

Gospel Renewal in the Church

Ephesians 1:11-23

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Heavenly Father, I thank you for the immense and wonderful ways that you are providing for us. It is all of sheer grace. All of life is gift. I want to thank you for Columbia Presbyterian Church. I want to thank you for how your Holy Spirit is working. I want to thank you for how you're giving wisdom and discernment to all of our leaders—our trustees, our deacons, our elders, our ministry leaders. I want to thank you, Lord, for the way in which you're providing for us in ways that we can't yet see. Lord, we need you desperately, and we need you to renew us. Now help us, Lord, as we look to your Word, as we finish up this series of gospel renewal, as we look at gospel renewal in the church. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

So, this morning, I want to also recommend that we consider just a word of things that I've been thinking about over this week as I prepared for this morning's sermon. This morning's sermon will be from the Book of Ephesians. We're going to be looking together at Ephesians 1:11-23. This is, if you will, a summary sermon of where we've been over the last almost eight weeks or so. And as you turn in your Bibles to Ephesians 1—if you don't have a Bible, perhaps you can open it in your electronic device. If not, you will have it before you on the screens.

And as you turn there, the thing I've been thinking a lot about over the last couple of days is just this: how incredible inspired—and I want to say this in a very Biblical way—how proud I am of you. I want to say how inspired I am from you and in you, because of the ways in which you have allowed Christ to work in you by his Spirit and his Word. I say that because I, as pastor, get to see the congregation from a 30,000 foot level, and sometimes right at the ground level. And sometimes all the way from the big down to the very minutiae of what I see in you and hear about you and ways in which I see you minister to each other—how incredibly humbled and inspired I am to continue to walk by faith in Jesus Christ. Why? Because when I doubt whether the Lord is working in me, I am encouraged and inspired by how I see him working in you, and how I see you wanting to open up your hearts, to see you open up your lives, to how the Lord wants to work in you—though that is a daunting task, a scary task—because the Lord is good, but he's not safe. He doesn't leave us the same. But I want to encourage you by the ways of things that people have been saying about you, ways and things I've been reading from you, your cards, your emails, the meals you're providing to each other—it is demonstration that the Lord is working.

I'm also very proud of you, because I've had good and painful conversations with numbers of you, sometimes to the point of tears, telling me about how the Lord is taking you to depths and parts of your life with the gospel that, number one, if you're honest, you didn't want to go, but now that you are there, how you're seeing his goodness at work in you. And it's stretching you. I am so proud to say that I get to serve with you. And I want to thank you for demonstrating Christ to me.

We've been working through this series of gospel renewal. It is working through the key doctrines that form what we call the gospel—literally, the good news. And this morning is going to be a summary of where we've been, tying it up and moving it to what I think is, perhaps, though I've never sung it before, a great title to a song that could finish this sermon, "Thrive." Because that's what, indeed, the Lord wants to do in us—that we might thrive in walking with him. Hear now God's Word from Paul to the church at Ephesus, as he seeks to encourage and pray for them. Ephesians 1:11-23.

In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you

were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

This is the Word of God. Thanks be to God. May God bless the preaching of his Word.

Why did I set out on this series? Partly, it is because, though we do not share the same family, we do share the same last name—a great book by the man named Doctor Richard Lovelace, who wrote a book back in the early 80s called *The Spiritual Dynamics of Gospel Renewal*. Spiritual dynamics of renewal, and how it works out in the individual Christian's life, and how it works its way out in the church. He studied as a church historian all of the churchwide and worldwide renewal movements that happened since the Book of Acts, and he looked at them, and he began to see a pattern—the primary ways in which the church was renewed—the primary and secondary ways that the Christian is renewed in their faith. This book has had an enormous impact on my ministry and an enormous impact on my life, and one that I continually go back to over and over again.

And so in going back to it again, I said, I want to do a series on the primary ways that the Lord brings about renewal in the Christian and in the church. And that's where we've been. And this passage gives to us—both explicitly and inferred—the four ways in which the Christian is renewed. You see it there in your outline. You are accepted. You are delivered. You are not alone. You have authority. This is where we've been.

And so before we go any further, I want to tell you that one of the reasons why we, the church of Jesus Christ, and you if you are a professing Christian—why it is this series, these primary dynamics of spiritual renewal, isn't something that just happens in the past and then we move on. This is something we visit regularly. Why is that? Well, I liken it to this story. A story that I saw played over and over again when I was a professional waiter for eight years, putting myself through college and seminary. I've worked in restaurants from Chicago to South Carolina. It was a great opportunity to see people from different cultures and different places and different circumstances.

