

Spiritual Blessings in Jesus Christ

Bible Background • Ephesians 1

Printed Text • Ephesians 1:3–14 | Devotional Reading • Psalm 33:8–12

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: UNDERSTAND Paul’s explanation of being adopted by God through Jesus Christ; EXPRESS humility at God’s affirmation of our worthiness; and PRAISE God for the remarkable gift of His adoption of us through Jesus Christ.

In Focus

After six years of marriage and almost as many years of infertility, Regina and Aaron had not been able to conceive the child they desperately longed for. They decided to start the adoption process, praying God would give them a child who needed them.

Shortly after meeting with the adoption agency, Regina began having a series of dreams. Every night for months, she dreamed of a small girl with a tiny birthmark on the side of her cheek. Regina would run to the child, reaching out her arms, but the child would cry and push her away. She was deeply troubled and shared the dream with Aaron.

“Honey, I think God has a child for us,” Aaron said. “Maybe it’s just not the right time.”

Regina and Aaron kept praying. One night, Regina dreamed about the child again. This time, the child reached out to her and smiled. When Regina woke up, she knew that God was answering her many prayers.

Finally, after years of eager and hopeful prayer, Regina and Aaron signed adoption papers, welcoming 4-year-old Joy, who happened to have a tiny birthmark on the side of her cheek, into their family.

This week, we will see how God provided a way to adopt us into His family— redemption through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Keep In Mind

“Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.” (Ephesians 1:5–6, KJV)

Words You Should Know

A. Predestined (Ephesians 1:5) *proorizo* (Gk.) — Decided beforehand.

B. Redemption (v. 7) *apolutrosis* (Gk.) — The act of being set free from imprisonment or slavery for a ransom.

Say It Correctly

Ephesians. ih-FEE-zhuns

Predestinated. pre-DES-tuh-nay-ted

Dispensation. dis-puhn-SEY-shuhn

KJV

Ephesians 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:

4 According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:

5 Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,

6 To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.

7 In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;

8 Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence;

9 Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself:

10 That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him:

11 In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:

12 That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.

13 In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise,

14 Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.

NLT

Ephesians 1:3 All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ.

4 Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes.

5 God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure.

6 So we praise God for the glorious grace he has poured out on us who belong to his dear Son.

7 He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins.

8 He has showered his kindness on us, along with all wisdom and understanding.

9 God has now revealed to us his mysterious will regarding Christ—which is to fulfill his own good plan.

10 And this is the plan: At the right time he will bring everything together under the authority of Christ—everything in heaven and on earth.

11 Furthermore, because we are united with Christ, we have received an inheritance from God, for he chose us in advance, and he makes everything work out according to his plan.

12 God's purpose was that we Jews who were the first to trust in Christ would bring praise and glory to God.

13 And now you Gentiles have also heard the truth, the Good News that God saves you. And when you believed in Christ, he identified you as his own by giving you the Holy Spirit, whom he promised long ago.

14 The Spirit is God's guarantee that he will give us the inheritance he promised and that he has purchased us to be his own people. He did this so we would praise and glorify him.

The People, Places, and Times

The Book of Ephesians. Paul wrote the book of Ephesians while he was imprisoned (see Ephesians 3:1; 4:1; 6:20), perhaps while jailed in Rome. Most scholars agree that Ephesians was written for a wider readership than just the church at Ephesus and was probably circulated among many churches in the Roman province of Asia, where Ephesus was located.

Background

In the original Greek text, the 12 verses of Ephesians 1:3–14 were a single sentence. This is one of the most joyful and profound passages in the Bible. Like an anthem of praise, it celebrates God's eternal and glorious plan of redemption. It is broken into three stanzas, each beginning or ending with the phrase "to the praise of his glorious grace" (Ephesians 1:6, NIV) or "for" or "to the praise of his glory" (1:12, 14, NIV).

This passage examines the plan of redemption from a triune perspective: The first (1:3–6) praises the Father for choosing to redeem us from our sin; the second highlights Jesus as the Redeemer (1:7–12); and the third stanza (1:13–14) reveals the Holy Spirit as the living, divine presence to the church and the world.

