

Favorably Disposed to Us

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Bible Verse: Ephesians 1-2
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Well, I'm very glad that the Lord has brought so many of you here today on a Communion Sunday at Truth Community Church, and I supposed I should set a little bit of context knowing that we have many visitors in the audience just from the sheer numbers, I know that we have a number of visitors with us here today. Over the past many months here at our church, we've been doing a series on the 10 Commandments and studying the moral law of God, and it's been a very searching time for us. We've come to realize that the 10 Commandments collectively condemn us all and not just collectively but individually each commandment is one that we've all broken repeatedly in spirit and in action, and that's what the law is designed to do, it is designed to show us our need of a Savior and to convince us of our unrighteousness, our sinfulness, and one of the consequences of that is that a thorough understanding of the law of God rids you of a sense of entitlement when you come before his majesty, when you come before God, because we need to understand and need to have deeply impressed upon us by the Spirit of God that we're all lawbreakers, we're all guilty before him, there is none of us that are going to go to heaven because we were good enough. I say this with a broken heart, the reality is that a lot of us in this room are not even going to go to heaven at all because we have a false sense of what Christianity means and deep in our heart there is this sense that we're actually good enough to go to heaven because we've never seen the law of God properly applied to our soul. It's very humbling and it's been a very humbling time for us over the past few months as a church to walk through the law of God and just see how far short we fall of the glory of God. I think we've done the first seven, we have three more to go, and the 10th commandment against coveting is by far the one that is most searching and condemning of them all.

So we don't even realize how sinful we are and that makes it difficult to appreciate what the Lord did for us at the cross which is what we are remembering in Communion as we remember his body and blood as we take Communion at the end of the service. So I just want to impress upon all of you and just for the benefit of those of you that are visiting, is that there is a context in the life of our church which brings us to the Lord's Table here today. And one of the things that is striking by way of contrast, is that for all of our guilt and for all of our unworthiness, is to realize that God had a plan of salvation which he had established before the foundation of the world and that it was God's intention to bless a portion of sinful humanity with grace, with kindness, and to have them reconciled to himself through the shed blood of Jesus Christ so that they could experience his grace

and undeserved favor throughout all of eternity. That's just stunning and should make us awed at the presence of such a wonderful God that he whose holiness we have violated, he who as judge had every right to condemn us immediately, to condemn the entire human race and to send us all into an eternal judgment of hell, to realize that he had done anything to show any kind of favor is far beyond anything that we could deserve, to think that he did it at the cost of his own Son exceeds it even more, and to realize that instead of judgment he is giving us grace and a gift of righteousness and a gift of reconciliation that will endure throughout all of eternity is just more than the human mind can possibly begin to comprehend.

And we start with that little bit of an introduction. Whenever we come to the Table here at Truth Community Church, there's always this nagging sense that I have inside of the temptation to take it for granted, to take it as something that is routine, to lose sight of the majesty of what it is that we are remembering here. We are remembering the fact that a holy God at his own expense intervened on behalf of guilty sinners like us in order to show grace to us that we did not deserve, that we could never deserve, if we had lived 10,000 lifetimes we couldn't have earned a drop of the mercy that was showered upon us at the cross of Jesus Christ. At our church, we try to take Communion seriously remembering that the symbol is pointing us to a greater spiritual reality of which none of us are worthy. As we come to the Table here this morning, and I'll probably bookend the message with this statement, the Table is for Christians. It is not for everyone to take. This is the Lord's Table and it's for the Lord's people and so if you're not a Christian, I beg of you and I admonish you to honor the Lord by not taking Communion, by letting the elements pass. If you are unrepentant, if you are unbelieving in Christ, you need to prepare now to let the elements pass and not pretend that you're a partaker of the Lord that you actually reject. That would be a great sin against him; scripture says it's like drinking judgment to yourself to do that.