But, generally speaking, every restaurant that I served, there was always that couple. Everyone had that one couple who would come in at least once a week. They would generally come in, and they would be seated at a table, and I would either see them because they were in one of my fellow servers' zones or they were in mine. I can call them just generally "that couple," because the cycle was the same. They would come in about six o'clock. We would call them early birds. Generally they were so comfortable, they moved beyond just having water. They began with coffee. And they would generally always know the menu. They would never have to open it. Sometimes I would call them by their first names, I was so familiar with them. They were generally very nice, not difficult, not demanding. They would ask for their regular. Generally before I even hit the table, I would already write on my little pad what I was going to have to type into the computer. And, like clockwork, drinks, bread, butter, a little

olive oil, salt and pepper. Appetizer, generally a soup. She would always get the salmon. He would always get the steak. Finish it off with just a little bit of dessert. They generally tip very well. It's always good—good table to start off the night.

But something else happened that was always a part of that couple. While they were nice to me, they generally did not talk to one another. They moved into a comfortable yet distant pattern of just going through the motions. There was a strange comfort, but a creeping separateness in it all. Yeah, they would smile at each other, but you could see they were thinking about something else. You could see they were just—well, they had taken each other for granted. And I would want to smile. I would want to give them something new. I was in training to be a pastor. I could see it. I wanted to encourage them. I wanted them to break out of that. I would maybe, kind of want to scare them once in a while—but generally I wouldn't do that. I would just let them alone. Sometimes I would pray for them. But often I would wonder—what has life become like? What is the drive home like?

Now, there's no way I can know what any marriage is like. Only the Lord and only the husband and wife know what the inside of a marriage looks like. In no way can I, as a pastor, ever know what's going on between you and the Lord in your faith. Only two people know that—well, four. You, and the triune God. We can come to church, and we can be nice, and we can encourage each other, but it often makes me wonder, because I wondered about my own heart—has our relationship with the Lord become like that couple? We go through the motions. There's a strange comfort to it all, but also a creeping distance. Is that what we want? Have we just fallen into a place of clocking time? What does the Lord want for us? What does renewal look like?

The Lord doesn't want us to be that couple. He doesn't want you to be that couple. And by the way, if I just uncomfortably described your marriage, I want to give you great hope that there is renewal for you. It might require work, but there is renewal. Those of you who have only been married a little time—it can happen to you, too. Because what often happens to us horizontally is the picture of what's happening to us vertically. The Lord wants renewal for you with him, and that's what this series has been about. It's about asking the Lord by his Holy Spirit to so renew us in our love, our desire, our dependence on him, that he would ignite a renewal in us as a church and in you as individuals—which is why we've looked at these four areas. So let's look together again as we quickly summarize where we've been, and to encourage you to keep going.

You are accepted. We hear that in verses eleven through fourteen. What Paul is describing there, by this idea of being accepted, when he says, "You were also chosen. You have been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will." What is the purpose of his will? The purpose of his will is that Christ and the gospel of our salvation might be realized and experience. And the only way that happens is, it is absolutely never, ever, ever you trying to dress yourself up to make yourself acceptable to God. What these verses declare nakedly and richly is that it's not us who find God acceptable or we hope will find us acceptable—it's the Lord, while we were yet his enemies. He predestined us. He is the one who has chosen us. He is the one, as we looked at weeks ago, who has justified us in Jesus Christ. That is the gospel. That is the good news. It is the righteousness of Christ. It is the work of him. It is his body. It is his blood. It is Jesus' obedience in our place, through whom God says to you, "You are accepted."

Our confession and catechisms as a church that is confessional says it this way—and very succinctly—what is justification? "Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardons all our sins and accepts us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us and received by faith alone." When Paul says:

In him you were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And you also were included in

Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal.

Ladies and gentlemen, I want to say to you, it is by faith, not by works. It is by the blood and body of another that Jesus declares to you, "You are accepted."

But more so—not only just accepted. Not only just that God sent forth his Son to die in our place. He doesn't just love us—he likes us. Because he makes us his children—adoption, if you remember—that we are justified. Not just declared righteous because of Christ—we are made members of his family. This is what Paul says in this passage when he says so clearly to them that, "Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance." That's family language. Paul was speaking in the context of his time. The only way to understand inheritance is if you are a child of a father—a male child, at that. But in the gloriousness of the gospel, men and women, boys and girls, become equal inheritants of all the promises of God that are yes and amen in Jesus Christ, because we are made his children. You are accepted, because of the blood of another, and brought into the family. "Welcome home," Jesus says. And when you are home, nothing can separate you from his love, because nothing you did got you through the front door, and his grace will keep you home. Do you know today that you are accepted?

