

Week 2: Spiritual Blessings in Christ: Ephesians 1:3–14

Hook



Main Point: Christians have been adopted by the Father, redeemed by Christ's blood, and sealed by the Spirit for their inheritance in God's kingdom.

Q: What's the most valuable thing you've ever found? What made it valuable – its price, or what it meant to you?

Q: Have you ever owned something valuable for a long time without realizing its worth?

In 2013, a California couple were walking their dog on a path they had traveled countless times before. Along the trail, they noticed an old rusty can sticking out of the ground. Curious, they dug it up and discovered it was filled with gold coins. They kept digging and eventually uncovered eight cans containing 1,427 gold coins dating back to the 1800s. The treasure became known as the Saddle Ridge Hoard and was valued at more than \$10 million.¹

The treasure had been there the whole time. For years they passed by it without realizing what was beneath their feet. Their lives changed not because the treasure suddenly appeared, but because they finally discovered what was already there.

Many Christians live that way spiritually. We know we are saved, but we often don't realize the riches that already belong to us in Christ. In Ephesians 1:3–14, Paul helps us see the treasure that is already ours. He says we have been adopted into God's family, redeemed by Christ's blood, and sealed with the Holy Spirit. The blessings Paul describes are worth far more than \$10 million – they are eternal riches that belong to every believer in Christ.

RECAP: In our first lesson, an introduction to Ephesians, we learned about Paul's long relationship with the church at Ephesus and how he loved them like a spiritual father. He wrote this letter to them while he was in prison awaiting his trial before Caesar, encouraging them to live into their identity in Christ as people transformed by the Gospel.² In this lesson, Paul praises the Lord for what He has done for us in the Gospel—

He has adopted us as His heirs, redeemed us by the blood of Christ, revealed His plan to unite all things in Christ, and sealed us with the Holy Spirit as the guarantee that He will complete our redemption and give us our promised inheritance.

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Book

Main Point: Christians have been adopted by the Father, redeemed by Christ's blood, and sealed by the Spirit for their inheritance in God's kingdom.

Ephesians 1:3–6 [Read]

Talking Point 1: We have been adopted into God's family as His heirs.

Q: Why might Paul use the term “spiritual blessing” instead of just “blessing” here?

Q: How do you think people in our culture misunderstand God's blessings?

It's somewhat hard to break up Ephesians 1:3–14 into three “talking point” sections because, in Greek, it's actually one long sentence. Paul often used long, complex sentences, and here the effect fits the grandeur of what he is describing. Each new phrase builds on the previous one, creating the feeling of “God has done this and this and this ... isn't that amazing!?” You almost run out of breath trying to read it all at once, giving a literal feeling of breathlessness in awe of the Lord.

Paul packed a whole lot of theology into this opening section, which is really a hymn of praise. For those who love God, all our praise should be steeped in theology, and all our theology should result in praise. Paul started with praise to God who has blessed us with “every spiritual blessing” in Christ. He writes with grandiose language, pointing to God's majesty and the greatness of our blessing: Christ is *Lord* and God is *His Father*. We have been blessed in the *heavenly* realms with *every* spiritual blessing.

Paul was writing as a prisoner, in chains for the Gospel, with his future uncertain. Yet, he reminded his beloved Ephesians of God's sovereignty over all things, even the heavenly realms. No matter what we face, there is no reason to fear because we are children of the sovereign Lord, who lavishes us with every spiritual blessing. Whenever we are worried about our earthly circumstances, we need only to remind ourselves of the greatness and love of our heavenly Father and trust in His plan for us (Matthew 6:25–34). No matter what we are going through, we can praise God through it all.

This section of praise is an overview of the Gospel, what God has done for us in Christ. But it starts even before we were created: He *chose* us before creation (1:4) and *predestined* us for adoption (v. 5). He *purposed* all of this in Christ (1:9). Predestination is one of those profound truths of Scripture, like the Trinity, that our finite minds cannot fully comprehend. Scripture teaches both divine sovereignty and human responsibility—it is not either/or but both/and. We may not fully understand how these truths fit together, but they do not contradict each other. The difficulty lies in the limits of our understanding, not in any inconsistency in God's truth.³ Though there is also individual

human responsibility in choosing to follow Jesus, this section reminds us that God is in control, and He has had this plan in place since before He ever even created the world. The Fall was not a surprise to Him; He already knew what He would do about it.

