

What God Thinks of You

One of the most offensive assessments of the value of a human being is the oft-heard statement upon the death of a billionaire, “She or he was worth 100 billion, or so, dollars.” Truth be told, she or he was worth far more than that. In fact, the pauper who lives his life as a penniless beggar is worth far more than that. Scripture tells us our being ransomed from the futility of sin and death came at a great price (1 Pet. 1:18f). And here in his Ephesian letter, Paul the Apostle begins with an outpouring of praise to the Triune God and for the value he has placed on us, his children by grace. It’s as though Paul says, “The place to begin in understanding God’s great salvation is to look at the importance of the believer to God. We are the objects of his creation and great salvation.”

Read Ephesians 1:3-14

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. ⁵ He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace ⁸ that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight ⁹ he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. ¹¹ In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, ¹² so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. ¹³ In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; ¹⁴ this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God’s own people, to the praise of his glory.

The older I get, the more I realize the importance of knowing the love of God for me. Knowing he loves me regardless of my deserving or performance, frees me to love myself as his beloved child and to love others, knowing they too receive his amazing love. Although the world offers a great variety of self-help books and therapies about raising our self-esteem through achieving success, most of us, sooner or later, find ourselves feeling inadequate. We can easily become overwhelmed by a gnawing sense that we’re not living up to our potential or even to a socially acceptable standard of achievement. I know how often I’m unhappy with myself and disappoint others

I wonder if the first century church struggled with self-esteem issues like Christ followers today. So many of us have been programmed since childhood to measure self-worth against the expectations of others, beginning with our parents. A true measure of our worth isn’t based on the opinions of others, but should come from the Triune God and what he thinks of us. Regardless of your station in life, your present circumstances and what you think about yourself as a success or failure, what truly matters is what God thinks about you.

First let’s note that we’re significant (having meaning and importance) because we were chosen by God the Father (vv.1-6). Because of some misunderstandings and controversy-spawned division over the doctrine of God’s foreknowledge, election and predestination of his chosen people, simply hearing these words, such as in our Scripture passage, causes a negative reaction. What we need to focus on is the word “love” (4),

“the loving nature of predestination” (Wood), which is a thanksgiving doctrine that praises God for his sovereign and gracious choice of us when we were not seeking God, but rather were running from him. As one scholar says, it’s very comforting to know that God has chosen us out of the entire human race, and “the real problem is not why he has not chosen some, but why he chose any” (Hoehner). And we were chosen by God the Father before the creation of the world.

You and I were not an afterthought with God the Father. In his heart he was our “Abba,” our “dear heavenly Father” (Matt. 6:9) before the worlds began. God chose us even with his foreknowledge of our sinful rebellion, and he made provision for us to be forgiven, reconciled with and restored to his love. When the Father sent his Son to die for us he had you and me in mind, providing for our forgiveness and the free gift of eternal life. You and I were chosen to become God’s adopted children.

Being a Roman citizen, Paul could appreciate this imagery of God’s adopting us. A man’s slave could become his adopted son, who would have privileges even above a younger natural born son. The adopted son who had been ransomed from slavery would be released from the bondage of his former owner. Paul is saying that God chose us, bought us from our former slave owner, the devil, and now takes full responsibility for us, including his loving discipline (Heb. 12:5-11).

My seminary New Testament professor was teaching the doctrine of God’s adopting us at the time he and his wife had adopted their first child. The doctrine came alive to him through his visualizing the heavenly Father in an orphanage filled with children, pointing to one child in particular and saying, “I want her to be mine.” Our resumé of significance includes the fact that we’re a saint as well as an eternally chosen, adopted child of God. You’re significant because you were purchased by God, who said “I want her to be mine” (verses 7-12).

And what God was willing to pay for us, when we had no apparent worth or deserving within ourselves, is the real indication of our worth to him. This weekend is the annual Art Fair on the (Capital) Square. Hundreds of artists show their paintings and many other art objects. What are all these art objects worth? Simply, they’re worth what somebody is willing to pay for them. Our text tells us we’re significant because we were purchased through God the Son who redeemed us through his blood (7). The Apostle Peter also underscores the price of our redemption when he writes:

“For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver and gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect” (1 Pet. 1:18f). I like the way “The Message” paraphrases this verse: “It cost God plenty to get you out of that dead-end, empty-headed life you grew up in. He paid with Christ’s sacred blood...”

It’s sickening to see photos of the bodies of victims of wartime bombings being dragged from destroyed buildings. Eventually rescue missions become simply search missions when the possibility of survival ends. But God never gives up his rescue mission for you and me, and he sought after us, yearning for us to receive his loving rescue through the cross of Christ (Lk. 19:10).

Jesus has redeemed us, and our worth as his children is revealed by his grace. God through Christ has “lavished” his grace on us (8). *“He (God) thought of everything, providing for everything we could possibly need”* (“The Message”). As a loving Father, he

will meet all of our needs “*according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus*” (Phil. 4:19), (which he often does through the gracious giving of his church).

We’re invited to live by the abundant wisdom available from the Scriptures as well as the power, presence and wisdom that come to us through the Holy Spirit. And God has so much more to give us than we’re ready and eager to receive. As James, in his wisdom book reminds us, we don’t have because we don’t ask God (4:2). We live as spiritual paupers when we should be living as children of the King of heaven.

