



**Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for May 3, 2009**  
**Released on April 29, 2009**

**“New Family in Christ”**

**Lesson Text:** Ephesians 1:3–14

**Background Scripture:** Ephesians 1:1–14

**Devotional Reading:** Exodus 19:1–8

**Ephesians 1:3–14**

**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.

**LESSON AIMS:**

**Facts:** to show how good God has been to us because He has made us part of a new family in Christ.

**Principle:** to show that all who put their faith in Christ can be part of this wonderful new family.

**Application:** to show that when we put our faith in Christ, we too can become an integral part of God's family.

## **INTRODUCTION:**

A friend of ours once gave her adopted daughter a little plaque with the inscription, "You grew in my heart, not in my womb." This tender sentiment reflects the fact that couples who cannot have children biologically often pursue adoption. In our culture, raising children is perceived to be an important life experience and (in theory at least) a source of joy, thus the desirability of adoption.

The ancient Romans of the Apostle Paul's time also practiced adoption, but usually for a very different reason. According to Roman law, a father's property could pass only to his legitimate heir, who was expected to continue the household and the family name. Men who had no children would therefore often adopt a son, sometimes a liberated slave, to stand as their heirs. The adopted son may already have reached adulthood by the time of the adoption.

Those adopted for this purpose severed ties with their former families in order to be able to receive their new father's name and property upon his death. Of course, they were also expected to submit to their new father and live in a way that would honor him as repayment for his generosity. Being chosen to be an heir and elevated from slavery thus carried both privileges and responsibilities. In our passage today, Paul uses the legal principles behind the concepts of *adoption* and *redemption* to illustrate our experience of God's grace, and helps us look at the family of God with all its rights and privileges when we trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

## **LESSON BACKGROUND:**

Time: A.D. 60

Place: from Rome

Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus is known for its teachings on unity in the church (Ephesians 2:11-22; 4:1-6), spiritual gifts (4:7-16), Christian living (4:17-5:21), marriage and family relationships (5:22-6:9), and the armor of God (6:10-18). Many readers prefer to focus on these more practical passages, while avoiding the difficult and controversial teachings on grace, works, and predestination in the first two chapters.

Yet Paul's ethical instructions are based on the principle stated at 5:1: "Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children." Christians, in other words, are to act a certain way *because* we have been adopted into God's household as His children; we must live in a way that protects the family name. Following this logic, Paul opens Ephesians with an extended theoretical discussion of our adoption as God's heirs. In so doing, Paul emphasizes God's grace and our need to respond to that grace through lives of service.

## **THE SOURCE OF FAMILY BLESSINGS (Ephesians 1:3-6)**

### **1. What are God's spiritual blessings? When do we receive them in heavenly places? (v. 3)**

After greeting his readers and extending to them his apostolic blessing, Paul began to remind them of their spiritual blessings in Christ. The source of these blessings is the "God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," to whom Paul extended praise. He called these blessings "spiritual," distinguishing them from temporal blessings. They are said to be "in heavenly places," or simply "the heavenlies." This is a reference to the celestial realms, distinguished from the realm of the earth, the temporal, and the corruptible (cf. 1:20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12). The value of these blessings thus transcends our mortal existence and cannot be changed or corrupted.

The Greek tense of "hath blessed" in Ephesians 1:3 indicates that God's bestowal of these blessings is an accomplished fact. We need not wait for them; we received

them when we received Christ. Thus, they are said to be "in Christ." To receive Him by faith is to receive everything God has for us (cf. Rom. 8:32).

## **2. When were we chosen in Christ? What was God's purpose in choosing us? (v. 4)**

Paul now shifts his vantage point from the time of our conversion to eternity past—"before the foundation of the world." It was then that God laid out His plan for redemption and glorification, and He included us in it. What a humbling truth! Before we were created, God, fully aware of our sinfulness, chose us to be in His family through union with His Son.

Paul borrows the notion of being *chosen* or "elect" from the story of faithful Abraham, who became the father of God's people. Before the coming of Christ, "election" into God's chosen people was grounded in physical descent from Abraham.

Now, however, we are chosen on the basis of faith in Christ, regardless of our ethnic or religious background (Galatians 3:28, 29). The phrase *before the foundation of the world* naturally makes us think of the time before Genesis 1:1; the general idea is that of "always." God always has planned for people to come to Him through Christ, a plan that the Ephesians (and we) have seen fulfilled personally. The purpose for God's choice was to make us holy and blameless before Him. He did not choose us just to save us from hell but to make us like Himself. The first adjective refers to the fact that we are set apart unto Him; the second speaks of the sin and guilt removed by Christ's sacrifice. We know, of course, that learning to behave like God is a gradual process that will be completed only by entering the life to come. But He set the process in motion in eternity past, and we are progressing in it even now.

