

Ephesians

Lesson One (1:1-14)

Salutation (1:1-2)

*1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,
To the saints who are also faithful in Christ Jesus;
2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the
Lord Jesus Christ.*

V. 1 Paul, an apostle—Until the First Missionary Journey (Acts 13:9) Paul was known by the Hebrew name Saul. It was by this name that we first met him (Acts 7:58) as one who helped in the stoning of Stephen. It was this same Saul who was converted on the road to Damascus (Acts 9, 22, and 26) and was appointed apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 26:17-18).

The word “apostle” comes from the Greek word *apostolos*, which means “one set forth.” In its special use here in the New Testament it refers to the men personally chosen and sent out by Jesus. Jesus promised these men inspiration (John 14:26) and gave them unique authority in the founding of the church (John 20:21-23; Eph. 2:20). Paul’s special role as an apostle was to bring in the Gentiles, to share with the Jews God’s gift of salvation in Christ (Eph. 3:4-6).

of Christ Jesus—“Christ” is from the Greek word for “anointed,” and is the equivalent of the Hebrew word “Messiah.” In the Old Testament, reference is made to the anointing of prophets (Isa. 61:1), priests (Exod. 29:7), and kings (1 Sam. 15:1). The long-awaited Messiah or Christ was anointed by the Father as our great Prophet, Priest, and King.

“Jesus” was the historical name given by the angel to both Mary (Luke 1:31) and Joseph (Matt. 1:21). It is the same as the Old Testament name Joshua, and means “Jehovah is salvation.”

by the will of God—When the Lord Jesus chose Saul of Tarsus to be His apostle, it was by the will of His Father. Notice how many things in Ephesians are done by the Father through the Son.

to the saints—The saints are “the holy ones.” To be holy means to be “set apart” to serve God. Every true Christian is a saint.

who are (at Ephesus and) also faithful in Christ Jesus—Although the earliest manuscripts do not include the words “at Ephesus,” it is still probable that Paul sent the epistle there first. From Ephesus, the major seaport and capital of Asia Minor, copies could have been sent

to all the Asian churches. If Paul had intended his letter for Ephesus alone, he surely would have included personal greetings to those with whom he had labored so long.

V.2 Grace to you—Every one of the thirteen epistles signed by Paul begins and ends with a note of grace. Could it be that a man who had so violently persecuted the church simply felt a greater appreciation for God’s grace? The word “grace” is often defined as “unmerited favor.” What this means is that although we are unworthy and undeserving, God likes us anyway! Grace is goodwill, favor, and lovingkindness—to people who do not deserve it.

and peace—Peace is best defined as “well-being of the soul.” The Christian has inner peace because he has been saved by grace through faith (2:8)—not by his own worthiness.

It has often been noted that “grace” (*charis*) is very similar in Greek to the usual Greek greeting (*chairein*). Also, “peace” was the usual Hebrew greeting (*shalom*). Since so much of Paul’s ministry involved bringing together Jews and Greeks into one body (3:4-6), it seems somehow appropriate that this Greek-Jew greeting should begin each of his epistles.

from God our Father—There is strong emphasis in Ephesians on the fatherhood of God. At least once in every chapter we are reminded of this important fact. The unity of the church is built upon it. Since there is one Father—only one (Eph. 4:6)—all who are His children are automatically brothers and sisters in one family. God is pictured as Father in the following verses in Ephesians: 1:2, 3, 17; 2:18; 3:14; 4:6; 5:20; 6:23.

and the Lord Jesus Christ—God our Father has appointed His Son to be head over all things (Eph. 1:22). So then, just as we have one God, we have one Lord (Eph. 4:5).

The title “Lord” has an interesting background in Greek. Originally it was used for the owner of a piece of property. Next it was applied to the man who owned slaves and had the authority to demand their obedience. Then it became a common title in referring to the Greek gods. (You can see the word growing in significance, until finally it becomes a fitting title for God’s Son!) Last of all, shortly before the coming of Christ, the word “Lord” became the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew name “Jehovah” or “Yahweh” in the Septuagint version of the scriptures.

Add up all the implications of the title “Lord”—owner, master, deity, the true God. Consider the glorious fact that one day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is LORD, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:10-11).

