

## Sola Fide: Faith Alone and Predestining Grace (Eph. 1:11-13)

Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at Gold Country Baptist Church on December 5, 2010

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Ephesians 1:11–13 (NAS) *In Him*<sup>11</sup> *also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will,*<sup>12</sup> *to the end that we who were the first to **hope in Christ** would be to the praise of His glory.*<sup>13</sup> *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,*

Paul speaks of faith a couple ways, the first is “hope” in v. 12. Some translate it “*put confidence in Christ*” (Amplified, Phillips) or in the NKJV it’s translated “*to trust in Christ.*” The idea is to trust in Christ alone as one’s only hope, to put all hope and confidence in Him and what He did on the cross. It’s really another way to say “faith” or “believe” as you keep reading to v. 13 “*you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—**having also believed***”

So saying “you also believed the gospel” makes clear that the hope or trust in v. 12 is parallel with the faith or belief in v. 13 also. It’s another way to speak of faith alone in Christ alone for salvation. Who are the “we” in v. 12 who first hoped in Christ? Paul may be talking about himself and the other Jewish early Christians, and the word Christ is just the Greek word for Messiah or Anointed One. The gospel Paul taught was to the Jew first and also the Gentile. So in v. 13 when Paul says “you also,” he is including the Gentiles in the same way with the Jews, as he’ll develop more in chapter 2, and Galatians and Romans, the only way any is saved is by faith

*The Cambridge Declaration* defines “Sola Fide” this way: ‘We reaffirm that justification is by grace alone through faith alone because of Christ alone. In justification Christ's righteousness is imputed to us as the only possible satisfaction of God's perfect justice. This is the article by which the church stands or falls. Today this article is often ignored, distorted or sometimes even denied by leaders, scholars and pastors who claim to be evangelical [ex: NPP (N.T. Wright), Emergents like MacLaren] ... The marketing orientation in many churches takes this even further, erasing the distinction between the biblical Word and the world, robbing Christ's cross of its offense, and reducing Christian faith to the principles and methods which bring success to secular corporations. While the theology of the cross may be believed, these movements are actually emptying it of its meaning. There is no gospel except that of Christ's substitution in our place whereby God imputed to him our sin and imputed [accounted/transferred/exchanged] to us his righteousness. Because he bore our judgment, we now walk in his grace as those who are forever pardoned, accepted and **adopted as God's children**. There is no basis for our acceptance before God except in Christ's saving work, not in our patriotism, churchly devotion or moral decency. The gospel declares what God has done for us in Christ. It is not about what we can do to reach him.’ (available from Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, [www.alliance.net](http://www.alliance.net) )

An older summary of the sure “hope” of a Christian from v. 12 is:

**My hope is built on nothing less** Than Jesus' blood and righteousness.  
I dare not trust the sweetest frame, But **wholly lean on Jesus' Name** ...  
When all around my soul gives way He then is **all my Hope** and Stay ...  
Dressed in **His righteousness alone**, Faultless to stand before the throne.

This is **all my hope** and peace, Nothing but the blood of Jesus;  
 This is all my righteousness, Nothing but the blood of Jesus.  
 Nothing can for sin atone, Nothing but the blood of Jesus;  
**Naught of good that I have done**, Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

The flow of Eph. 1 is all about good that *God has done for us*; in eternity past, before creation (v. 4-5), and then 2,000 years ago on the cross (v. 7 *His blood*). After all the verses about what God has done, finally in v. 13 is our response to what God has been doing all along beforehand. It says we listened to or heard the message of the gospel and when we believed, it was that moment of faith alone (not any works) that salvation and its blessings were realized and actualized in our life, and we were sealed with the Holy Spirit.

In the grammar of v. 13 it is when we put our faith in Christ alone and His gospel that we are saved and sealed, marked as God's and secured. Just like the first Gentile converts in Acts 10, it says they believed and it was at that moment while Peter was preaching that the Holy Spirit was given to them, demonstrating they were saved. Paul says "you also when you believed were sealed in Him."

