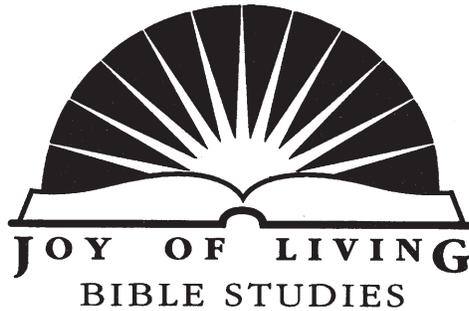


Ephesians Lesson 2



Ephesians 1:3-6 — The Work And Blessings of the Father

A rich man was in the habit of giving his wife an expensive piece of jewelry every year on her birthday. One year he might phone the jeweler and say, "Send me your finest pearl necklace, along with your bill." Or, "Send me your finest diamond pendant, along with your bill." Or the finest emerald bracelet or ruby ring. Each time, the jeweler did as the rich man asked, dispatching a messenger to the rich man's mansion to deliver the jewelry piece in a box along with his bill.

But every year the rich man would play a game with the jeweler. He would send the messenger back to the jeweler along with the original box, a note, and a check. The check was always written in the amount of several thousand dollars less than the price on the jeweler's bill. The note would say, "Sir, I like the jewelry piece, but I do not like the price. If you will accept the

enclosed check for a reduced amount, then please return the jewelry box with the seal unbroken."

For years the jeweler put up with the rich man's game, accepting the reduced check, and returning the box with the seal unbroken. He still made a profit on the jewelry, even if it was a lower profit than he liked—and at least he was able to keep the rich man's trade year after year. In time, however, the jeweler began to tire of this charade.

Finally the day came when the rich man placed an order for a lavish diamond necklace, and the jeweler decided he would not get clipped again. As usual, the jeweler sent the necklace in a box, along with his bill. Again, as usual, the box was returned with a reduced check for payment and a note.

Enough was enough! The jeweler refused the check, kept the box, and sent the messenger away in disgust. When he opened the box to reclaim the necklace, he found that the necklace

had been removed. In its place was a check for the entire amount of the jeweler's bill.

For years, the rich man had been sending the entire asking price of each jewelry piece—hidden inside the sealed jewelry box. In all that time, the jeweler had accepted thousands of dollars less than he could have received—because he didn't open the box and look inside.

The hidden riches of Christ are available to you and me but to find them, we have to open the letter of Ephesians. It is here, in this letter, that we find the description of the riches we have in Jesus Christ.

Paul speaks passionately and extensively about these riches—and with good reason. Having traveled throughout the Roman empire, he had seen the spiritual and material poverty of the Roman world. He had spoken to rulers, soldiers, business leaders, merchants, laborers, farmers, and slaves. He saw that all of them, regardless of material wealth or status, suffered from the same spiritual deprivation. All were depressed, discouraged, beset with fears and anxieties, jealousies and hostilities. They were under the grip of superstition and filled with the dread of the

future. They had no hope of life beyond death.

Paul's great joy and mission in life was to unfold to us the riches available to us in Jesus Christ—riches which liberate and transform us, bringing us into a new experience of joy, love, and radiant faith. He gloried in the vast riches of God in Jesus Christ.

The Structure of Ephesians 1

In the previous chapter, we examined the summary statement with which Paul gathers up the great themes of this letter:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. (Ephesians 1:3)

There is an unusual sentence structure in this passage which is apparent in the original Greek New Testament, but which cannot be seen in the English translation. Verses 3 through 14 were actually composed as a single unbroken sentence filled with many adjectives to amplify and enrich our understanding of God's blessings in Christ. If you want to get the full effect of it, take a deep breath and read those

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verses together without pausing. You'll gain a real appreciation for just how much meaning Paul crams into that one great sentence!

It is easy to imagine that Paul is dressed in khakis and pith helmet, looking like Indiana Jones, taking us on a guided tour through a treasure chamber like those of the Egyptian pharaohs, describing what he sees. He starts out describing the most immediate and evident facts—then something else comes into view and he shines his lantern on it. Then comes some new glorious object or artifact, and glory flashes upon glory until he has compiled a dazzlingly complex sentence describing the vast and nearly indescribable riches of the chamber.

That is how Paul shows us that all of God's truth is interwoven and interconnected—you can never touch upon one great theme without finding that it leads to others, and that those lead to still others. All of God's truth is like that—His spiritual truth, and also His truth in nature. You can't study one subject in nature without touching upon a great many others.