The last goal of God's choice is our adoption. The phrase "in love" (Eph. 1:4) should probably go with verse 5. It was in love that God predestinated us to adoption. "Predestinated," or "foreordained," emphasizes the final goal for which He chose us—"the adoption of children." This word, literally, is "son-placing." It refers to the custom of bestowing on the son in a family all the privileges and responsibilities of adulthood. It is not the same as our practice of adoption today.

## **3. What does Paul mean when he says God has adopted us? (v. 5)**

Paul used this concept spiritually several times in his writings. It is the act by which God places a believing sinner in His family with all the privileges of a full-grown son. This means we can be on intimate terms with Him (Gal. 4:4-7) and are joint heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:14-17).

The basis on which God chose us and foreordained us to the privileges of sonship is "the good pleasure of his will" (Eph. 1:5). He did not choose us because He foresaw some good in us; He simply willed to extend His grace to us. We cannot comprehend His reasons; He has chosen to keep them hidden. He wants us to respond by trusting His sovereign goodness and wisdom. He also wants us to humble ourselves in light of our unworthiness.

Paul therefore compares their experience with an *adoption*. An adopted son is not related physically to his father in the same way as a natural child, but according to Roman law adopted children enjoy the same legal rights and privileges as other members of the family. Similarly, anyone who accepts Christ becomes one of His elect children, regardless of background or previous lifestyle.

Verses 4, 5 raise two further points that will become important later in the letter. First, verse 4 emphasizes the implications of our new status as adopted children: we are to be holy and blameless, like our new heavenly Father. Our lifestyle must reflect the fact that we are now members of God's household.

Second, verse 5 indicates that God did not choose and adopt us because we deserved it, but rather because it pleased Him to do so. We cannot earn the right to

become members of God's family. All the credit belongs to Him; indeed, the credit can fall only to God, since our salvation was worked out before the foundation of the world, long before we were even born.

#### **4. To which of His characteristics does God wish to bring praise and glory by saving us? (v. 6a)**

The word *to* at the beginning of verse 6 indicates the result or, perhaps better, the intended purpose of our adoption. Ultimately, our salvation brings *praise* and *glory* to God; it does so because it demonstrates how very gracious He is.

For Paul, the word *grace* summarizes God's unmerited love for sinners, especially as revealed by Jesus' death on the cross. The phrase translated *made us accepted* is actually based on the verb form of the word for grace. The original Greek text literally says, "the glory of his grace with which he graced us." The last part of the verse stresses the source of this gracious blessing: Jesus Christ.

God's purpose for bestowing all spiritual blessings on us is "the praise of the glory of his grace." This expression emphasizes the superlative importance of God's grace. It is the most glorious theme one can imagine when considering how He extended it to His sinful creatures. He will receive praise for it throughout all time and eternity. Redeemed humans will continually thank Him for it, and astonished angels will always marvel at its wise design (cf. 3:10).

#### **5. Who is the beloved One in whom we are accepted? (v. 6b)**

Through this grace, God "hath made us accepted in the beloved" (Eph. 1:6). The phrase *accepted in the beloved* builds on the reference to adoption in verse 5. Jesus, as God's *beloved* Son, bears full rights to His father's estate. As the heir of all things, Jesus secures our relationship with God under the umbrella of His own rights and privileges.

The verb translated "made us accepted" is based on the same root as the Greek word for "grace." So it could be translated "has graced us." God has bestowed His grace "in the beloved," an obvious reference to Christ. He has always been His Father's beloved (cf. Mark 1:11; 2 Pet. 1:17); and when we are "in Him," we too are favored with God's love.

The Father thus has chosen us to be in His family, partaking of the same love and privileges He bestows on His Son, Jesus Christ. He has done this to make us holy and thus bring praise to His glorious grace.

### **THE MEDIATOR OF FAMILY BLESSINGS (Ephesians 1:7-12)**

#### **6. What is redemption? From what have we been redeemed? (vs. 7)**

Paul now shifts his emphasis from the Father to the Son, through whose mediation heavenly blessings have come to us. "In whom" refers back to Christ, the beloved One.

We receive God's grace through Him because He has provided "redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins."