Number two, you are delivered. This is the doctrine of sanctification that we looked at. Justification, adoption, now sanctification. Consider for a moment—what do we teach with regard to adoption? Adoption is an act of God's free grace whereby we are received into the number and have a right to all the privileges of the sons of God. And then, once we are brought into the family, what does he do with us? Once we're living at home with our Heavenly Father, renewed and reconciled to him, what does he mean to do with us? He means to make us holy. He receives us as we are but never leaves us the same. This is the doctrine of sanctification. Consider what our confession teaches. What is sanctification? "Sanctification is the work of God's free grace whereby we are renewed in the whole person after the image of God and are enabled more and more to die unto sin and live unto righteousness."

So, when we looked at, together, this passage, what does Paul mean when he talks about, first, this idea of sanctification? And that is, he says:

For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.

So, now, watch what happens in sanctification. Do you remember what we did? There is both a definitive sanctification and an experiential side. Both are implied here. If we are made his children, brought into his house, our Heavenly Father means to make us more and more into the image of his Son. He gives us wisdom by his Word. He empowers us by his grace. And then, as he does so, he then will give us more grace, more wisdom, guided by his truth, that we will know him better. And we don't mean by the word "know" head knowledge. It's not taking a group of doctrines and applying it to my life. Ladies and gentlemen, the Biblical idea of knowledge means this—that while I'm brought into his family definitively, sin is no longer my master, we're no longer enslaved to sin, we're free by his grace to walk in obedience—then, he empowers us to do so. He is the one who will make us more and more like him. This is the work of definitive, but then experiential sanctification. It takes times to work itself out. And if you're a Christian, you know, as you know your own heart, that we are nowhere near where we need to be. Definitively, the Lord is working, but he's not yet done until Christ returns. This is the work of the Lord.

And when Paul says, "I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints and his incomparably great power for us who believe"—I realize just as I'm looking at my notes, I didn't finish this sentence. Please forgive me. Here's what it means. To know the Lord means it isn't just applying or

believing in a set of doctrines. It means actually doing what he's told us to do. The Lord gives us the grace to walk in obedience—not just believe a set of doctrines. And experientially, his Spirit and his grace empowers us to walk into obedience, because he's sanctifying us.

Thirdly, you are not alone. Notice in this passage at least three times explicitly, a fourth implicitly, he talks about the Holy Spirit. When Jesus said to his disciples, "Though I am going, I will not leave you as orphans. I will give you my Spirit," that is God saying to us, we are not alone. The person of the Holy Spirit, the Godhead, the third person of the Trinity, is present—which means when Jesus says "It is better that I go. Otherwise, the Holy Comforter will not come to you," he's saying that if he doesn't go, the Holy Spirit won't be there, because Jesus was embodied. Therefore, as I remember a few weeks back, he can't be in Chicago and Columbia, Maryland, at the same time. But, by his Spirit, he is everywhere present. So, Jesus is saying the Spirit's presence, God's presence with you, is of greater importance than Jesus remaining on earth after his resurrection. And what we need in this life, day in and day out, is his presence. Because some of you feel very alone, very acutely. Some more than others. We need to be reminded, indeed, the Christian is not alone. They have the presence of God.

But even more so, over and over again, he talks about the power. What is this strength at work in us? It is God working in us, animating us to new obedience, giving us a desire to know Christ in our character, giving us the desire to pursue the fruit of the Spirit, making us a more thankful people, a joyful people, a humble people. That doesn't happen because we aim at them. It happens because the Holy Spirit moves in empowering us to desire those things. And so the normal expectation of the Christian is that the Lord, by his power, his Spirit, is working and changing us. It's two steps forwards, five steps back, but the general trajectory is change to look more like Christ. This is what the Lord is doing.

And here is something that many of us forget. I said it a few weeks ago, and it's this. The Holy Spirit is not an afterthought of the Trinity. God is here. He is working. And where two or more are gathered, here he is also. And the Holy Spirit is living and active, and he works by the truth of the Word, and he will bring it to mind. He will write it on your heart. He will empower you. Pray for the Spirit's empowerment, to desire the Word, to love Christ, and that Christ will be more beautiful and believable, because the Spirit is at work. God has not left us alone. He is here.