In these verses, the vast plan of redemption is revealed from eternity before creation to the time of its future completion at the time of Christ's Second Advent. The focus of redemption is always Christ, and the phrase "in Christ" or "in him" occurs repeatedly throughout this passage. In fact, this expression is the key phrase of this entire epistle, or letter.

At-A-Glance

1. God Blessed Us (Ephesians 1:3–6)
2. Jesus Christ Redeemed Us (vv. 7–12)
3. The Holy Spirit Sealed Our Salvation (vv. 13–14)

In Depth

1. God Blessed Us (Ephesians 1:3–6)

Paul begins this passage with joyful praise to God the Father for His plan of redemption and He blesses Him for the blessing of Christ Jesus. Because of Christ's redemptive work, believers are beneficiaries of all the spiritual blessings of the "heavenly realms" (v. 3, NIV). These spiritual blessings come from living and abiding "in Christ." Verse 4 tells us of the first blessing: We are chosen to be holy and blameless. God did not choose us because we are holy and blameless, but He chose us that we might become holy and blameless. Consider the implications: When we accept Christ as our Savior and Redeemer, we are accepting God's offer to make us holy and blameless. He is promising to take us unworthy sinners and make us into His very own children. And we are not only joining the family, but we are also gaining all the rights and privileges that come with the position.

In addition, we were predestined, or chosen ahead of time, to become God's children and be freely given the gift of His glorious grace. He determined beforehand what we would become or do. Some of these plans are listed in this passage of Scripture. He decided His people would be holy and

blameless (v. 4), adopted as His sons and daughters (v. 5), redeemed (v. 7), for the praise of His glory (vv. 11-12), recipients of the Holy Spirit (v. 13), and given an inheritance (v. 14). Verse 6 says God has freely provided for us all these blessings by His grace and through Christ Jesus. It's up to us to accept them.

2. Jesus Christ Redeemed Us (vv. 7–12)

This second stanza of Paul's hymn highlights the wonder of God's grace, revealed in the life and death of Jesus Christ. God takes sin very seriously, and it is only because of Christ's sacrifice on our behalf that we can be forgiven. But God does not forgive grudgingly. Rather, He forgives us "according to the riches of His grace" (v. 7, NKJV). God "lavished on us" His grace and forgiveness (v. 8, NIV). Just as parents love their children, God loves us. He not only adopts us into His family, but He does so in generosity and abundance.

God also promises that one day His plan for humankind will be fully accomplished. At the right time, the culmination of God's plan will come to pass, and all will be brought together under the Lordship of Jesus Christ (v. 10). In these confusing and fearful times, it is comforting to know that there will come a time when everything will come into right relationship under the leadership of Jesus.

3. The Holy Spirit Sealed Our Salvation (vv. 13–14)

In ancient times, a seal denoted ownership. In this last stanza of Paul's theological hymn, he speaks of the Holy Spirit's role in our redemption. The Holy Spirit "seals" the deal. When God adopts us into His family, He gives us the Holy Spirit as evidence that we are truly His sons and daughters (Romans 8:9) with all rights and responsibilities. The Holy Spirit is also a promise of greater things to come—when God's entire plan is accomplished and our full redemption is realized. On that great day, when all is fulfilled, the family of God will truly be "unto the praise of his glory" (Ephesians 1:14).

Search the Scriptures

1. When and why did God choose us to become part of His family (Ephesians 1:4)?
2. How do we obtain redemption (v. 7)?
3. What role does the Holy Spirit fulfill in the redemption plan for believers (vv. 13–14)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. What are some of the benefits of being a part of God's family? How do we know we are part of God's family?
2. How do we know we are part of God's family?

Liberating Lesson

People long for connection—a place to belong. Some search for relationships at work, at the gym, or online. Others hope for a sense of belonging within their own family. Still others move from relationship to relationship, without ever really feeling loved or accepted anywhere. As believers, we can offer others meaningful relationships within the body of Christ. In fact, it is usually through relationships that we are able to lovingly invite others to join us in the family of God.

Application for Activation

Many people don't have a clear understanding of sin. If people do not have a clear grasp of what sin is, then they don't know that they need repentance and redemption. As believers, so that others may

join us in the family of God, we must clearly point the way to the Cross. God loves every person in the world and wants him or her to join His family. It's our mandated duty to extend the invitation.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Ephesians 1:3-18

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:

The adjective “blessed” (Gk. eulogetos, yoo- log-ay-TOS) literally means “praised, well- spoken of ” or “in a place of favor and benefit.” The verb “be” is not stated in the text but is implied. Therefore, Paul’s intended meaning could be either “God is to be praised” or “God is characterized by blessedness.”