So we want to caution you in that direction. At the same time, I would have a word for Christians who come here with an unrepentant heart in your own Christian life, understand this, that as a Christian you cannot reach for the elements with one hand while you are clutching your sin with an unrepentant heart in the other. If you are living a double life of some kind, you should not take these elements no matter what your tongue says about proclaiming to know Christ. If you are clutching to an unforgiving spirit or bitterness or, you know, you're settled in patterns of lust that you've come to actually kind of like, or you've got an angry spirit of some kind or, you know, you've just been cold and indifferent to the Lord for weeks on end and haven't done anything about it, this might be a time for you to examine your heart and say, "You know, am I even in Christ or not?" And if you're not willing to repent, then by all means you too should let the elements pass because this Table is for those not that are perfect, not for those that are righteous in themselves for none of us are, but this Table is for those that are repentantly, trustingly, dependently believing in Christ, trusting him for mercy and withholding no area of their life from him in any kind of known sins. And for those of us that approach the Table like that, I have a wonderful passage of Scripture to bring us to as we kind of pivot now, and I want to take you to a familiar Scripture to prepare your hearts for Communion.

Turn in your Bibles to the book of Ephesians with me. Turn to Ephesians and having addressed the rebellious hearts that might be in our midst here, I now turn to humble Christians to give you a word of encouragement as you come to the Table and to realize that for those who have been born again, for those that the Lord has done a work and you are responding to Christ even without perfection, we understand that we don't respond to him perfectly but the deep longings of your heart are to love Christ, to serve him, to honor him, you love and appreciate him and, you know, you grieve over your sin, you don't boast in it, you don't settle down in hardness in it but you grieve over it and repent and confess your sins, this message is for you and preparing your heart for the Lord's Table as an act of appreciation and gratitude for all of the kindness that the Lord has shown to you. For you, I'm here to remind you today that our Lord God, that this holy God, this wonderful Lord Jesus Christ, he is favorably disposed to us. He is favorably disposed to his people. He saved us in order to sanctify us, to set us apart that we might be a people that are devoted to his worship and praise, and what better time to be gathered together devoted to his worship and praise than when we remember how he laid down his righteous life in order to redeem us.

And for earnest Christians, for repentant Christians, I understand because it's true for me too, it is easy to get discouraged as we see the remaining sin in our lives, we see how easily we stumble. You know, the book of James says we all stumble in many ways and, you know, we don't want it to be like that and yet we do. Just yesterday I was out for the briefest of walks in our neighborhood and I noticed a house that I hadn't seen before, hadn't noticed it. There's this really big house in our neighborhood. Do you know what I did in response to that? I coveted after that house sincerely. It broke my heart to realize it. I said, "Man, I wish I had that house." And I had just completed the preparation for the 10th commandment which says, "You shall not covet many things," seven things that are listed there and it says, "You shall not covet your neighbor's house." And the impulse of my heart as soon as I saw something like that was to covet it, to covet that which the Lord has not given to me, to covet after that and to forget the gratitude that I should have for all of the many blessings that he has given to me. That struck me and so I spent the rest of my walk in a spirit of confession realizing how quickly sin can bubble up in my own heart and, you know, and we're all in that boat.

So we struggle with so many things, we struggle with so many things in our heart: discontentment, anxiety, and resentment, and greed, as well as what the Apostle John describes in his first letter, the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the boastful pride of life. And if we had not the mercy of Christ, we had not the gospel set before us, you know, we would be miserable men because we are so unworthy of him, and yet, as Scripture says, Ephesians 2:4, "But God," but God for reasons known only to him, for reasons prompted only within his own holy essence and nothing about us, not even our faith prompted God to love us, God for his own reasons has set his love on us in the Lord Jesus Christ in such a way that we can come and enjoy fellowship with him, that we can find joy in him, that we can find rest and forgiveness and a cleansed conscience in him in a way that is totally undeserved but which we receive gratefully as a gift.

So what we're going to do is use the first two chapters of Ephesians obviously in very much a panorama sense, the first two chapters of Ephesians to see all that God has done to reconcile us to himself, all of the love, grace, mercy, kindness, patience that he has shown to us despite our sinful condition; what he has done in Christ shows us that he is favorably disposed to his people, that he designs our blessing. And our response to that is to praise him and to serve him and to repent of sin and to look to Christ alone for our righteousness and so that's what we want to do here this morning and we're going to start with a sense of the praise of God and then move on to the power of God. The praise to God starts in chapter 1, verse 3, and I'm going to read this long section through verse 14 which in the Greek text is 202 Greek words and it is one single sentence. It's an amazing piece of Greek literature and it's divided up in English, they break it up into sentences but in Greek it's only one sentence showing that the Apostle Paul once he started on this topic, he couldn't stop, he had so much that he had to get out that his words just tumble upon one another in recognition of the greatness of God and the greatness of his salvation. It's a passage that is Triune in nature, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It's a passage that tells us so much about the different works that the Trinity has done on our behalf and it comes from the full heart of an apostle writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. So we'll begin in verse 3 where the Apostle Paul says,

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love 5 He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. 7 In Him [that is, in Christ] we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace 8 which He lavished on us. In all wisdom and insight 9 He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him 10 with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him 11 also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, 12 to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory. 13 In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14 who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.

