloodshed, murder, jealousy, disharmony, envy, between men and men and between nation and nation. Blight is apparent in character, families, societies and nations. Ever since sin entered the world, things have been falling apart.

Also the created world is affected. **The creation was subjected to frustration** (Romans 8:20). The creation is in **bondage to decay** (Romans 8:21). The earth is cursed with disharmony and corruption. “Nature red in tooth and claw”, with troubles, diseases and pestilences. Original perfection has long since vanished and disappeared.

God’s plan and purpose is to restore harmony. Whereas sin tears apart, in Christ things are brought together and united. Process already begun since Christ’s death. Men at variance with men, the Gentiles and the Jews, nations at variance with other nations – all can find reconciliation and peace when believers in Him. But process to be complete at end of time. All things to be gathered together in one - whether in heaven or earth.

What are “all things” in heaven and earth? What will be united under Christ’s headship? Certainly – Christians living and Christians dead. Church on earth and church in heaven. Perfect harmony among God’s elect or every age and generation. Angels who are “good angels” – never sinned, therefore never redeemed, but brought under Christ’s headship. Also created universe, animals and beasts. Earth itself will be involved in this renewed harmony and unity. Groaning creation will be set free. Peter speaks of the destruction of sin and evil in the universe, and the creation of new heavens and new earth in which righteousness will dwell (2 Peter 3:12-13). One day the earth will be **full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea** (Isaiah 11:6-9).

Perfect harmony to be restored between men on earth and creation. Harmony in heaven likewise. All under Lord Jesus Christ. Head over all. Always Christ is there, and He is absolutely central and essential and vital to whole process. He has all glory and credit. (Anything calling itself Christianity, which does not make Him central and does not keep repeating His blessed name, is a denial of Christianity.)

Often questioned whether this verse teaches universalism. Very prevalent today in many churches – that all men sooner or later will be saved. The universalist will say it is impossible to think of God’s love ever being defeated. Most serious issue – and it involves the nature of Christianity, the words and authority of it, salvation and evangelism. Unless Paul contradicts himself and contradicts Christ – such an idea is quite unacceptable. Paul makes it clear that those not obeying the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and not knowing God will be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord (2 Thessalonians 1:8,9). Christ Himself taught about hell as eternal and irreversible. Peter speaks of fallen angels reserved in chains for final destruction (2 Peter 2:4).

If not saved, do not cling to this verse with such a perverted interpretation. See it and its meaning in light of whole balance of Scripture.

So here is glorious picture of future. Rebellious man will finally acknowledge Christ’s Lordship, but will not finally know His salvation. How much we need to have minds

stretched and perspective broadened. Back into eternity past – God’s planning and purposes, election of His people, His predestination of them. Then through time to present day, when God’s purposes are being fulfilled. And then on to eternity, the Saviour’s coming glory and final triumph in the future. Heart and mind need to inhabit eternity. How blinkered is our vision. How narrow our horizons. How small our minds. So preoccupied with petty little affairs and present events. Need to see time in light of eternity. And to view our present privileges and obligations in the light of past election and future perfection.

Dealing here with mighty concepts, deep things of God. Here is God’s final purpose for this world. There is nothing beyond God’s final purpose. Bigger and greater than our personal salvation. Transported from matter of personal salvation to ultimate things – God’s final, comprehensive and glorious purpose. No greater privilege than to be allowed to look into this. Delivers from the depression which can soon overcome us as we look at the world in its present turmoil and division. When we have knowledge of God’s plan, which is totally certain, we remain calm in present world crisis.

Within this master plan for the universe, the believer may look forward to an inheritance

**In whom we are heirs** (Ephesians 1:11). And this inheritance is given in two stages. Certain blessings are here and now, and others are given in the hereafter. In this life we enjoy intimacy and fatherly care and blessings of those whom His Spirit indwells, to illuminate, strengthen and direct. He gave us Christ after all: **He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all – how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things** (Romans 8:32). Christ is governing the universe in the interest of His church (Ephesians 1:22) and causing all to work for spiritual good of His people (Romans 8:28).

Then in the future we will know what it means to be heirs of God, joint heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17). Going to be with God, be with Christ, live in place He has prepared (John 14:2). Enjoy His glory, reign with Christ. Enjoy Paradise. Spend eternity in Divine presence. All He is in His glorified life, we ourselves shall be. Enjoy that blessed state forever.

To grasp these truths means we should be the happiest people on earth and full of joy (1 Peter 1:8), joy unspeakable. The essence of the future for the Christian is this – we have an inheritance, incorruptible and undefiled, which does not fade away, **and kept in heaven for you** (1 Peter 1:4). Joy of knowing that whatever we may lose in this life we have final inheritance – guaranteed, safe and secure.

*“Fading is the worldling’s pleasure  
All his boasted pomp and show.  
Solid joys and lasting treasures  
None but Zion’s children know”*

But can we be sure it will be ours? Dare we believe? Back comes God’s affirmation it is so: **Having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will** (Ephesians 1:11). In eternity

past, all this was planned for us. He drew up His plans, and if we are believers, our names are written into those plans. We are where we are because of God's sovereign will and pleasure.

There is one great mastermind and power behind our lives God is not a helpless spectator. No puppet whose strings are pulled by men. Not at mercy of luck or chance or own feeble will. **He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus** (Philippians 1:6). Never leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). He loves us with an everlasting love (Jeremiah 31:3). We have this secure anchor as we face life with all its storms and uncertainties. These truths give us a calm and sure confidence in a living powerful God. Lose fear of men. Gain support in adversity, comfort in sorrows and patience in our difficulties. Assurance in prayer. Live confidently.

And how it stimulates us to do His will, redouble efforts in His service, fear nothing but sin, and as He works in our lives, to **work out your salvation with fear and trembling** (Philippians 2:12). God is not merely exercising vague influence for good, He is the Most High, ruling in the kingdom of men (Daniel 4:17). **The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms** (Deuteronomy 33:27).

### Conclusion

What a glorious picture of God given in this passage. One who reveals future, master and controller of history, all to be gathered together under His Son in harmony and unity from present chaos and discord. And within that all embracing purpose, believers are given an inheritance. Starts now, but the fullness of blessing will be in the life beyond, when we see Him face to face.

Can we be sure? Might we fail to receive? No, God's people were predestined by the One who works out everything in accordance with the purpose of His will. Our response – live **for the praise of His glory** (Ephesians 1:12). All begins in His will and ends in His glory. We who are God's people must live by His will and for His glory.