The reason that Paul directs blessing toward God is because of the favor that God has poured out on His people. The blessings here are “spiritual” (Gk. pneumatikos, pnyoo-mat- ik-OS)—related primarily to our spiritual welfare—rather than material or physical. The spiritual blessings we have received are also comprehensive. The list to follow in verses 4–14 will show us what he means by “all.” The blessings are further described as “in heavenly places” and “in Christ.” “Heavenly places” (Gk. epouranios, ep-oo-RAN-ee-os) could literally be translated “heavenlies.” The heavenlies are mentioned in Ephesians 1:20 as the place where Christ sat down after ascending to heaven. Then, Ephesians 2:6 tells us that we are presently seated in the heavenlies with Christ (Darby Translation). The “heavenlies” are, therefore, the realm where God lives.

4 According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:

The word “chosen” (Gk. eklegomai, ek-LEG- om-ahee) means “picked out” or “selected.” Because the Scriptures are clear that God has chosen His people, there is a question regarding the basis on which He has chosen them. It could be argued that God’s choice is solely based on His sovereign will. This is rooted in the fact that sin has so thoroughly corrupted humanity that no one is able to choose Christ unless God first regenerates their heart (John 5:21; Ephesians 2:1). Another view is that God’s choice of individuals is based on His perfect foreknowledge (prescience) of what those individuals would do if they were left to their own free will. This view holds that the prevenient grace of God makes it possible for anyone to choose to believe in Christ apart from a special regenerating work of

God. This perspective emphasizes the Scripture's offer of salvation to the entire world (John 3:16) and argues that God would not offer humanity salvation that we are not able to seek on our own. The Father's work in the redemption of His people began before the foundation of the world. Other New Testament passages echo this thought. In Matthew 25:34, Jesus refers to the inheritance of the righteous as "the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Jesus was destined for His role as our Redeemer from eternity (John 17:24; 1 Peter 1:20). Furthermore, the Lamb's Book of Life has contained the names of God's people since before the creation of the world (Revelation 13:8; 17:8).

Being chosen by God is a high privilege, but it also involves accountability. In Ephesians 1:4, the word "holy" (Gk. *hagios*, HAG-ee-os) means "consecrated, set apart, morally perfect." It is sometimes used in the New Testament as a noun to mean "saint" (those set apart to God). The Greek work *amomos* (AM-o-mos, "without blame") is a word used ceremonially to describe a sacrifice as "without blemish" (see 1 Peter 1:19). In this context, it describes a state of moral faultlessness (see Philippians 2:15; Revelation 14:5).

5 Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,

The word translated "predestinated" (Gk. *proorizo*, pro-or-ID-zo) also means "decided upon beforehand," "predetermined" or "foreordained." When the authors of the New Testament used this word to describe God's action in the redemption of humanity, they intended for us to understand that God did more than simply plan our redemption. He caused it to happen. God even predestined the crucifixion of Jesus (Acts 4:27–28; 1 Corinthians 2:7–8). He has predestined not only our adoption but also our complete transformation into the image of Christ (Romans 8:29).

In Ephesians 1:5, our salvation is also described as "adoption of children" (Gk. *hiothesia*, hwee-oth-es-EE-ah). The predestination-to-adoption is based on the "good pleasure" (Gk. *eudokia*, yoo-dok-EE-ah) of God's will. *Eudokia* is used in the New Testament to mean "satisfaction," "good pleasure," "favor," or "approval." The message of the Scriptures is clear: God purposed, planned, and accomplished our redemption, not because of any obligation or compulsion but because He is merciful and compassionate. It pleases Him to save His people from sin and bestow eternal blessing upon us (Luke 12:32; 1 Corinthians 1:21).

"Will" (Gk. *thelema*, THEL-ay-mah) in Ephesians 1:5 means "what one wishes or has determined shall be done." Until the coming of Christ, God's will for humanity's salvation was mostly hidden and only partly revealed. It was a mystery because humanity had no way of knowing exactly what God was going to do (Ephesians 3:4–5). But Christ's advent, crucifixion, and resurrection—along with the proclamation of His word—have fully revealed to us what God has "determined shall be done" (see Daniel 11:36).