Now throughout this passage there's two things that I just want to say by way of overview statements. Throughout this passage you see the sovereignty of God in salvation being emphasized. Salvation was God's idea, it was God's gift, and it was a gift that he determined to accomplish before the foundation of the world, and he determined before the foundation of the world who the recipients of that gift would be without regard to

anything good or bad that anyone had done. That's what it means, you know, he did it before the foundation of the world and so you see the term "predestination" being used. God determined beforehand what the destiny of men would be and this is his sovereign prerogative. God is holy and those of us that have sinned and violated against him, we have nothing to say against that. It is a mark of the sinful rebellious heart of men that they would object to God's sovereign prerogative to save whom he wishes according to his own desires.

So we need to keep that in mind as we go through this but, secondly, as we consider these matters of salvation, I want to draw out before you, as we've done often here from this pulpit, the fact that all of salvation is to the praise of the glory of the grace of God, and just as there is a reference to the threefold person of the one Godhead, there is a threefold recognition of the praise that is given to Father, Son and Holy Spirit in this passage. Look at verse 6. You must see this to understand this passage at all. Paul opens with praise, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," there in verse 3, then in verse 6 as he's walking through this majesty, he says, "to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved." He freely bestowed it meaning that we didn't deserve it. We had done nothing to prompt it in him. Verse 12 he says, "to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory." And verse 14 it's "a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory." So verse 6, "to the praise of His glory"; verse 12, "to the praise of His glory"; verse 14, "to the praise of His glory."

One of the things that we do here at Truth Community Church is we try to keep things simple. We try to keep things focused on the word of God and we don't dilute things with a lot of references to human events or, you know, to different things that might be happening in the lives of individuals. We do that for a reason, we do that so that we would not detract from the glory of God as we gather together for corporate worship, that our eyes are looking up vertically as we examine his word. There's a reason why we do that, it is because we want everything to be devoted to the praise of the glory of this holy God.

Now what this means, what this passage means for us as we see that God the Father chose us before the foundation of the world, that Christ redeemed us with his own blood, that the Spirit sealed us for salvation, what this means is this, kind of the overarching point that we're making as we come to the Communion Table is that true Christians, not simply those who profess Christ but true Christians who have been born again by the Spirit of God, true Christians have no fear of final judgment. We have no fear of going to hell. We certainly have no fear of going to purgatory because that's a place that doesn't even exist, that's a place that was made up by Catholics that has no basis in Scripture whatsoever. We're not afraid of death. We're not afraid of what comes after death because we understand what God has done for us in Christ and how he has secured us in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So we want to just walk through a few highlights here, three or four highlights in this first section of verses 3 through 14, of why we praise God, why we come to the Table with

gratitude, why we come with a sense of serene confidence that it is well with our souls. And why can we be like that? Why do we praise God? Well, first of all, so this is like a subpoint if you're taking notes. First point, the praise to God, and then some subpoints of the grounds for the praise, the reason for the praise. Why do we praise God as we gather together as believers? We praise him because he chose us. He chose us for salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ and he has blessed us in measure that cannot be counted.

Verse 3 through 5, look at it there with me again. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ." Right there should be the remedy for a covetous heart if you're in Christ. God has given you every spiritual blessing in him and so our hearts, if they were right and pure would be filled with nothing but gratitude and praise to God because he has given us every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. He's been good to us so on what grounds do we resent not having different things that we might desire after? This is just a mark of the remnants of sin within us that we would be ungrateful for every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ because of something we see that we don't want. This is convicting to me as I expressed earlier.