Every Spiritual Blessing (1:3-8)

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 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. 5 He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace which 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 which he lavished upon us.*

V. 3 Blessed be the God and Father—When we bless God we acknowledge his grace, praise his glory, and worship him. Our hearts cry out “Blessed be the Lord!” as the rightful response to his greatness and goodness.

who has blessed us—When God blesses us, he gives us grace and power.

in Christ—If you look carefully at each of the seven blessings in verses four through fourteen, you will notice that each one of them is available “in Christ,” “in him,” or “in the Beloved.” It is only in the Son that the blessings of the Father are given.

with every spiritual blessing—God’s most important blessings are the spiritual ones. While it is true that he sometimes blesses us with health, wealth, family, or friends, his seven greatest blessings are listed in the verses ahead:

1. He chose us. (V. 4)
2. He destined us. (V. 5)
3. He bestowed grace. (V. 6)
4. He redeemed us. (V. 7)
5. He made known the mystery. (V. 9)
6. He made us a heritage (ASV) (V. 11)
7. He sealed us with the Holy Spirit. (V. 13)

I think it is striking that these greatest blessings are freely available to all men. There are no “special favors” held back for a few “super-saints.”

in heavenly places—This unique phrase occurs five times in Ephesians, but not once in the rest of the Bible. The heavenly places are:

1. Where our blessings are (1:3).
2. Where Christ sits at God’s right hand (1:20).
3. Where we sit (now) with Christ (2:6).
4. Where the principalities and powers are located, to

whom God is showing his wisdom (3:10).

5. Where the spiritual hosts of wickedness are (6:12). We are talking about a realm of real existence that is above and beyond our mortal earth, which shall endure even when this earth has passed away. Through the church we are already (2:6) participants in the grander

drama, since we are by faith pilgrims here...and citizens there. It is in the heavenly places that we are right now wrestling against Satan and his hosts (6:12).

V. 4 even as he chose us in him—What a wonder! How amazing! God wants us to live with him in heaven! God is not grudgingly sharing his heaven with us—he is joyously *choosing* to have us join him there.

Sometimes this verse is wrongly understood to mean that God chooses in advance who shall go to heaven and who shall go to hell. Regardless of how a person lives, his destiny has already been pre-determined. This is a wrong concept. Throughout the scriptures men are told to repent and are offered salvation—and their destiny depends upon their response. (See Luke 13:5; John 3:16-18; Acts 2:38, 17:30; Rev. 22:17).

What did God choose? He chose to receive all those who were *in Christ*. In other words, God chose a class of people—the people who had accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Each individual is given the freedom to decide which group he will be in—the group in Christ, or the group apart from Christ.

before the foundation of the world—Before God had even created man, God knew man would sin. He therefore chose a way of salvation for man, and that way was in Christ Jesus. He chose to accept all who would accept his Son (John 1:12).

that we should be holy and blameless before him—Even though we were totally unworthy, God received us when we accepted Christ. God’s plan for us, now, is that we should become holy (set apart to him) and blameless (without blemish). God did not accept us because we were good, he accepted us in Christ in order that we might become good.

V. 5 He destined us in love to be his sons—The divine plan of salvation called for all those who accepted Christ as Lord to be received as sons. God did not destine which people would accept Christ. He destined that whoever did accept him would be adopted into the family.

The word “destine” means literally “to establish boundaries in advance.” God staked out the boundaries for the group he would adopt. By his sovereign decree, all those *in Christ* were considered to be in the group. Whether a man is in God’s group, then, depends on what he has done with Jesus.

through Jesus Christ—As with all the spiritual blessings, adoption into God’s family is possible only through Jesus. It is interesting to note what “adoption” meant in Paul’s time. When a person was adopted, the action cancelled his former name, his former debts, and his former life. Adoption gave him a new name, a new home, and a new inheritance. This is also what God did

for all those in Christ, when he destined them “to be his sons.”

according to the purpose of his will—Salvation is the will of God. He does not will that any should perish, but that all should repent and be saved (2 Peter 3:9). He wills that men should repent, and gives them every opportunity to do so. It is not his will to save men who do not repent.

God calls all men to repentance (Acts 17:30), but only those who accept the call are “chosen” (Matt. 22:1-14). If a man accepts God’s plan of salvation, the credit belongs to God who made it all possible. If a man rejects the plan and is lost, the blame is totally his own.

V. 6 to the praise of his glorious grace—God freely gave his favor without regard to man’s merit or worth. Man had nothing to deserve God’s grace, but it was given anyway (Rom. 5:8). This is why we should praise his glorious grace (verses 6, 12, and 14).

which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved—God is lavish (v. 8) in the grace he pours out upon his children. However, he restricts his grace to those who are found in his Beloved Son, and to those alone.