6 To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.

"Praise" (Gk. *epainos*, EP-ahee-nos) is used here and in verses 12 and 14 to refer to recognition that is due God for His work to save His people. The Lord will receive praise, thanksgiving, and honor from the redeemed for all eternity (Revelation 7:10). "Glory" (Gk. *doxa*, DOX-ah) can mean "brightness," "splendor," "majesty," "fame," "renown," or "honor." Here, the emphasis is on the fame and renown of God's incredible "grace" (Gk. *charis*, KHAR-ece). *Charis* refers to the favor that God has shown to His people by selecting them and orchestrating their salvation, in spite of their sin.

7 In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;

Paul now switches his focus from the orchestrating work of the Father to the role of the Son, who accomplished the salvation of God's people. All of the blessings of salvation are experienced "in Christ" (see comments on v. 3). "Redemption" (Gk. *apolutrosis*, ap-ol-OO-tro- sis) is a release from slavery or captivity brought about by the payment of a ransom, a "buying back." "Forgiveness" (Gk. *aphesis*, AF-es-is) is the cancellation of an obligation—namely the obligation of payment for our sin. Christ's work means that God promises to erase our sin from our record (Isaiah 43:25), to not count our sin against us (Romans 4:8), to not remember our sins (Hebrews 10:17), and to cleanse our conscience so that we may walk in newness of life (Hebrews 9:14; 10:22).

We experience redemption and forgiveness through the "riches" (Gk. *ploutos*, PLOO-tos) of God's grace. *Ploutos* can mean a literal abundance of wealth; here, the emphasis is on the fullness of the blessings experienced by believers in Christ. Furthermore, God's cleansing work is a precursor to the spiritual prosperity for which we hope (Jeremiah 33:8–9).

8 Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence;

God has "abounded" or "lavished" (Gk. *perisseuo*, per-is-SYOO-o) the blessings of salvation upon us. In this context, *perisseuo* means "to make extremely rich." His generosity is so great that it might cause us to question the soundness of His judgment. However, Paul uses two overlapping terms to clarify that the lavishing is deliberate and based on sound judgment. "Wisdom" (Gk. *sophia*, sof-EE-ah) is "the capacity to understand and function accordingly." "Prudence" (Gk. *phronesis*, FRON-ay-sis) is "intelligence" or "the ability to understand."

9 Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself:

The verb "having made known" (Gk. *gnorizo*, gno-RID-zo) means, "to reveal" and may indicate either the time or means of God's lavishing. This phrase could also be translated "when he revealed to us" or "by revealing to us." What God revealed was the "mystery" (Gk. *mysterion*, moos-TAY-ree-on) of His will. A biblical mystery is a secret that God has not previously disclosed. The exact nature of the mystery is not the point of this passage. The point is that God has entrusted the message of His plan for the redemption of humanity with the church. We are responsible to be good stewards of that message by faithfully preserving it, guarding it from corruption, and sharing it with those who need to hear it.

The revelation of the mystery of God's will happened according to His good pleasure. The Greek word for "good pleasure," *eudokia*, was also used in verse 5 to describe the way God adopted us as His children. The word "purposed" (Gk. *protithemai*, prot-ITH-em-ah-ee) means "to set before oneself" or "to propose to oneself." The word is used figuratively here to mean, "plan," "purpose," or "intend." Again, we see that God's lavish blessing of His people in Christ is both motivated by passionate love and carefully planned.

10 That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him:

God's plan, rooted in love and guided by wisdom, concerns more than the redemption of humanity. His goal is to change or renew the order of the entire created universe by manifesting the Lordship of Christ in a powerful and dramatic way. "Dispensation" or "economy" (Gk. *oikonomia*, oy-kon-om-EE-

ah) refers to God's plan of salvation, which He is bringing to pass in the "fullness of times." As sovereign king of the universe, God did not simply set the events of history in motion, step back, and watch to see how things would play out. He is actively involved in bringing about His intended purpose for the world He created. "Gather together in one" (Gk. anakephalaioimai, an-ak-ef-al-AH-ee-om-ahee) also means to "unite" or "sum up." God's purpose is for Christ to be revealed and exalted as Redeemer and Lord of the entire universe (Ephesians 1:22; Philippians 2:9–10; Revelation 5:9). "All things" includes all people, as well as everything that Christ created when He formed the universe (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16–17). This is why the Scriptures refer to the future with terms and concepts such as "new heavens and new earth" and "the restoration of all things" (Isaiah 65:17; Acts 3:21; 2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:5). Jesus, who created all things in the beginning, is in the process of recreating the world, which humanity damaged through sin.