If churches stand or fall based on this doctrine, we need to get it right! The Reformers taught we're saved by "faith alone" but not by the kind of faith or so-called faith that is alone, devoid of good works or fruit of the spirit or evidences of regeneration. I can't infallibly know your heart but I do know that infallible Scripture says you are to examine yourself to see if you're in the faith (2 Cor. 13:5). If your faith is in something *you did* a long time ago (said prayer, signed a card, raised a hand, went forward all emotional at crusade or campfire, or went down in the water in baptism) but truth is you really aren't interested in spiritual things and haven't been for a long time but are just here for the sake of appearance of family, I beg you, examine yourself to see if you're really in the faith and if Christ is working in your life and heart through His Spirit in you. If not, see yourself as a great sinner, see Christ as a great Savior and truly plead "Lord, be merciful to, a sinner" as Jesus taught in Luke 18, you can be justified this same day by faith alone in Christ alone

Now is our faith a work? Is it something *we do*? Is it *of ourselves*, so that we can boast for *our* contribution to conversion, *our* faith? Look at Ephesians 2:8-9: *For by grace you have been saved through faith* [but keep going]; **and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; <sup>9</sup> not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.**

"*faith and that not of yourselves*" – how is faith not *of yourselves*?

"*it is the gift of God*" – in the grammar "it" includes faith and the whole process of salvation.

Faith is not a gift that we produce and present to God and then in return He gives us a gift of regeneration like a gift-exchange program. No, faith itself is part of the gift God gives to us! The NT teaches God grants or gives faith / repentance.

"*not as a result of works*" – literally not of anything that we "do"

"*so that no one may boast*" – just to make it more emphatic, not one part of salvation can we boast or take credit for what "I did"

That also fits with Eph. 1:12 that says the end or purpose of our hoping / trusting in Christ is *the praise of His glory*. Even our belief in v. 13 is not to our credit or glory but to God's (v. 14b).

And in 1:11 we're reminded that before we believed, God first had predestined us. Look at v. 11: *...having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will*

You say, "oh great, there goes Pastor Phil talking predestination again, I thought we were done with that!" Well, this is Paul and ultimately it's really God who inspired Paul and the other biblical writers to keep using words like this and "elected" or "chose" or its noun form elect / chosen, and a lot of other words that emphasize God's will, initiative, sovereignty and supernatural work in our heart before we believe, because of which we believe. And we believe all of inspired Scripture is profitable for teaching so we can't just skate over or skirt issues that God teaches to us.

When we teach the Bible verse-by-verse it's the text that drives what we study, and because Paul keeps bringing these truths up we can't ignore him and be faithful to his message:

<sup>1</sup> *Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God ...*

<sup>4</sup> *just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world ...*

<sup>5</sup> *He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, [and it doesn't say according to the good choice of our will but] according to the [good pleasure] of His will, <sup>6</sup> to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us ...*

<sup>9</sup> *He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention [His good pleasure] which He purposed in Him ...*

<sup>11</sup> *...having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will ...*

So when our will came to believe in Christ in v. 13, it doesn't cancel out all the verses before v. 13. Turn over to Acts 2 and I want you to see how this truth doesn't negate evangelism or man's responsibility to believe, in fact what's interesting to see is in many of the evangelism passages in Acts the truth of Eph. 1 is there, too.

**2:21** *Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved ...*

[read v. 37-39]...*"For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself."*

[*"whoever calls ... as many as God calls to Himself"*]

**3:19** *"Repent and turn to God that your sins may be wiped out ...*

<sup>26</sup>*"For you first, God raised up His Servant and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways."*

[*"turn from your sins ... God turns you from your sins"*]

**5:31** *"He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. <sup>32</sup>"And we are witnesses of these things ...*

[*God grants repentance...yet we are to obey by witnessing*]

**10:43** *Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins. <sup>44</sup>While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message.*

<sup>45</sup>*All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because **the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles...***

**11:18** *When they heard this [how the HS saved them], they quieted down and glorified God, saying, “Well then, **God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life.**”*

So Peter preaches to the Gentiles that whosoever believes in Jesus can be saved, and while He’s speaking, the Holy Spirit is poured out on them, God initiates and interrupts and imparts His Spirit as a gift from above, and the conclusion of the Gentile believers is that God Himself has granted repentance unto life to them as well.