But though these verses are presented to us in a single complex sentence, there is actually a very natural, simple

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division within Ephesians 1:3-14. It divides into three parts around the three Persons of the Trinity, because that is how the spiritual blessings are divided. These blessings gather about the three Persons of the Trinity—the work of the Father, the work of the Son, and the work of the Holy Spirit. First you have the work and blessings of the Father:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. (Ephesians 1:3-6)

Then you have the work and blessings of the Son. Notice the rich and exalted language Paul uses to describe the Son and our relationship to Him:

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understand-

ing. And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:7-12)

Then you have the work and blessings of the Holy Spirit:

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:13-14)

All of these blessings take place, remember, not in some future time and place, not in the afterlife, but in the here and now, in an unseen but utterly real

dimension that Paul calls “the heavenly realms”—the invisible realities of our lives today. Yes, “the heavenly realms” do extend on into eternity—but this dimension of life is also something to be experienced now, in our daily lives.

That is what Paul is talking about—your thought life, your attitudes, your inner life, your behavior—the place where you experience conflict, pressure, struggle, temptation, disaster, and triumph. It is the place where we are exposed to the attack of the principalities and powers mentioned later, in Ephesians 6—those dark spirits in high places who get to us, depress us, frighten us, and fill us with dread, anxiety, rage, and hostility. “The heavenly realms” are a place of conflict—but also a place where God can release us and deliver us, where the Spirit of God touches us at the seat of our intellect, emotions, and will.

These principles are not mere doctrinal or theological ambiguities, they are the rock-solid foundational truths that sustain us through every moment and every trial of the Christian life. They are as reliable as the laws of nature, and they function regardless of how we feel.

Once, while I was doing some amateur electrical repairs in my home, I discovered that electricity follows a pattern of its own and takes no notice of how I feel at the moment. While I understood this fact in theory, it was quite a shocking experience to encounter this fact experientially. The electrical current I came in contact with was not in the slightest degree impressed with my position as a Bible teacher, pastor, or author. When I closed the electric circuit with my own body, that current didn't hesitate to flow through me as if I were an insulated copper wire.

Spiritual principles operate with the same impartiality as electrical principles. We respect spiritual truth to our own benefit, and we violate it at our own risk. Spiritual principles are not respecters of persons. For our own good, we must come to understand spiritual truth, respect it, and align our lives according to its principles.

The Work of the Father

In the rest of this lesson and the two lessons that follow, we will take a closer look at the three natural divisions of Ephesians 1:3-14, the work and blessing of the three Persons of the Trinity. We will begin in this lesson with the

work and blessings of the Father, and examine the work and blessings of the Son and the Holy Spirit in the next two lessons.

Look at the first statement:

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight (Ephesians 1:4).

This is an expression of what theologians call “the doctrine of election,” or predestination—the fact that God chose us to be in Christ even before the creation of time and space. If you try to encompass that truth with your finite mind, you will experience a mental overload! It is an astounding truth, and we struggle with it, we question it, and I would submit to you that we really don't believe it, because so often our actions just don't show it. We wonder, “How could God choose us, and yet still offer a choice that we must make?” We struggle over the seeming conflict between our human free will and the sovereign election of God.

Many try to explain away this paradox. “Well,” they say, “God can foresee the future, so He looks ahead in time, sees we are going to make a choice, and ‘elects’ us on the basis of a deci-

sion He knows we will someday make.” But that is not what the Scriptures say. Others say, “Well, God sees what kind of people we will be, and recognizing our value to His plan, He chooses us on that basis.” Nothing could be more unscriptural. God doesn’t need our help to carry out His eternal plan. To think that we, by our own effort, can make ourselves useful to God is pure human arrogance. We can accomplish nothing for God apart from His choosing, empowering, and will.

As hard as it is for us to understand and accept, the fact is that we are chosen by God. Jesus said so Himself: “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him” (John 6:44). That’s putting it plainly, isn’t it? You can’t come to Christ unless you are drawn by the Father. God has to initiate the activity.

Then why does God appeal to our individual human will? For in Matthew 11:28, we also read, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” That means it’s up to us as individuals to make a choice. You cannot become a Christian until you choose to come—yet it is equally true that you cannot become a Christian unless God has chosen you. Both

facts are true. We can’t reconcile them in our puny intellects, but we can accept them by faith.

Think of it: Before the creation of the world—uncounted millions and billions and trillions of years in the past—God chose you to belong to Him. Let that sink into your mind for a moment! Drop to your knees in awe and humility before this loving eternal Being who is not confined by past or future, by years of time or light-years of space; who knows the future as certainly as He knows the past; who determines all things by the counsel of His will.

Do you see how this fact elevates your identity as a child of God? We are not afterthoughts in God’s plan. There are no second-class citizens in the body of Christ. We are all chosen of the Father, selected as members of His eternal family. He has chosen us to be holy and blameless. These truths are so revolutionary we are *afraid* to believe them! We can scarcely believe that these truths literally apply to us!