In the Greco-Roman world, *redemption* is an economic term, with similarities to the way we refer to redeeming stocks, bonds, or coupons today. Redemption is the process of making payment for the freedom of a slave; the cash paid is referred to as a *ransom*, similar to the way we refer to the ransom money that kidnappers require for the lives of their victims.

"Redemption" in the Bible means a release obtained by payment of a ransom. In the Old Testament, if a Hebrew was in slavery and he could not pay the required price of freedom, a kinsman could redeem him (Lev. 25:48). Similarly, Christ became human so that He could pay our ransom and free us from sin's bondage. The price He paid for our freedom was His own blood (cf. Rom. 3:24-25; I Pet. 1:18-19).

With this redemptive freedom has come "the forgiveness of sins" (Eph. 1:7). "Sins" here is more precisely translated "transgressions." God erased from His accounts all our offenses against His holy standards. With the payment of the ransom comes our release from His legal sentence of condemnation.

In many ways, this verse sums up Paul's thinking about salvation. Previously, we were slaves to sin, unable to free ourselves. God, however, paid the ransom for our liberty by giving His Son's life on the cross. But God does not demand that we pay Him back. He expects us neither to pay for our own sin debt nor to pay for the work Christ did to pay our sin debt. Rather, God forgave any debt we may owe Him. He adopts us into His family and makes us heirs of His wealth. Recognition of this fact should motivate us to trust His judgment and to serve Him with all our strength.

### **7. How is God's grace different from the grace we show one another? (vs. 7-8)**

God did all this according to the riches of His grace. Again Paul extolled the virtues of God's grace—the bestowal of His favor on undeserving sinners. Here he emphasized its inexhaustible supply. We may extend grace to one another for a season, but we lack its riches, and it is soon exhausted. But grace pours forth endlessly from God. Since His reservoir is infinite, more grace is always available—even when, to our shame, we squander it.

The next clause, "wherein he hath abounded to us" (Eph. 1:8), refers back to God's grace. Since its supply is boundless, God is not sparing in distributing it. He pours it forth lavishly on those who need it. As stated elsewhere, "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Rom. 5:20). Our immense need is met by His superabundant supply.

The terms *wisdom* and *prudence* probably refer not so much to the quality of God's actions as they do to the effect of His grace in our lives. Wisdom is spiritual insight, the new understanding of God that we gain when we experience His grace and come to know Him as our liberator and adopted Father.

If wisdom refers to the content of our knowledge of God, prudence means that God has given us the ability to put that information into practice. Thus, God's grace is not simply something we know about—not just a doctrine that can be described and discussed—but is rather a fact of our experience that should be evident in the way we live.

### **8. What is the "mystery" that Paul speaks of? (vs. 9-10)**

A "mystery" as found in the New Testament refers to a previously hidden truth that God has now unveiled to those spiritually qualified to understand it. Paul used this term to describe various aspects of truth now disclosed through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ (cf. Rom. 16:25-26; Eph. 3:3-6; Col. 1:27).

Paul often uses the word *mystery* to refer to the gospel, God's eternal plan for salvation (examples: Romans 11:25; Ephesians 6:19; Colossians 2:2). This plan was mysterious in the sense that it was hidden throughout the Old Testament period, when God's people expected to receive salvation by being born into the Jewish nation, keeping the Law of Moses, and offering animal sacrifices.

No one in that era could have predicted that God was planning all along to send His Son as the ultimate sacrifice. Now, however, the fullness of the story has been made public by the death of Jesus on the cross and by Paul's miraculous call to preach the gospel to Gentiles.

Here Paul emphasizes in strong terms God's free will in formulating, revealing, and fulfilling this mystery. It is the mystery of "his will" and "good pleasure" which He "purposed in himself" (Eph. 1:9). He was under no obligation, and He took counsel with no one else. The truth Paul would presently describe originated solely in the mind

of God. This revealed mystery is of grand, cosmic scope. It concerns "the dispensation of the fulness of times" (v. 10). "Dispensation" means "stewardship"; it deals with how God will dispense with the times of man when brought to completion on this earth.

This is not "the fulness of the time" (Gal. 4:4) when Christ came the first time. Rather, this phrase looks forward to the time when the ages have run their course and fulfilled God's purpose. Then everything in heaven and on earth will be unified in Christ, who will be Ruler over all (cf. 1 Cor. 15:25-28; Phil. 2:9-11; Col. 1:19-20). Jesus' work on the cross provided the basis not only for individual salvation but also for the redemption of the entire universe.