**13:38** *Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, <sup>39</sup>and through Him **everyone who believes** is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses...<sup>48</sup>When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and **as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.***

[all of you believe...all appointed/ordained to eternal life believed]

**16:14** *A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; **and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.***

[Paul gave the gospel but God opened her heart to respond to it]

You say ‘what about all the passages where Jesus calls to all to come to Him and to believe. Don’t calls to be saved by faith alone prove man *can* come to faith *alone, on his own*, man by free will simply wills to come to know God?’ Look at Mt 11:28

**“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find **rest for your souls.**”** [But that doesn’t cancel out what Jesus said right before, in v. 27]: *All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and **anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.***

I referenced that text last week, notice again “*who the **Son** wills.*” There’s no contradiction in the next verse to call on all to come, even though we know they won’t know the Father unless the Son chooses by His will to reveal it to them. God’s sovereignty over salvation should never hinder us from calling all to come to Christ. The sovereignty/responsibility tension is in my mind, not Christ’s.

Look at Matthew 13:9 where Jesus speaks of the different types of soil and responses to the Word and says “*He who has ears to hear, let him hear.*” That’s a call to all willing and able: listen, hear, heed Christ. The hard-hearted who refuse to obey are responsible and yet in v. 11 Jesus tells His disciples the reason they know is:

**13:11** *“**To you it has been granted to know** the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted”* [We think “wait a minute, Jesus, doesn’t that mean they’re not responsible?”] ...<sup>15</sup>*FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL, WITH THEIR EARS THEY SCARCELY HEAR, AND **THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES,** OTHERWISE THEY WOULD SEE WITH THEIR EYES, HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART AND RETURN, AND **I WOULD HEAL THEM.**’*<sup>16</sup>*“But **blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear.***

Unbelievers are spiritually blind, but it is a responsible culpable closing of their eyes, a willful refusal they cannot blame God for. But in v. 16 why do *my eyes see*? I'm not to conclude some people are just born with better spiritual eyesight than others just as some people are born with better physical eyesight than others, and hey, I just had better sight or insight naturally to see what less insightful people can't see as I was able to on my own. No, Jesus says in v. 11 "*to you it has been granted to know*" (and v. 16 to see and hear)

Look at Matthew 16:25 for another call to "whosoever wishes":

*"For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it."* [and He had just explained in the verse before that meant denying self, dying to self, and following Jesus]. That's the responsibility anyone who comes after Jesus or "whosoever wishes" – and yet just a few verses earlier Peter has rightly understood who this Jesus is he's been following, see v. 16: "*You are the Christ[Messiah], the Son of the living God.*"<sup>17</sup> *Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.*

You see that? Flesh and blood, human beings cannot take credit for coming to know Jesus as He truly is, God in heaven reveals this. Look at Matthew 22, another example of how the invitation call, what theologians call the general call of the gospel, goes to all, a genuine offer and those who freely willfully reject are responsible:

**22:1** *Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying,*<sup>2</sup> *"The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son."*<sup>3</sup> *"And he sent out his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding feast, and they were unwilling to come."*<sup>4</sup> *"Again he sent out other slaves saying, 'Tell those who have been invited, 'Behold, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fattened livestock are all butchered and everything is ready; come to the wedding feast.'"*<sup>5</sup> *"But they paid no attention and went their way, one to his own farm, another to his business,"*<sup>6</sup> *and the rest seized his slaves and mistreated them and killed them."*<sup>7</sup> *"But the king was enraged ... [Judgment rightly and fairly falls on those who rejected the invite and followed their own will and own way and were unwilling to come freely. Then v. 14] For many are called, but few are chosen.*

God hasn't chosen all. Why I'm chosen and will be at the wedding feast of God's Son rather than so many who won't; I don't know?! But the fact that not all are chosen (same word as Eph. 1:4) doesn't mean the many who were invited were not genuinely given a real opportunity or invitation. Sometimes people think this "chosen" (same root as "elect" or "election") or "predestined" language must mean that sinners have no choice, but Jesus doesn't say there was no choice before them, He says they were *unwilling to come* (v. 3). Once we understand *our unwilling sinful nature*, we all like sheep go astray and our own way (that's where our will takes us, our way is not God's way and is as different as heaven and earth), then we see why God must choose us and rescue us *from our wrong choice*.