But, finally, you have authority. We looked at, last week, the reality of the battle being waged. The battle being waged is not against flesh and blood, but it is against the spiritual domination and dominion, the evil powers that are at work, that is found specifically in the person and work of Satan himself and all of his demons and his spirits. And they are real. And the Christian who believes by faith—recognizes that it is only the gospel that enables us to truly see the reality of that, that what is operating in the world is the very one who hates—that is, Satan himself—hates everything that God loves. And if you are a Christian, and if you are not a Christian—it doesn't matter. You need to know, Satan has one emotion, one will, towards you, and that is unadulterated hatred. He wants to keep you in bondage. He wants to distract you. He wants to deter you from seeing Christ.

Here's the beauty of this passage. Verse nineteen:

That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

You remember what we talked about in regard to this authority? It first begins by understanding that there is a battle to be waged. And Satan will seek to tempt and distract us in every way he possibly can. But not only that—our own remaining sin, our own hearts, tempt us. Our own desires draw us away. But is the power of the Lord, his Holy Spirit, that enables us to be ready for the battle. But if you're offered a

sword and you refuse to pick it up, then it's not going to go so well for you. We're going to be defeated. The Lord has given you a sword. The Lord has given you faith as a shield. He's given you his Holy Spirit. This is what he's done to prepare you for battle, with this reality—the war is won. That's what this passage tells us. The battle is real. He is preparing us for battle. But while the battles and the skirmishes we face with Satan, temptation, and our own evil desires—though that battle is very real, and by his Spirit we have victory and other times we fail—the battle is real, but the beauty of the gospel is the war is won. Jesus, who is raised from the dead, is now seated at the right hand of God the Father in the heavenly realms.

And then this great truth. He says that the body of Christ, of which we are a part, belongs to the risen victorious Christ. And this curious, curious passage or these few words—he says, “And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.” If Christ Jesus died on the cross by his body and blood to redeem you, to call you to himself, to make you the children of a Heavenly Father, and he gave his body on the tree and was buried in the grave, but then on the third day, by that same mighty power which is the Spirit, God raised Christ from the dead and is now victoriously sitting on the throne next to the Father—if that's what he was willing to do before we knew him, then, Christian, I will tell you, if you are a professing Christian and as the body of Christ covenantally and corporately, you are the precious body of Christ.

He will do everything—everything—to protect you. Nothing will snatch you from his hand. Nothing, not a hair from your head, will fall, that your Heavenly Father does not count it as precious, that he does not look at you and every part of your body—every cell—does he not say, “This is mine.” Every church that professes faith in Jesus Christ and professes the gospel, does he not say, “This is mine.” And the gates of hell will not prevail against the body of Christ. Yes, some churches fold and they fail, but the body of Christ continues on. The Lord has won the battle, and your bridegroom comes to you this morning and he looks to you as his beautiful, glorious bride, clothed with the robe of the righteousness of Christ. And he says to you, “Oh, how beautiful you are. I have pledged my betrothal to you. I have poured out my body to you. I have claimed you as my own.” And the wedding bells of heaven ring, and the choirs of heaven sing. And we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses.

Christians, the gospel is renewable because it has never died and it has never lost power. And by the Holy Spirit, he wants to do this in you. And if you know that one who so loves you and protects you says to you, “I want to renew you,” how could we ever say no? But it will be in his timing. It will be by his way, according to his plan. But don't you, along with me—don't we want to ask, Lord, are you done with us? Do you not want to work new warmth, new love, new life, into these flesh and bones? If you are with me, then I would ask you to pray along with me, because this is what the Lord wants to do—because you are his. Let's pray and ask that the Lord will work.

Heavenly Father, I thank you for this, your people. I thank you for the salvation that you have given to me, and I thank you for the salvation that you've poured into the hearts of so many here this morning. I thank you for the existence of Columbia Presbyterian Church, that you have called your own, and of all of our sister churches, those who preach the gospel and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ by faith, who preach the triune God—Lord, this is your body throughout the world. Lord, we are yours. But we would ask you, as a small part of this global body, that you love and care for—Lord, we ask you, as we are the bride of you who is our husband—will you, as the groom, renew us? Strengthen us. Fill us with your Spirit. And, O Lord, according to your Word, remind us that we are accepted. We are delivered. We are not alone. And, in Jesus Christ, we have victory. Now, do with us that which is well-pleasing to you, to make us a reflection of the glorious and beautiful Jesus Christ our Lord. In his name we pray. Amen.