V. 7 In him we have redemption—To “redeem” is to deliver and set free by paying a price; to ransom. Our self-incurred debt was slavery to sin (Rom. 6:16). The rightful consequences were the wrath of God (Eph. 5:6) and the death of the sinner (Rom. 6:23). The price to rescue us was the blood of Jesus (1 Pet. 1:18-19).

through his blood—Throughout the Old Testament God had been teaching a principle of blood atonement (Lev. 17:11). The climax and fulfillment of all this was Calvary, when God’s only Son gave his life and satisfied our debt.

riches of his grace—Paul keeps coming back to the unbelievable fact that God gives grace to those who deserved wrath. God is so rich in grace that he can never exhaust the supply.

V. 8 which he lavished upon us—God spares no expense for his children.

More Spiritual Blessings (1:9-14)

9 For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ 10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

11 In him, according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will, 12 we who first hoped in Christ have been destined and appointed to live for the praise of his glory. 13 In him you also, who have heard the word of truth, the

gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, 14 which is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

V. 9 For he has made known to us...the mystery of his will—One of the ways God has lavished his grace upon us (see preceding verse) is by revealing his plan of salvation. For all earlier ages this plan had been kept secret (Eph. 3:9), but now it has been revealed. The word “mystery” in the Bible does not mean something that is complicated, obscure, and difficult to understand. It means something that has been kept secret until God chose to reveal it. No man could have guessed in advance that God would save the world by the death of his Son, but once God announced it, it was plain and it was simple.

according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ—This phrase, as translated here from the RSV, loses one important element of the original in Greek. A more accurate translation is “according to his **good will** which he set forth.” It was not just God’s **plan** to save the world—it was his **pleasure** to do so!

V. 10 as a plan for the fullness of time—The plan was to send Jesus to be the Savior and Lord of all creation. The fullness of time began when Jesus was sent forth to be born of woman (Gal. 4:4). The fullness of time will reach its completion when Jesus reigns over all things in the Consummation.

to unite all things in him—The final act in this grand drama will be when all things are brought under the headship of Jesus Christ. The Greek word for “unite” used here means more than just to bring together. It means to put together **under a single head**. Unity among men is of no value unless there is first a right relationship with God. The tower of Babel proved this. God’s plan was first to bring men into a right relationship with him through Christ, and second, to bring men into a right relationship with one another under Christ’s lordship.

NOTE: Verses eleven and twelve will be quoted from the American Standard Version of 1901. The Greek is difficult to translate, and English translations vary widely. I prefer the wording here of the ASV, instead of the Revised Standard Version which we are otherwise following.

V. 11 in whom also we were made a heritage—a heritage is something which is specially designated to become the property of a given individual. God’s heritage is his people.

“The Lord’s portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance.” (Deut. 32:9)

In Christ we have been admitted to the ranks of the chosen people—the special possession of God. We get heaven—and God gets us!

having been foreordained according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his will—There is a chosen people whom God is using to accomplish his eternal purpose in Christ. This chosen people is made up of all who have yielded to Christ as Lord. God did not predetermine who would be in this group, but he did predetermine what he was going to do with that group.

V. 12 to the end that we should be unto the praise of his glory—God’s chosen people are appointed to live unto his glory. This was true of the Jews in the Old Testament and is true of Christians in the New Testament. All that we ever say or do should be to the glory of God!

we who had before hoped in Christ—“We who had before hoped” are the Jewish Christians who had been faithfully awaiting the promised Messiah. They are mentioned in contrast to the Gentile Christians (“you also”) in the next verse. First Jew, then Gentile (see Rom. 1:16), all men are offered the opportunity to become and live as God’s chosen people.

V. 13 In him you also, who have heard the word of truth—These are the Gentiles. They had not become acquainted with God through birth into a Jewish family, but by hearing the Gospel. Notice that in this verse Paul unreservedly calls the Gospel message “truth.”

and have believed in him—“Faith comes by hearing” (Rom. 10:17). Faith is not an irresistible working of the Holy Spirit on a man’s heart. Faith is the rational response of the man who hears, believes, and acts upon the Gospel.

were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit—The “seal” of the first century was a mark of genuineness. If a person saw the king’s seal on a document, he could be sure it was the king’s document. In a similar way God has placed an identifying seal on every true child. This seal is the indwelling Spirit, and “if any man does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to him” (Rom. 8:9). At the beginning of the church, when the Gospel of Christ was first proclaimed, the promise was made to those believers that if they would repent and be baptized they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Thus, we today know we have the “seal” of the Holy Spirit in us if we have obeyed God’s commands (Acts 2:38). Subjective or emotional feelings are not a dependable guide.