There's no fatalism, or forcing people's wills to reject Christ, or fencing off heaven to those who want to get in but aren't chosen. The picture is more like a broad road (like Mt 7), many running to destruction, and Christ's message goes forth on top of a building where a narrow gate is, His call to all "*come to me!*" (like 11:28).

But like 22:5 no one is paying attention, all are going their way, their back is to Him, they're all going the wrong way! Then as 22:14 says and Ephesians 1 says, some are chosen, and the picture is the Father and Spirit reaching out to snatch some running the wrong way and turning them around, then bringing them up the narrow gate to the top of the building to see the Son there. So they now are in a place by grace that they can see the Son for who He is in all His irresistible beauty and majesty and glory (2 Cor. 3-4) and they freely and fully then trust the Christ they rejected before, and they enter thru the narrow gate that has '*whosoever come*' above it. And they may not have understood what was happening at the time but as they're now inside the gate they look back and on the other side they read the words of Ephesians 1: *chosen, predestined ...*

I don't pretend to comprehend it all but I'd rather blow my mind than hold onto my pride of what I think *I did without God's grace*. There are genuine questions people have, some of which may not be prideful, but perplexing questions we can approach in a humble spirit without demanding God answer all our questions or explain all His ways. Ex: if God commands something (believe, come to me), and holds responsible, doesn't that prove free will or fallen humanity can?

**22:37** '*YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.*'

... <sup>39</sup> '*YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.*'

**5:48** '*Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.*'

Jesus gave many commands we are responsible for that not only do fallen men fail, but even regenerated men can't fully fulfill. In Mt 19 a man asked Jesus what he could do to inherit eternal life and when Jesus called him what he would not and could not do because of his natural love for things of this world, in v. 25 his disciples say "*Who then can be saved?*" Remember what Jesus replies in 19:26? "*With man this is impossible* [this=salvation, their question who can be saved], *but with God all things are possible.*" Not only is salvation impossible with man, but to fully understand all the intricacies of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility is not fully possible, at least for my mind, but it's no problem for God's. So we need to keep submitting our speculation to God's revelation.

Let's look at John 3, the most famous "whosoever believeth" text. We all know John 3:16, and as freely as Jesus proclaimed that truth so should we. But what's striking to me is in the same chapters the same speaker often puts the same emphasis on God's sovereignty as man's responsibility. We shouldn't think one disproves the other

<sup>7</sup>"*Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'*" <sup>8</sup>"*The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.*"

Notice the sovereignty of God's Spirit, just like the wind that blows *where it wishes*, and we don't fully know its movements or comings and goings but we can hear and see its evidences. We can tell when the wind has come and we can tell when God's Spirit has come into someone's life and we can tell when life has been born.

On the phrase “born again,” our English Bibles have a footnote: “or born *from above*.” John understood it this way in v. 27: *A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven.*

We can’t even receive anything unless it’s been given from above. In v. 3 Jesus says “*unless one is born again [or “born from above”] He cannot see the kingdom of God.*”

John 1:12 *But as many as received Him [responsibility], to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name,* <sup>13</sup>*who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.* <sup>14</sup>*And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory ...*

We did receive Him, believe Him, and see Him as glorious, but in the same breath the same writer just said we weren’t born again *because of the will of man* ultimately, we were born *of God*, i.e., this was God’s doing. We didn’t cause our first birth and we didn’t cause our spiritual new birth or our adoption as children of God, and yet our seeing, receiving, and believing were real and genuine.

God’s predestining our adoption (Eph. 1:5) doesn’t make us robots when we later love him, anymore than a human child later coming to love his father who he’d never have even known without the father choosing and adopting before. The child’s love is still real towards his father even though the father predetermined first to adopt and set his love upon the child from another country. “*We love because He first loved us*” (1 John 4:19).