Even in this opening hymn of praise, before he delved into the theological meat of the letter, Paul was already addressing our identity in Christ, as sons (1:5). He specifically used “sons,” not just “children,” because in the ancient world, it was sons who inherited their father’s estate (1:14). This Greek word is unique to only a few verses in the New Testament, always referring to our spiritual adoption by God (Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:5). It is a compound of two Greek words, something Paul did often to create a new term, “son” and “to place,” meaning God places us in the position of a son/heir. This is significant theologically; as God’s adopted sons, we are co-heirs with Christ and will share in the inheritance that is ours through Him (Romans 8:17). But our adoption is not something we earned. God graciously gave us this position “in the Beloved One”—Jesus Christ—according to the good pleasure of His will (1:5–6). Therefore, the ultimate purpose of our adoption is not our own glory but “the praise of His glorious grace.”

Adoption is one of the “spiritual blessings” Paul had in mind. These blessings are not primarily earthly or material; they are the blessings of salvation that come from God and are ours because we are united with Christ. This doesn’t mean these blessings are only future and that we just need to hold on through this life and wait for heaven. Christ’s promised earthly kingdom is still future, but believers already belong to His spiritual kingdom and experience the blessings of His rule. Paul wrote that God *has* delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of His beloved Son (Colossians 1:12–14). God *has* lavished His grace upon us, giving us redemption and forgiveness (1:7–8). He *has* chosen us to be “holy and blameless before Him” (1:4) and given us His Spirit, who enables us to walk in holiness (Galatians 5:16–25). These blessings are not only a future hope; they are a present reality.

Understanding blessing this way helps explain how Paul could rejoice even in prison. Paul’s situation might look bleak to those who seek the blessings of this world. But because Paul’s treasure was in heaven (Luke 12:33–34), he could rejoice and remain content in any earthly circumstance, as he wrote in Philippians, also from prison (Philippians 4:4–13). Paul called believers to rejoice in the Lord *always*, not just when circumstances were good. We praise Him *all the time* because He is always good and works all things together for the good of those who love Him, even when we cannot see or understand what He is doing (Psalm 34:1; Romans 8:28–29). Even when our circumstances seem bad, God is still at work, using suffering to produce endurance, character, and hope in us (Romans 5:3–5). As God’s adopted sons and heirs, our inheritance isn’t measured by temporary earthly prosperity; it is the eternal inheritance secured for us in Christ. Our inheritance isn’t found in the kingdoms of this world but in the kingdom of God.

Q: Why can it be hard to praise God when things aren't going well? What can we remind ourselves of in those times?

Q: What kind of blessings are we expecting from God? Are we looking for earthly blessings or spiritual blessings?

Q: What spiritual blessings have you experienced since you came to faith in Christ?

Ephesians 1:7–10 [Read]

Talking Point 2: We have been redeemed by God through the precious blood of Christ.

Q: What did the blood of Christ do? How is it connected to the riches of God's grace?

Q: What will happen when God's plan reaches its final fulfillment?

Paul had already said that God adopted us into His family through Jesus Christ (1:5). Now he described more of the spiritual blessings we have in Christ (1:7). This is both a description of what God has done for us and a description of our identity in Christ. Christians are the redeemed, the forgiven, and the recipients of God's abundant grace (1:7). This is our identity in Christ.

The language of redemption would have been familiar from the Old Testament. God redeemed Israel from slavery in Egypt and made them His people (Exodus 6:6–7; 19:5–6). Their obedience did not earn their redemption; God redeemed them first, and then called them to live as His people.

In Christ, we have experienced an even greater redemption—not from physical slavery, but from slavery to sin (Romans 6:15–18), and not through the blood of lambs, but through the precious blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:18–19). We don't obey God to earn redemption; we obey because we have been redeemed. God didn't just set us free *from* slavery; He set us free *to* a new life as His people (Titus 2:14). This redemption is closely connected to our adoption: we are no longer slaves but sons and heirs (Galatians 4:7).

Paul reiterated again God's big-picture plan – the “mystery of His will,” which He *purposed* in Christ and will put into effect when the times reach their *fulfillment* (1:9–10). In the Bible, a “mystery” is not something mysterious or impossible to understand; it is something that was previously hidden but has now been revealed by God. Here, Paul tells us what the mystery is: God's plan is ultimately to “unite all things” in Christ—everything in heaven and on earth (1:9–10).⁴ Right now, we are the redeemed sons/heirs of God living in His spiritual kingdom on earth, but God's plan has not yet reached its final fulfillment. A day is coming when Christ's rule will be universally displayed and all things in heaven and on earth will be brought together

under Him. What God has already begun in Christ will one day be brought to its appointed fulfillment.