11 In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:

The benefits of our status as God's heirs (or inheritance) are not the product of chance. Paul emphasizes the determining influence of God's sovereignty with a flourish of words that repeat themes from earlier in the passage and overlap in meaning. The word "predestinated" is the same word used in verse 5 to describe God's loving act of foreordaining our adoption. "Purpose" (Gk. prothesis, PROTH-es-is) here refers to a plan or something that has been resolved. "Counsel" (Gk. boule, boo-LAY) means "plan," "purpose," "resolution," or "decision." "Will" has already been used in verses 5 and 9.

12 That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.

The "we" of this verse is complemented by the "you" of verse 13—both of which groups are clearly composed of believers in Jesus. The "praise of his glory" is, of course, the appropriate response to God's saving grace (see v. 6). God chose and called the people of Israel to believe in the coming Messiah. He revealed the salvation that He would bring through signs and symbols, such as the temple worship and the Levitical priesthood. His purpose was not to restrict salvation to the Jewish people but to make them a light for the peoples of the world so that many would experience His salvation (Isaiah 49:6). Paul is among the Jewish people who heard the message of Christ and came to believe that He was the Messiah. This also means that all of the many ways in which Israel experienced both the promise and fulfillment of God's deliverance (see Romans 9:4–5) are additional grounds for praise to God.

13 In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise,

Paul continues to point out the priceless benefits of the gospel but with special emphasis on the fact that Jews (the "we" of Ephesians 1:12) and Gentiles ("ye") have shared equally in those benefits. The experience of salvation comes from hearing the word of truth, not from being born or being circumcised as a Jew. The Gentiles, having believed, also experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Elsewhere in the New Testament, Paul and the Apostles refer to the baptism of the Spirit as the fulfillment of both Old Testament prophecy (Joel 2:28) and the promise of Jesus (Luke 24:47–49). The fact that Gentiles experienced the same baptism as Jews did on the Day of Pentecost was something that many Jewish Christians found extraordinary. It served as incontrovertible evidence that Gentiles could be saved by faith in Jesus without first becoming Jews (Acts 10:44–46; 11:15–18). "Sealed" (Gk. sphragizo, sfrag-ID-zo) means "to mark for the purpose of identification or indicating ownership." Sealing also carries with it a sense of certification—a guarantee of

authenticity. The experience of Spirit baptism is, therefore, not a “second blessing” but a “down payment” toward the full benefits Christ has purchased for us.

14 Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.

An “earnest” (Gk. arrhabon, ar-hrab-OHN) is a “first installment, deposit or down payment.” We normally think of an “inheritance” (Gk. kleronomia, klay-ron-om-EE-ah) as property that changes hands at death. Even though God cannot die, the New Testament often uses this word to refer to the possessions promised by

God to His children. The emphasis, therefore, is on God’s incredible love for His children— that He longs to lavish everything He owns on them. “Praise of his glory” is the same phrase used in verse 12 to describe the purpose of God’s redemption of those who were first to believe. Here, the phrase applies to the salvation of all God’s people. God’s mighty power and incredible grace will bring Him the enduring, thankful praise of all His people, for all eternity.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Blessed by God's Forgiveness
(Psalm 32:1-7)

TUESDAY

Blessed by Being Chosen
(Psalm 33:8-12)

WEDNESDAY

Blessed by God's Gift of Grace
(1 Corinthians 1:4-9)

THURSDAY

Blessed by God's Revelation
(Daniel 2:17-23)

FRIDAY

Blessed by the Word of Truth
(Colossians 1:3-8)

SATURDAY

Blessed by God's Redemption
(Luke 1:67-79)

SUNDAY

God Has Blessed Us
(Ephesians 1:3-14)