### **9. How do we know our inheritance in Christ is secure? (vs. 11-12)**

As God's sons, we have full rights to a spiritual inheritance (cf. v. 5). We were predestined to be mature sons of God, and this maturity includes an inheritance. He also again insists on the sovereignty of God's grace: God gives the inheritance "according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will."

This amazing statement asserts that everything that occurs somehow contributes to the accomplishment of the plan He has determined. He is constantly working out an eternal plan, and even those things that appear to contradict it are made to support it (cf. Rom. 8:28). Our inheritance in Christ is thus secure, and its bestowal depends on God's grace, not our merits.

Paul clarified this as he stated the purpose of Christ's mediation —"that we should be to the praise of his glory" (Eph. 1:12). God has willed and worked His redemptive plan from beginning to end, and He deserves any credit that comes from our changed lives. Our merits intermingled with His grace would rob Him of His glory (Gal. 2:21; Eph. 2:8-9).

The phrase "who first trusted in Christ" (Eph. 1:12) reveals that "we" refers primarily to Jewish believers, for they were the first to trust Christ. "Ye also" in verse 13 then refers to Gentile Christians in Ephesus who heard the gospel later. Both have become the spiritual body of Christ, heirs of the same blessings (cf. 2:11-23).

### **THE GUARANTEE OF FAMILY BLESSINGS (Ephesians 1:13-14)**

#### **10. What is the Spirit's role in guaranteeing our salvation? (vs. 13-14)**

Speaking now to his Gentile readers, Paul said that "the word of truth," which came from God, the source of all truth, had wrought a spiritual deliverance in their lives and made them children of God. When they believed this message, they were sealed in Christ with the Holy Spirit who had been promised to all believers. The Spirit is here called a seal. In ancient times a cylinder or ring was used to impress a seal on one's property to confirm ownership. So the presence of the Holy Spirit in us is the sign of God's possession of us.

The Spirit was promised by Christ (cf. John 14:16-17; Acts 1:4). His presence in our lives is a promise that God will fulfill the work He began in us.

An "earnest" (Eph. 1:13) is a down payment— not just a pledge of more to come but an actual part of the payment. We have not yet received most of our inheritance, but we know that God will eventually give it in full because He has given us the Spirit. The guarantee looks forward to the time when our redemption will be complete, when we will have new bodies and be separated from all sin (cf. Rom. 8:23). Every aspect of the Triune God's redemptive work is designed to bring glory to Him alone. And that is where it belongs.

### **PRACTICAL POINTS:**

**1.** When correctly considered, God's blessings should always elicit our praise (Ephesians 1:3).

2. From the beginning of time, God planned and provided for our salvation through His Son, Jesus Christ, for His own glory and our good (vs. 4-6).
3. The great cost of our salvation, our Savior's lifeblood, should cause us to highly value it (vs. 7-8).
4. Be assured that God's design and desire for all the earth will be ultimately fulfilled in Christ (vs. 9-10).
5. Christ is our hope; because He lives, we too shall live (vs. 11-12).
6. The believer's sealing by the Holy Spirit guarantees final redemption from sin (vs. 13-14).

### **CONCLUSION:**

As Christians we know that we have experienced God's grace, and we also understand that He has brought us into His family. We also hope to live with Him in Heaven someday. But in the meantime, we face numerous temptations and go through periods of doubt. In such times the promise may seem very, very far away. For this reason, God gives us His Spirit both as proof that better things are coming and for the strength and confidence to finish the course. If we do, we will one day learn that our most profound spiritual experiences in this life were only a down payment on something much, much greater.

In our lesson, two sets of images that Paul has used throughout the passage (adoption and redemption) come together. The word *earnest* means "down payment": our experience of the Holy Spirit is God's deposit on the eternal life we will enjoy. At the same time, we are God's *purchased possession*, paid for with the blood of His Son.

The timing of *redemption* may refer to our death or to the second coming of Christ; either way, Paul is thinking of the time when God's investment will pay off in eternal fellowship with His children. Meanwhile, we should prepare ourselves to be in His presence by living pure and holy lives that will bring *praise* to Him.

### **PRAYER:**

Father God, help us remember two things: the price You paid for us and what You expect in return. We know that we can do nothing to save ourselves. Give us the strength to live as redeemed people. As You do this for us, please extend Your grace to others who do not know You, and help us to spread the message of Your love. In Jesus' name, amen.

### **THOUGHT TO REMEMBER:**

Christians are God's children, heirs to all that He owns.

### **ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON:**

Next week's lesson is "[New Life in Christ](#)" and shows how new life in Christ comes by faith because it is God's gift to us. Study Ephesians 2:1-22.

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