So he's blessed us in every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, and then he goes on to say this in verse 4, he says, "just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will." Beloved, God set his purpose of salvation before the beginning of time, and God having set his purpose and having chosen whom would be saved, the outworking of time since Genesis 1:1 has just been an unfolding of his purpose to redeem a people for his Son the Lord Jesus Christ. God chose us individually so that we would one day be in his kingdom. If you are a Christian, you have this blessed knowledge, this blessed privilege of knowing that before time began God had you in mind, and God created you and appointed your life span with a purpose that you would enjoy fellowship with him forever. You, by name. It's not that God sent Christ into the world on a kind of a blind mission hoping that whoever would respond later would come and, you know, now God's kind of anxiously watching to see how it would work out and see who will come or not. No, God knows the end from the beginning. Scripture is very clear about this.

So this means that if you are a Christian, despite all of your sins, God purposed for you to be in Christ and that you would be with him forever. God chose you by name before time began. This is transcendent. This is eternal. This is magnificent. And you say, "Well, that's a marvelous thing to contemplate." And when you start to think that way, you're starting to enter into the spirit of the passage. "You mean I'm a Christian, even though I don't deserve to be, and I'm a Christian because God determined that for me, God determined that for my life before time began, before he created the earth?" Yes, that is the words of Scripture. That is the teaching of Scripture that he has blessed you like that; from eternity past you were in the mind of God to be redeemed by Christ during the course of your lifetime, and as a result of that, there was never any danger that you would not be in Christ in the end because it's what God had chosen for you before the foundation of the world. He chose us so that one day we would be in Christ. He chose us

so that one day we would be in his kingdom. He chose us knowing in advance how sinful and rebellious we would be. He chose us in advance knowing that even after we were saved and walking through this life, that we would be sinful and rebellious against him and that we would not live perfectly. He knew all of that in advance and still chose you anyway to receive an inheritance in his kingdom, to be with the Lord Jesus Christ throughout all of eternity.

Now beloved, that's glorious. That is unspeakably great and it is an expression of the great kindness of God toward us that shows us that he must be favorably disposed to us if he chose us before the foundation of time in order to belong to him. And look there at verse 5 as well, this is not simply an accounting transaction in the mind of God. At the end of verse 4 he said he did this in love. He did this out of love, you know, seeking the highest good for us. And it goes on and he says he predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to himself. God purposed for you in Christ to be a child of God. He determined to bring you into his family, that you would be adopted in with full rights of the inheritance of all that belonged to Christ would one day belong to you, his deity excepted. To start to understand something of this is to be staggered at the magnificence of it all. He chose us, he adopted us into his family so that we can say that we are children of God, and for this reason Scripture says in 1 John 3, "For this reason the world does not know us because it did not know Him." But beloved, Scripture says 1 John 3:1, "Beloved, behold what manner of love the Father has given to us that we should be called the children of God, and we are." And for that we praise his name.

And go further, go further and take it and work it out into what it means for your daily life here today as you're walking through difficulties, struggling with temptation, dealing with difficult family or different matters that, you know, all of us face. Step back from all of that, you can't begin to understand the purposes of God in those difficulties until you remember the big picture of the gospel of Jesus Christ. You must view all of that through the lens of the fact that God chose you and saved you in order to deliver you into his heavenly kingdom, and as a result of that, when you see that overarching eternal perspective, you realize that in the midst of your difficulties it must be true that God is favorably disposed toward you even though it seems like your circumstances are set hard against you. Don't interpret the goodness of God through the lens of the difficulty of your circumstances, rather reverse it, start with the eternal purpose of God, understand your security and blessing in Christ, my Christian brother, my Christian sister, and view everything through that prism so that you say, "Whatever else is happening in these relational or financial or physical reversals that I'm facing, whatever else I might think about them, it has to be that God is favorably disposed to me in the midst of them because He chose me and adopted me into His family and He had prepared that blessing for me before the beginning of time." And we have to go back to that again and again and again.

Paul goes on and, you know, if you're new to our church, you can go and find, you know, I did a number of sermons on this passage so we're just doing a little bit of summary. If this incites your interest then, you know, go and look for those sermons online where we discuss them in greater detail. It's not just that God chose us in Christ, secondly, he

redeemed us. He redeemed us in Christ. Paul opened talking about our God and Father in verse 3, and then he moves and he brings the Lord Jesus Christ into it and speaks more specifically about the work of Christ in verse 7 as he goes from what the Father has done for us to what the Son has done for us, and in verse 7 it says, "In Him we have redemption through His blood," obviously the shed blood of Christ on the cross, and what was it that the shed blood did for us? It brought about our redemption. It brought about "the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us." At the cross, Jesus Christ paid the price necessary to bring us out of our slavery to sin.