The reason we find it hard to believe is that our understanding of the word *holiness* is so distorted. We think *holiness* is sanctimoniousness, when the truth is that *holiness* actually means “wholeness”—being restored to the

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useful function for which we were originally created. Physical wholeness prevails when the body works the way it was intended to work, and spiritual wholeness results when our entire being functions as God designed it to function. When we are spiritually whole, we are holy.

And what does it mean to be “blameless” before God? It doesn’t mean to be sinless, because (as Romans 3:23 tells us) *all* have sinned. But thanks be to God, though we are sinful we can still be blameless. While it is not in our power to go back in time and undo the sins we have done, we can still accept the righteousness of Jesus and the forgiveness of the Father as a covering and cleansing for our sin. When God lifts the blame and shame of sin from us, we become blameless.

Ephesians 1:5 records a second great aspect of the work of the Father, which is related to the first: “He predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ...”

Here is a partial explanation of how God takes care of all the past failures and the shame of our lives, to produce a Christian who is holy and blameless for His use. God accomplishes this change in us by means of a new family

relationship. He destined us to be sons, to be adopted as His own children.

Adoption means leaving one family and joining another, leaving behind all that was involved in the first family and assuming the name, identity, resources, and history of another. This is how Paul describes this new relationship. We all were born to the family of Adam. We have left that family to belong to a new family, the family of Jesus Christ. That doesn’t mean that we are not human; it means that we are no longer identified with the sinfulness of Adam. Though we are human and subject to the temptations of Adam’s race, we are no longer enslaved by death and sin. We’ve been transferred into a new family, and we have received a new identity.

As adopted sons of the living God, we have the only begotten Son of God as our forerunner and example. We learn how to live from Him—and we are to copy His life. Our aim is to live exactly as Jesus lived. We are to derive our way of life from Jesus, just as Jesus derived His life from the Father. In John 6:57, He said, “Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me.” God

the Father was His resource, wisdom, strength, and power. Everything Jesus did was in reality the life of God the Father being lived out through the Son. In the same way, we are to derive our life from Christ, to become a channel through which God can work. As adopted children of the Father, we are to share the life of God's only begotten Son. That is what pleases the Father.

It's All God

The rest of verse 5 and verse 6 tell us why the infinite God of the universe should stoop to choose weak, failure-prone, sin-ridden creatures like you and me as part of His ultimate plan:

...in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. (Ephesians 1:5-6)

That really makes it clear that we have no reason to feel important because we have been chosen by God. On the contrary we are humbled by the truth. There is not anything in us that God needs to fulfill His plan. His choice is based not on our intrinsic merit, but on the kind of God He truly is. He chose us for adoption as His sons for two reasons:

Reason 1: "In accordance with his pleasure and will."

Reason 2: "To the praise of his glorious grace."

It is all God. None of it is us. It begins with God's pleasure and will. It gives Him pleasure to save us for His use. And the final result of His choice is praise—all the universe responds with joy, praising God throughout creation.

The final phrase of verse 6 introduces the next theme, the work of the Son. Here Paul speaks of the grace "which [God the Father] has freely given us in the One he loves, Jesus Christ. God "en graced" us (that is a good rendering of the original Greek); He poured out His grace upon us in Christ. Jesus was sent to us by the Father. That is the mark of His love. Jesus came to be poor, to be misunderstood, opposed, and hated, to be spat upon, beaten, and crucified—and why?

So that we might be rich!

Remember how Paul put it in 2 Corinthians 8:9: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich." So my question

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to you is: Are you enjoying your inheritance?

Every morning, when the sunlight opens our eyes, our first thought should be, “I’m a child of the Father! I’ve been chosen by Him to be a member of His family! His peace, His joy, and His love are my legacy, my inheritance—and I can draw upon His riches every moment of every day, no matter what my circumstances may be.” The letter to the Ephesians ought to be a treasure store to which we go whenever we feel discouraged.

I once read of an old Navajo Indian who became rich when oil was found on his property. He took all the money and put it in a bank. His banker became familiar with the habits of this old gentleman. Every so often, the Indian would show up at the bank and say to the banker, “Grass all gone, sheep all sick, water holes all dry.” Without a word, the banker would take the old Indian into the vault, show him several bags of silver dollars, and say, “All this is yours.” The old man would spend about an hour stacking up the dollars and counting them. Then he’d return the bags to their places, come out of the vault, and say, “Grass all green, sheep all well, water holes all full.”

It is amazing the change that comes over us when we simply review our resources and count our blessings. That is where true encouragement is found—in an honest accounting of the Father’s limitless resources and blessings, made available to us in Christ.