V. 4 which is the guarantee of our inheritance—The guarantee (also translated “earnest”) is a down payment which makes a transaction binding. When a person is ready to commit himself to a real estate

transaction, for instance, he puts up “earnest money.” This is proof that he will carry out what he says he will do. When God puts his Spirit into our hearts, it is proof that he will carry out all he has promised. In our covenant relationship with God, we do not need to worry that God will fail to do his part.

Interestingly, the same Greek word (*arrabon*) is today the modern Greek name for an engagement ring! (See *Vine’s Expository Dictionary*, “Earnest”.) When a young man is serious about his intentions, he gives this ring in promise of a future relationship. It is a lovely parallel that the church will one day be gathered up as the Bride of Christ, to share in the great Wedding Feast of the Lamb (Eph. 5:25-27 and Rev. 19:7-9).

until we acquire possession of it—Some translations understand this in a different way: Until God takes possession of what he has purchased (his people). However, in the context of the “earnest” payment made by God to us in the preceding clause, it is best to accept this RSV rendering. Until we come into God’s very Presence in heaven, we have the Holy Spirit’s presence in our lives.

to the praise of his glory—How we should praise God in his glory for our spiritual blessings! Three times Paul has now repeated this refrain (v. 6, 12, and 14).

Study Questions

1. What words are always found in the opening of Paul’s epistles? What is their significance?
2. What are the heavenly places?
3. Did God choose some and reject others even before the foundation of the world?
4. When God adopts sinners to be his sons, what are the results of this adoption?
5. What is redemption? What does blood have to do with it?

6. What is the biblical meaning of “mystery”?
7. How would you summarize God’s master plan for the salvation of a lost world?
8. God has made us his heritage. What does this mean?
9. Does the seal of the Holy Spirit preserve us from falling away? What does it do?
10. Does the guarantee or “earnest” of the Spirit guarantee our faithfulness? What does it do?
11. Have you praised the glory of God for his spiritual blessings as often as for his material blessings?

Lesson Two (1:15-23)

Paul’s Prayer (1:15-23)

15 For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, 16 I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, 18 having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe, according to the working of his great might 20 which he accomplished in Christ when he raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come; 22 and he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the

church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Some Christians are like the farmer who bought a tractor but did not know it ran under its own power. Each day he hooked his big team of horses to it and pulled it around the field. Finally he got tired of all the bother and quit using the tractor altogether. “Tractors are no good,” he concluded. He didn’t know what one was good for, and he didn’t know how to use its power.

Lest any Christian not know what Christianity is good for, or how to use its power, Paul writes the prayer which is the text of our lesson.

V. 15 For this reason—The reason that Paul makes this prayer for his readers is the thought of the preceding verses: God has blessed them spiritually and has sealed them with his own Spirit.

because I have heard of your faith—Why did Paul say he had “heard of” their faith if he had spent nearly three years with them in Ephesus? There are two probable answers. First, since some years had passed since his stay in Ephesus, Paul was rejoicing that he heard of their continuing faith (as in Philemon 4, 5 and 1 Thess. 3:6). Second, this epistle was apparently intended for *all* of Asia Minor and many of these believers were people Paul had never met. (See comments on Eph. 1:1).

and your love toward all the saints—Faith in the Lord Jesus must necessarily be accompanied by love for the saints. It is impossible to be in a right relationship with the head, while being cut off from all the rest of the body. Jesus said that love for one another was the identifying characteristic of his disciples (John 13:35).

V. 16 I do not cease to give thanks for you—Paul had left Ephesus for the last time around 57 A.D. As he writes this epistle from Roman imprisonment, some six years have gone by. Still, he is faithfully lifting up the Ephesian saints in his daily prayers. The fact that he did the same for so many other churches shows something of the prayer life this great apostle must have had (see Rom. 1:8; 1 Cor. 1:4; Phil. 1:3; Col. 1:3; 1 Thess. 1:2; 2 Thess. 1:3; and Philemon 4).

remembering you in my prayers—“out of sight, out of mind,” was not the way Paul operated. He gave thanks for those with whom he had served; he prayed for their well-being.

V. 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ—Jesus Christ revealed the true God to man (John 1:18). While many gods had been depicted in wood or stone, the true God was manifested in human flesh, in his only Son. To have seen Jesus was to have seen the Father (John 14:9), for Jesus was the visible image of the invisible God (Col. 1:15) and carried the very stamp of his nature (Heb.