And if you would just turn toward the end of your Bible a couple of books to the book of Colossians which was written at about the same time in prison as the book of Ephesians, you get a divine commentary on this, of just exactly what it was that Christ did for us when he redeemed us. In verse 13 of Colossians 1, Colossians 1:13, "He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." Scripture describes fallen unsaved men as being in multiple bondages of slavery. We are slaves to our own sin, that's why people can't break their bad habits is because they don't have control over their hearts and their lives and their own affections. Scripture describes us as being bound to Satan, blinded by him, and in a place of complete spiritual helplessness, having no ability of our own to respond to God, having no ability to give ourselves new life, having no ability as a natural man to overcome the supernatural bondage in which Satan was holding us, and the supernatural bondage of the power of sin. Beloved, you and I were lost and hopelessly helpless. Hopelessly helpless. And what had God appointed, what had Christ done? Redemption through his blood. At the cross, the Lord Jesus Christ secured your salvation. He made it infallibly certain to occur. That's why he could say, "It is finished!" And at the cross, Christ by his shed blood and by the power of God in the resurrection by the resurrection power of God, the power of sin, the power of Satan was broken by our Lord Jesus Christ and he did this on our behalf. He did it for us. Satan had no binding over Christ, Satan had no power over Christ so Christ didn't need to deliver himself from the power of Satan, Christ had no sin and so there was no sin for him to be delivered from. Don't you see that when he went to the cross, he was doing it for us? He was doing it for his people. And why would he do that, that's the question of the hour? Why would Christ do that? Why would God the Father choose us and adopt us into his family? Why would Christ go to the cross after living a righteous life for some 30 years, why would he do that for sinners like you and me?

Why would he do that? The text tells us. Verse 4, it was in love. Verse 7, it was according to the riches of his grace which he lavished on us. Boundless grace, boundless mercy gladly showered upon us by the Lord Jesus Christ and not in a misery stingy way, he lavished it upon us. He poured it out in abundant measure far more than anyone could have asked for. And why did he do that? Beloved, it was not because you deserved it because you did not. He did it because that's what he's like. He is a generous, loving, gracious Savior who gladly brought you into the family of God through his redemptive work on your behalf. He gladly did that. He graciously did that. And when you start to recognize that, you start to do two things: one, you are humbled by the reality that your

position in Christ was secured not by your goodness but by his, you are humbled to realize you did not deserve this. So there are times where you cry out, "Lord, why me?" And it's not the "why me" of "why am I suffering," which is, you know, common to unredeemed men to say. No, the Christian should be saying, "Lord, why me? Why such love and grace on me because it wasn't anything in me that could have prompted that?" And you say, "Oh," and then the sun starts to rise on your understanding, "Then it must be because of You. It must be because of Your love and grace that You have done this on my behalf. Undeserved love, undeserved grace lavished upon me, an unworthy sinner."

So when that starts to form in your understanding, you praise God, and you praise him not primarily or first and foremost for any earthly blessings that he's given to you. You set everything earthly aside and you look up at the majesty of his being and you thank him for the grace of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. So we praise him because he chose us. We praise him because he adopted us. We praise him because Christ redeemed us at the price of his own blood, beloved. You know, if we understood something about the physical tortures of the cross, it would change our perspective, but far infinitely more, if we understood something about the nature of the redemptive work of Christ and how he suffered the wrath of Christ for all of our sins, God chose you by name before the foundation of the world, Christ was suffering for you by name on the cross, somehow in the infinite mind of Christ and in the infinite justice of God, in the infinite grace of God, Christ was absorbing every individual sin that you had ever committed and suffering the punishment for it. Christ suffered for my covetous thought yesterday around 2 o'clock along with the thousands if not millions of other sins of which I'm guilty, and he gladly did it as a brother to the redeemed, as the elder brother to the redeemed. He gladly saved us and paid the price for all our sins at Calvary. How can you not love him? You know, how could anyone understand this and not say, "Do you know what? Henceforth and forevermore the only purpose in my life is to live to the glory of this One who loved me and gave His soul up for me like that." How could you have any other kind of response?