Like the Psalms implored the redeemed of the Lord to “say so,” to shout the praise of their Redeemer (Psalm 107:2), so Paul implored the Ephesians to praise God, their Redeemer, for the “riches” of His grace that He has “lavished” upon us (1:6–8). Paul could praise God not only because of what He had already done in Christ, but because he knew where God’s plan was going: all things will ultimately be brought together under Christ. Paul may have been in prison, but he was not in despair. He was rich with spiritual blessings. His body was in chains, but his soul was set free in Christ (Galatians 5:1). He had every reason to praise!

Q: In what areas of your life have you experienced the riches of God’s grace?

Q: What has God redeemed you from? What has He redeemed you to?

Q: What does it look like to live as God’s redeemed people in our world today?

Ephesians 1:11–14 (first in the ESV, then also the NIV⁵) [Read]

Talking Point 3: We have been sealed with the Spirit as a guarantee of our inheritance.

Q: What contrast do you notice between the “we” of verses 11–12 and the “you also” of verse 13?

Q: How is the Holy Spirit a guarantee of our future inheritance?

Paul was writing about two groups of believers here: Jewish believers who were the first to hope in Christ (“we” in 1:11–12) and Gentile believers who later heard and believed the Gospel (“you also” in 1:13). Paul’s point wasn’t that the inheritance belonged only to the Jewish people who first hoped in their Messiah. Gentile believers had also been included in Christ, and when they believed, they too were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. Jew and Gentile alike share in the spiritual blessings God gives to everyone who is in Christ. This is a truth Paul will develop much more fully in chapter 2.

Paul said that those Jewish believers who first hoped in Christ were “to the praise of His glory” (1:12). Their salvation displayed the glory of God because it was the fulfillment of His gracious plan and promises. Then, after explaining that the Gentile believers had also been included in Christ and sealed with the Holy Spirit, Paul returned to the same purpose: “to the praise of His glory” (1:13–14). Both groups were saved by God’s grace and brought together in Christ, so that He, not they, would receive the praise.

Paul then pointed ahead again to the final fulfillment of our redemption and inheritance (1:14). In Corinthians, Paul explained that when we are resurrected, we will be given

new glorified bodies. Paul wrote that “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable” (1 Corinthians 15:50). Our redemption is already a present reality, but we still await its final completion, including the redemption of our bodies when we are raised and glorified (Romans 8:23; 1 Corinthians 15:50–53).

Paul said the minute we believed, we were sealed by the Holy Spirit, guaranteeing our future inheritance in Christ. We don’t have to worry about losing our future inheritance; it is guaranteed. The Greek word was a term in Roman times that referred to a deposit or down payment that guarantees the rest will be given later. The Holy Spirit’s being with us in this life is like a down payment on the full inheritance to come (1:14). The Holy Spirit’s presence with us now is a foretaste of the full inheritance to come, the greatest blessing of which will be perfect, unhindered fellowship with God forever. Walking with the Holy Spirit in this life is like a small taste of what heaven will be like, when we will live in God’s presence and experience His goodness without the effects of sin and brokenness.

When Revelation describes the final kingdom of God, what makes heaven so great isn’t that we get mansions or pots of gold; it’s that *God is there*. The greatest blessing of our inheritance is God Himself—living forever in perfect fellowship with Him. He is the reward. In the same way a loving home for a child doesn’t come from a big room and all the toys they could ever want but from the presence of loving parents. Revelation uses the same language Exodus does when it talks about God’s redeeming Israel to be His people in His kingdom: “He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God” (Revelation 21:3).

The Bible doesn’t tell us everything we might want to know about the “stuff” we’ll have in heaven. It does talk about feasting with God, and Jesus said there are many “rooms” in God’s house and that He’s preparing a place for us there (John 14:2). But Scripture’s emphasis when describing our inheritance isn’t on possessions or all the things we might imagine receiving. Our inheritance is ultimately eternal life with God in His kingdom (Romans 8:17; Revelation 21:7). We will have glorified bodies and live in the new heavens and new earth, but the greatest blessing of our inheritance will be God Himself and living forever with Him. As walking with the Spirit now brings joy, peace, goodness, love, and other good things, living in perfect fellowship with God will mean experiencing those blessings without the effects of sin and brokenness. Our eternal future will be greater than we can imagine. Whatever it is like, it will be perfect because we will be with God forever.