Look at John 5:40. You say, “well what about other times where Jesus holds unbelievers responsible, doesn’t that prove they have a free will to come?” But in John 5:40 man’s will is man’s problem: “*you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life.*”

Jesus holds man responsible and thus man must be responsible:

**5:24** *Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.*

Jesus again gives a “whoever believes” type of statement, and He describes salvation as passing from spiritual death to spiritual life. How do the spiritually dead come to life and respond?

<sup>25</sup>*Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live*

... [commentators say this is spiritually dead who hear Christ and are given life. v. 21:] “*For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes.*”

Just as God the Father raises the dead (v. 24 term for before they pass into life in salvation) the Son gives life to whom He chooses. As I was reading this week in my Bible that has all the words of Christ in red, just to study and come up with examples of where Jesus is clearly demonstrating salvation by faith alone, by belief in Him, I kept bumping into Christ’s words of His sovereign grace, and so many times there’s a call to be saved by faith alone, there is also a recognition *even that* is not alone, on our own (Eph 2:8-9)!

In **6:29** Jesus already explained believing is not the work of man:  
*This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.*

It's God's work that you believe and you must believe to be saved:  
**6:47** *"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life."*  
**6:37b** *"... the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out."*

So don't ever think Scripture's emphasis on predestinating grace or God's sovereign work preceding / producing faith means there are people who want to come to Christ but He casts them out unfairly because they're not on His list. No one who comes to Christ will be cast away, and if you've never come to Christ in faith, this verse is for you today: come to Him today, and He will receive you! And yet *in the same verse*, in the first half of v. 37 we read of those the Father has given to the Son, a group of which all will come to Him  
 ... <sup>37</sup> ***"All that the Father gives Me will come to Me"***

Jesus intended this truth to be a great comfort to us, that it's not all about us or based on us, this is about the Father giving a people as a gift to His Son Who will make sure they all make it to the end: <sup>39</sup> ***"This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day."***  
 ... <sup>44</sup> ***"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day."***

If you find some of what Jesus says here difficult, take heart:

<sup>60</sup> *Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this said, "This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it?"* <sup>61</sup> *But Jesus, conscious that His disciples grumbled at this, said to them, "Does this cause you to stumble?"* <sup>62</sup> *"What then if you see the Son of Man ascending to where He was before?"* <sup>63</sup> ***"It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing;*** [don't think flesh / humanity can come to spiritual life on its own, Jesus says His Spirit give life] *the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.* <sup>64</sup> *"But there are some of you who do not believe."* For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him. <sup>65</sup> *And He was saying, "For this reason I have said to you, that **no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father.**"* <sup>66</sup> *As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore.*

And if Jesus came teaching these words in American churches in our day some would withdraw and not attend that church anymore.

<sup>67</sup> *So Jesus said to the twelve, "You do not want to go away also, do you?"* <sup>68</sup> *Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life."* <sup>69</sup> ***"We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God."*** <sup>70</sup> *Jesus answered them, "Did I Myself not choose you ..."*

John 15:16: *"You did not choose me but I chose you ..."*  
 v. 19 *"I chose you out of the world ..."*  
 v. 5b *"... apart from Me you can do nothing."*

If you believe and embrace v. 5, Ephesians 1 won't be as hard to understand or embrace. I intentionally didn't give you a bunch quotes from the Reformers but from our Redeemer Jesus and His Apostles. I don't believe these truths because Calvin taught them but because Christ taught them. It's Scripture alone that the Reformers emphasized as our authority (as we'll study next week).

Our closing hymn that we're about to sing captures some of those verses this way:

I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew He moved my soul to seek Him, seeking me.  
It was not I that found, O Savior true; No, I was found of Thee.  
'Twas not so much that I on Thee took hold, As Thou, dear Lord, on me.  
I find, I walk, I love, but oh, the whole Of love is but my answer, Lord, to Thee!  
For Thou were long beforehand with my soul, Always Thou lovest me.  
(1890 Hymn: "I Sought the Lord," Chadwick)