And understand this, beloved, I say this sympathetically but I say it clearly and directly: Scripture teaches us that those who have heard clearly the gospel of Jesus Christ and reject him, Scripture says that those who have heard the gospel and deemed the Son of God unfit for their submission and worship, they will face the strictest judgment of them all. It won't be the murderers. It won't be those that have committed crimes that are viewed as the most heinous by man. In God's eyes the most heinous crime that you can commit is to hear about the gospel of Jesus Christ, to hear and see set before your eyes the glory and majesty of his holy name, the majesty of his person, the majesty of his work, and then to reject that and say, "I will not have that man reign over me. I will be my own. I'll be my own god. I'll worship what I want to but I will not submit to Christ. I will not submit to the holy word of God written in the 66 books of the Bible." Man, if you walk away from that, if you reject that, the lowest hottest part of hell is reserved for you because that is a direct insult, that is highhanded rebellion against the Christ who freely offers this gift of salvation to everyone who will believe. And if someone walks out of here today unbelieving, understand this, it won't be because of anything on God's side, you'll walk out unbelieving, you'll walk out rejecting Christ because of the sin and rebellion in your own heart and you will face accountability before a holy God for that.

So if I were you, if I were you, I would repent right now. I wouldn't wait until the end of the service. You should bow your heart now and say, "Lord, I see how clearly I've rebelled. I see how clearly my life has been against You. Have mercy on me, the sinner. Yes, I've done all of these wicked things in my flesh but I see now that my greatest sin is vertical. I've ignored You. I've rejected Christ. I've mocked Him. I've treated Him as unworthy of my time and attention." God will hear a cry for mercy like that, beloved. Jesus said, "Come to Me all you who labor and are heavy-laden and I'll give you rest." There is no unwillingness in God for you to be saved. The unwillingness is found in your own wretched heart if you walk out of here and are not a Christian.

Well, there's one more aspect here and I'm just going to go through, I'm just going to leave it here and we'll save the rest for another time. God the Father chose us, adopted us. Christ the Son redeemed us with his shed blood. Then we see the work of the Holy Spirit and the kindness of the Holy Spirit to us as well in that he sealed us. Look at verse 13 where it says this, "In Him," that is, in Christ, "you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation having also believed," you believed in response to the work of God, you believed, you know, your faith, beloved, I'm going on a little tangent here, faith, true faith, true saving faith is an indication, is the evidence in your heart that you've been chosen by God for salvation. The fact that you believe in Christ, truly believe in Christ, is one of the initial marks that you've been chosen for salvation but understand that it is the choice of God, it is the work of God that produced faith in your heart, and it is the work of the Spirit of God that produced faith in your heart. It's not something that you conjured up in your own power in order to believe and then God said, "Oh, I must respond now because he's believed." No. No, you believe because the Spirit of God was graciously working in your heart in order to take out your heart of stone and put in a warm beating heart of flesh that would respond to the living God and the invitation to Christ. You had nothing in you that would have responded. You were cold. You were dead. You were bound by Satan, bound by sin. There was nothing in you that could have possibly, possibly started this process.

That's why Scripture says we love because he first loved us. Don't ever reverse that sequence. God loves us in Christ before the foundation of the world and if you've been saved, if the Spirit of God has worked in your heart, you're loving in response to that work of his. God does not love you because you first loved him, you love God because he first loved you. It's very important for each one of us to get that straight in our minds because that sequence changes everything that you think about genuine salvation and it determines the way that you respond to God in your life and the way that you live in obedience to Christ and what you give your life over to, what you give your love to, how you respond to your trials. Everything is determined by what you think about that sequence. If God chose me and I believe in response to his choice, I'm humbled by it because I realize it's not anything that I deserved. If I think that my choice determined the outcome of my salvation, then there's an inevitable sense of boasting that comes. "I believed and I'm different. You know, you don't believe, I had the insight to see it." And there's boasting there and there's boasting in the presence of God. "I received. You know,

I chose You." Don't go down that Arminian road. That leads you to bad places when you really think it out and see the consequences of it all.