Q: Since the Holy Spirit is the guarantee of our inheritance, how does His presence in us give us a foretaste of the perfect, unhindered fellowship with God we will enjoy forever? How should that assurance shape the way we live now?

Q: Looking back on your life, when have you seen the clearest evidence of God's hand at work? What did God use to reveal Himself to you, and how did that change the way you thought, lived, or responded to Him?

Q: If we want more of a foretaste of heaven in the here-and-now, what should we do?

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Took

Main Point: Christians have been adopted by the Father, redeemed by Christ's blood, and sealed by the Spirit for their inheritance in God's kingdom.

Most of us know what it's like to live when money is tight. You put off repairs. You settle for cheaper options. You worry about whether you'll have enough. Now imagine living that way while having millions of dollars sitting in a bank account or buried somewhere on your property that you didn't know existed. The money is yours, but you're not enjoying the benefits because you don't realize what you have.

Many Christians live that way spiritually. We have been adopted into God's family, redeemed by Christ's blood, and sealed by the Holy Spirit, yet we often live as though we are spiritually bankrupt. We can become weighed down by fear, insecurity, guilt and discouragement, forgetting the riches that are already ours in Christ.

The book of Ephesians is God's reminder of the treasure we possess in Jesus. During this season, commit to faithfully attending your LifeGroup as we discover the spiritual blessings God has lavished on us and learn together what it means to live out our new identity in Christ as His people.

CHALLENGES

THINK: Think about the goodness the Holy Spirit has brought into your life. How is your life different now that you have been redeemed and are walking by the Spirit and with the Spirit living in your heart? In what ways is life still a struggle? How does this reflect the brokenness of the world? What does it tell us about our mission here in this world? Now imagine you are living in heaven, with no brokenness and no sin, enjoying perfect fellowship with God all the time. What will that be like?

PRAY: Praise God for all He has done for you in Christ. Praise Him for each of the theological points Paul made in this passage but also everything He has done for you personally in your life. Pray also for God to open your heart and mind to receive all He wants to teach you in this study of Ephesians. Pray for God to help you understand your identity in Christ and how to live into that identity in your everyday life.

ACT: Let the redeemed of the Lord say so. Choose one new person to whom you can tell the story of how God has redeemed you. It doesn't have to be a long, detailed testimony of every step of your journey with Jesus. Just think of it in terms of redemption: how did God rescue you from slavery to sin and bring you into a new life with Him? That doesn't mean your life is perfect now and you never sin anymore, but how is your life different now? What is it like to walk by the Spirit?

¹ <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/california-couple-finds-10m-gold-coins-buried-yard-n38471>

² 2 Tim 4:6; Philippians 1

³ There are many things about God that are beyond our human understanding. How can God be Three Persons in One? How can God be both the Just and the Justifier? How can He execute both perfect justice and amazing grace? When it comes to predestination versus human free will to choose to follow Jesus, theologians often focus more on one side or the other. But the truth is that the Bible teaches *both* divine sovereignty *and* human responsibility. It's not either/or, it's both/and.

Scripture tells us that God chose us before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4-5; Romans 8:29-30) and that no one can come to Christ unless the Father draws them (John 6:44). Yet Scripture also repeatedly calls people to choose whom they will serve (Joshua 24:15), to repent and come to Him (Matthew 4:17; Acts 3:19-21). Paul tells the Philippians in the very same verse to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" and yet also that "it is God who works in you" (Philippians 2:12-13). God is fully sovereign and yet we are also responsible for our choices. God didn't create robots who are programmed to obey; He wanted children who choose to love Him. Somehow, in a way that surpasses human finite understanding, God's sovereign plan works through real human decisions.

Rather than trying to explain away one truth to make the other easier to understand, we should let both stand where the Bible leaves them. Rather than trying to explain away one truth to make the other easier to understand, we should let both stand where the Bible leaves them. Our inability to fully understand how these truths fit together should humble us and remind us that God's ways are higher than ours. We cannot fully comprehend all His ways, but we can trust that everything He does is perfectly wise, just, and good.

⁴ *ESV Study Bible*, note on Ephesians 1:9–10, 2263.

⁵ There is some debate about how the verb in verse 11 should be translated. The ESV renders it "we have obtained an inheritance," while the NIV reads "we were also chosen." The Greek word can carry the idea of receiving something by lot or being appointed by lot. Either way, Paul emphasizes that this happened according to God's purpose and will (1:11). In context, the shift from "we who were the first to hope in Christ" (v. 12) to "you also" (v. 13) is best understood here as a contrast between Jewish and Gentile believers.