Warren Wiersbe tells the story of “America’s Greatest Miser,” Hetty Green. When she died in 1916, Hetty “left an estate valued over \$100 million (You can imagine what the amount would be in today’s dollars!). She ate cold oatmeal because it cost to heat it. Her son had to suffer a leg amputation, because she delayed so long in looking for a free clinic that his case became incurable. She was wealthy, yet she chose to live like a pauper....She was so foolish that she hastened her own death by bringing on an attack of apoplexy while arguing about the value of drinking skim milk!” Wiersbe then continued by saying that “Hetty Green is an illustration of too many Christian believers today. They have limitless wealth at their disposal, and yet they live like paupers” (7).

Our sense of significance would increase greatly if we comprehended more of our access to God’s grace and the fact that he promises to not leave us as abandoned orphans (Jn. 14:18), but will provide for us as pilgrims on the way of the cross. We have the assurance that through our life in the Son, God is working out everything in our lives “in conformity with the purpose of his will” (11). It should give us all an added sense of significance to realize that, even though we may be bewildered by present circumstances, Christ has a carefully thought-out plan for us. We were purchased through God the Son, who has a plan for our lives, even if our lives may seem in a shambles. As a friend recently reminded me, Christ is in our future as well as in our past and present, and whatever lies before us will eventually be shown to be his good, pleasing and perfect will (Rom. 12:2).

And now having believed, we were “marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit” (13). We’re significant because we’re kept by God the Holy Spirit who lives and works within us. Unless we have the Holy Spirit within us, we can’t claim to be the children of God (Rom. 8:9). We are born again by the power of the Holy Spirit, who comes into our lives the moment we first believe and who keeps us in Christ and who is actually Christ in us, our hope of glory (Col.1:27).

Because we’re inhabited by the Holy Spirit, we have the presence of Christ and God as our Helper and Teacher (Jn. 14:15-31; 16:5-16). The presence of the Holy Spirit transforms our mortal bodies into temples of the Holy Spirit, which are to be treated with honor and with holy living (1 Cor. 6:18-20). The Holy Spirit lives in us to produce the fruit of the Spirit, the virtues of godliness (Gal. 5:22-23). If we could only practice the presence of God in us through the Spirit, we’d realize how significant we are to God, who entrusts us to incarnate his presence in the world. And he entrusts us to carry his message of eternal life as a priceless treasure for others (2 Cor. 4:7).

The presence of the Holy Spirit is a reminder that our relationship with Christ is one of intimate friendship. Henri Nouwen says: “When Jesus died, the disciples’ friendship with him did not diminish. On the contrary, it grew. This is what the sending of the Spirit was all about. The Spirit of Jesus made Jesus’ friendship with his disciples everlasting, stronger and more intimate than before his death. This is what Paul experienced when he said, ‘It is no longer I, but Christ living in me’” (Gal. 2:20).

The older I get, the more I value good friends, who enrich me and add significance to my life. And to think that Jesus wants to be our friend and share his life with us for the present and for all eternity is beyond my comprehension (Jn. 15:14)! It's an honor to know that God the Spirit chooses to live within us and wants to have fellowship with us (Rev. 3:20) and to constantly work on us to make us more into the likeness of Jesus Christ. And we have the assurance that his presence is not momentary or temporary. We're kept by the Holy Spirit, who is our assurance of future glory. The Holy Spirit seals us, i.e. stamps us with a mark of God's ownership, one that cannot be erased (Rev. 22:4). The Holy Spirit is God's "deposit guaranteeing our inheritance" (14). It's the concept of a down payment, or earnest money in a financial transaction. This guarantee could refer to an engagement ring, a pledge of a forthcoming marriage, certainly a promise of more to come!

The Holy Spirit is our enabler who keeps us safely in the love and saving grace of God and who walks with us through the pilgrimage of this earthly life. But also he's the assurance, the down payment, the "mark" upon us, and the engagement ring, assuring us of a glorious everlasting life with Christ Jesus and his people in the new heaven and earth. We're significant because of what we are now, as God's redeemed children, but we're significant because of what we shall become—exactly like Jesus in perfect holiness, reigning with him throughout eternity (1 Jn. 3:2).

As God's redeemed kingdom people we're called to make a significant difference in his kingdom. Even the smallest act of love and kindness, as well as the quiet witness you give for Christ, can have eternal consequences. What amazing significance it will be to hear our Savior and Lord say some day, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" (Mat. 25:23). We have the opportunity to contribute to God's glorious kingdom by bearing fruit that will last (Jn. 15:16).

We're significant because we have been chosen, redeemed and kept for the glory of God (vv. 6, 12, 14). We're called to add to the honor and wealth of God for all eternity. We exist for the pleasure of God and our life's purpose is, as the Westminster divines expressed in Question 1 of their Shorter Catechism, to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

We're significant because God delights in us and wants us to enjoy him and his people as he enjoys us, and even likes us! In the eternal kingdom we'll fully realize how much he loves us, why he chose us and why he paid such a price for our redemption, and why he has kept us in his care all the way into everlasting life with him. Forevermore there will be no doubt whatsoever about our significance. Our value will be magnified when we share Christ's glory forever (Jn. 17:24).

We're significant because of who we are as children of the heavenly Father and friends of Christ Jesus, who lives in us through the Holy Spirit. You're God's dearly loved child, now and forever.