Here in verse 13 we see that the Spirit sealed us. Verse 13, "In Him," and oh, what this means is just phenomenal, "In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory." When Paul here talks about the sealing of the Holy Spirit, understand that in those times, the seal, you know, think about a seal being impressed on warm clay and the imprint of the seal is being left on the seal and so that clay would be used to seal official documents and things like that. The seal was a mark of ownership. The one who owned the seal was the one who was putting his imprint on the clay. Paul uses that as a metaphor to help us understand what God has done for us in salvation. What God has done, what the Spirit of God has done, is he has sealed us. Through the indwelling Holy Spirit, God has marked us as his own. God has set us apart and he has marked us by the indwelling Holy Spirit in a way that shows that we belong to him. And one of the marks of having the indwelling Holy Spirit is a transformed life, is having a heart that is tender to the word of God, that believes the word of God, that loves the Lord Jesus Christ, that longs to obey even if you obey imperfectly, as you do. But there's this longing, there's this captivity of your heart, your heart is taken captive to the beauty and the wonder of the Lord Jesus Christ and you see him as the greatest thing of all, the object of your highest affection and none can rival for it. If family must go for the sake of your loyalty to Christ, you say family must go. If the world hates me, I understand that the world hated Christ before it hated me and I'd rather be identified with Christ in the opposition of the world than to be on the world's side in opposition to Christ.

There is just this clear dividing line that comes. My point is this, is that that heart of love and affection for Christ, that longing for obedience is the sure inevitable mark of a genuinely converted heart and that evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit shows that God has marked you out as his own, and therefore you belong to him. And that mark of ownership, that pledge of our inheritance in verse 14, is it's the language of a down-payment. What it means is this, the fact that you have the indwelling Holy Spirit within you now in the plan and outworking of the way salvation works, it's like a down-payment that God has given you. The down-payment of the indwelling Spirit is the earnest payment, meaning that there's more to come. If you have the Spirit now, it's the sure guarantee, the sure promise of God that there's more to come, that God will keep you through this life. None of those that the Spirit saves could possibly ever be lost. God will keep you through this life. God will bring you safe into heaven. You will be in his eternal kingdom enjoying the riches and glory of Christ forever and ever without end, having been made perfect in him, glorified, the presence of sin thoroughly banished, no more tears, no more sorrow, no more pain, no more temptation, utterly removed from all of the effects of sin, glorified, made like Christ and being with him throughout all of eternity. The presence of the Spirit in your life today is a down-payment that that greater gift will certainly be fulfilled for you in the end.

You step back from that and what can you say? "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He has blessed me with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. He chose me and adopted me into His family. I can rightly be called a child of God, a child of God by redemption, not simply that God made me but God loved me and redeemed me and I belong to him and He wants me in His family and I am. And that when Christ was on the cross, He was doing that for me. He loved me and gave Himself up for me," Galatians 2:20 says, first person singular. "And the Spirit indwells me and is keeping me and is sanctifying me, and even though I'm unworthy of it to this day, God has set His love upon me like that so that I am fully assured that He is favorably disposed to me." And what we have here at the Communion Table is a symbol that reminds us of all of those great realities, that Jesus Christ poured out his blood to give this gift to us. And it's a symbol, behind the symbol is the reality of the love and the grace and the mercy and the kindness and the patience of God toward his wandering children. And we gather back together to this focal point that reminds us of it and with a glad heart of worship, we anticipate what is about to come.

So let me just close where I began. If you're here today and you're a Christian, we invite you to share in this Table with us. This isn't limited to the members of Truth Community Church. We believe in open Communion, that everyone who knows Christ can rightfully partake. But having said that, with all of these wonderful promises of God echoing in our mind, let me say this and repeat myself: if you're not a Christian or if you're a Christian living in sin, please do not profane this Table by taking the elements. Please don't reach for the elements with one hand while you're clutching your sin and rebellion in the other. It's either all for Christ or just passing on the Table here. Our men are going to come now to serve Communion to us. Bow with me in a word of prayer as David also comes to lead us in song.

Father, we are grateful to You for the grace and peace that flow in our lives as a result of the work of our elder brother the Lord Jesus Christ who not only suffered on the cross for us, He was buried, He was raised from the dead, more than that, He has ascended to the right hand of the throne of God where He intercedes for His saints from which He will one day come again to receive us to Himself. Gracious God, gracious God, how good are You? How deep is Your love for unworthy sinners like us, that all of that would be ours and far more than we can comprehend and the wonder of our Lord Jesus Christ. So I pray now, Father, that as we come to the Table, that corporately and individually we would do so in a manner worthy of Your great love, the great gift of Christ and, Father, may we do so with a full assurance that You look at us with favor and that You intend to bless us, just as You have done in the past, You will bless us going forward in the future, for surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Amen.

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