Study Questions

Before you begin your study this week:

- ☞ Pray and ask God to speak to you through His Holy Spirit.
- ☞ Use only the Bible for your answers.
- ☞ Write down your answers and the verses you used.
- ☞ Answer the “Challenge” questions if you have the time and want to do them.
- ☞ Share your answers to the “Personal” questions with the class only if you want to share them.

First Day: Read the commentary on Ephesians 1:3-6.

1. What meaningful or new thought did you find in the commentary on Ephesians 1:3-6 or from your teacher’s lecture? What personal application did you choose to apply to your life?

2. Look for a verse in the lesson to memorize this week. Write it down and post it in a prominent place. Make a real effort to learn the verse and its “address” (reference of where it is found in the Bible).

Second Day: Read Ephesians 1:7-12, concentrating on verse 7a.

1. a. Ephesians 1:7a continues enumerating what God’s grace has provided for us in His Son, Jesus Christ. From this verse, what do we have in Him?

b. Challenge: Look up the word *redeem* in a dictionary.

2. How is this redemption obtained? (Ephesians 1:7)

3. Challenge: What do you learn about our redemption from the following verses? Look for what we have been redeemed from, and also for the benefit or purpose of our redemption.

Romans 3:21-24

Galatians 3:13-14

Galatians 4:4-7

Colossians 1:13-14

Titus 2:14

1 Peter 1:18-19

4. To the original hearers of Paul's letter to the Ephesians, the word *redemption* suggested a picture of a slave market. In Paul's imagery, we were bound as wretched slaves in a great slave market. Romans 6:6-14 explains more about our redemption. From this passage, what have we been set free from?

5. Personal: We see from these passages that those who are in Christ have been set free from both the penalty and power of sin, and have been given full rights as sons and daughters of God. Have you turned from going your own way and accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior? What difference has this made in your life?

Third Day: Review Ephesians 1:7-12, concentrating on verses 7b-8.

1. The word *lavish* means to expend or bestow profusely, marked by profusion or excess. What did God lavish upon us? (Ephesians 1:7b-8)

2. From the following Scriptures, how is God's grace extended to mankind?

John 1:17

Romans 3:24

3. Challenge: Look up the word "grace" in a dictionary.

4. Read Ephesians 2:8-9. How completely does our salvation rest on God's grace?

5. Personal: If you have experienced this grace of God, write a short poem, sentence, or paragraph of praise to God for His marvelous grace.

Fourth Day: Review Ephesians 1:7-12, concentrating on verses 9-10.

1. What did God make known to us? (Ephesians 1:9)

2. In the Bible a *mystery* is a secret God understands, but which people cannot understand unless God discloses its meaning. What is the mystery He has made known to us? (Ephesians 1:10)

3. What does Colossians 2:2-3 have to say about the mystery of God?

4. When will all things be brought under one head, Jesus Christ? (Ephesians 1:10)

5. How do the following passages describe the times in which we live and in which the disciples lived?

1 Corinthians 10:11

Galatians 4:4

Hebrews 1:2

6. Personal: Read 2 Corinthians 6:2. The times have reached their fulfillment, and God has revealed His plan of salvation through Jesus Christ. Tomorrow is not promised to you. Today is the day of salvation. Are you right with God through Jesus Christ?

Fifth Day: Review Ephesians 1:7-12, concentrating on verses 11-12.

1. Many people believe that all life happens randomly and by chance. What does Ephesians 1:11 say regarding this?

2. From the following verses, when did God make this plan?

1 Corinthians 2:7

2 Timothy 1:9

1 Peter 1:20

3. What does Ephesians 1:11 say regarding those who are in Christ?

4. a. From Ephesians 1:12, name one purpose that those in Christ have been predestined for.

b. Read Psalm 18:3. Why should the Lord be praised?

5. God's plan is being revealed. The time of salvation that began with the revelation of Jesus Christ is still unfolding.¹ Eventually everything in heaven and earth will be brought together under one head, Jesus Christ. From Philippians 2:9-11 describe what will eventually take place.
6. Personal: Everyone will eventually bow their knee to Jesus Christ and confess that He is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. And truly the Lord is worthy to be praised. Write a prayer to God expressing your thoughts about this.

Sixth Day: Review Ephesians 1:7-12.

1. All the blessings that have been enumerated in Ephesians 1:7-12 were unknown before Jesus Christ. What word is used to describe this in Ephesians 1:9?

2. What does Colossians 1:25-27 say regarding this mystery, and to whom is it now disclosed?

3. Read 1 Corinthians 2:6-14. The remaining questions for today will be taken from this passage.
 - a. What does 1 Corinthians 2:6-8 say about Paul's message and the wisdom of God?

1. Frank E. Gaebelin, editor. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990)

