



THE LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

STUDY 1 INTRODUCTION TO EPHESIANS

Ephesians 1:1-14

Verses 1:1-2: Paul begins his letter to the Ephesians like other letter writers of his day would have done. He introduces himself and says who he is writing to. This way to begin a letter seems better than ours where we have to look at the end to see who has written to us.

Paul is very conscious that he is an apostle by the direct call and will of Christ. His Damascus Road experience (Acts 9:1-9) is what he has in mind.

He calls all the Christians in Ephesus to whom he is writing, 'the saints' – this is their status as believers

Q 1. *If you are a believer in Christ you too are a saint. How do you feel about this? Would you be shocked if someone at church or at your work addressed you as 'saint'? What is a better contemporary word to use rather than 'saint'?*

Verses 1:3-14: These verses make up one long sentence, the longest in the New Testament. In it Paul 'blesses God' (give thanks to God) for all the benefits God has bestowed on those 'in Christ' – an expression he uses eleven times in this section. It is as if he cannot stop praising God for the privileges of being a believer.

(Note: Five times in Ephesians Paul speaks of 'the heavenly places' or 'heavenlies.' He seems to mean by this expression much the same as if he had said heaven but he did not think all our blessings 'in Christ' await us in heaven in the future. Paul believed all our future blessings are now given to us but they are not fully enjoyed or experienced now. Their full enjoyment and realisation will come when Christ returns and we are with him in the heavenlies.)

Q. 2. *What are the blessings Paul says we have in Christ?*

Q. 3. *Are we conscious and thankful for these spiritual blessings and do we feel as excited about them as Paul? What are the personal blessings you are currently aware of? Are you prepared to share something of these with the group?*

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Q. 4. For Paul our spiritual blessings in Christ are of first importance. Material blessings are not even mentioned. I suspect if we were asked to make a list of the blessings God has bestowed on us we would first think of our material blessings, our home, health, people we love and who love us, friends, etc, etc. Is that true? Why is this so often the case today?

In verse 4 Paul says God the Father ‘chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world’ and in verse 5 that he ‘destined us for adoption.’ This is the language of election, even predestination. He list God’s choice of us as one of our great blessings in Christ. This is the key to understanding Paul on this matter. What he is saying is that every believer should thank God for their salvation in Christ. We are Christians not because we are more clever than other people, or more morally upright or anything else. If we believe in Christ it is all of grace. The only person to thank for our new life in Christ is God. Salvation is 100% a gift from God. We do not deserve it or earn it.

Paul is not saying you will only believe if you are elect, or once saved always saved, or anything else that sounds deterministic or suggests that God throws a dice for every person on which is written on one side, ‘you are elect/chosen’, and on the other, ‘you are not elect/chosen’.

Q. 5. Are we overwhelmingly thankful to God and God alone, for graciously giving us the great gift of salvation? If not why not? Are there people, mentors, friends, teachers or family members to whom you are thankful for your faith in Christ? Does such thankfulness take your focus away from the grace of God?

Verse 5: Paul speaks of God as choosing us as his adopted sons or daughters. Often books on adoption suggest that the parents say to their adopted children, ‘You were specially chosen and thus you are specially loved.’ To say this to the child makes the point that they very precious to their parents because they had chosen them. They had said, yes we want you with all our hearts. Paul is saying, you Ephesian Christians, and you who read my letter in years to come, remember God has made you a member of his family.

Q. 6. What thoughts cross your mind when you think of this truth? God has adopted you as a member of his family? Is family membership important to you? Do you see yourself as a member of a particular church family, or of God’s broader family or both?

Verse 7: Redemption speaks of the setting free of someone by the payment of a price.

Q. 7. What is the price that has been paid for our redemption, and how costly was it?

Verses 9-5: Paul speaks of God revealing what had long been a ‘mystery’ (something unknown), namely, that all along God had a great plan to gather up all things in heaven and on earth in Christ. The Greek has the idea of bringing back to perfection or harmony or restoring what

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is damaged or distorted. The imagery implies the world is out of kilter, disharmonious, because of sin and in Christ God is putting things back together harmoniously.

We often think that the Gospel is essentially a message for individuals. God wants individual people, one by one, to personally believe in Christ, and salvation is ultimately about the individual believer being saved out of this world. Yes, each of us must respond to Christ as an individual but here Paul says God has a much bigger plan that involves the whole creation, both earth and heaven.

Q. 8. How could Paul's big picture of salvation/restoration reshape our thinking if we took it seriously?

Verses 13-14: As Paul comes to conclude his long recital of the blessings we have in Christ he speaks of the Holy Spirit. He says those who believe in Christ are marked by the 'seal of the promised Holy Spirit'. In the ancient world a seal signified ownership. In English we mean much the same when we say 'branded'. Christians are marked or branded by the Holy Spirit. What marks us out as Christians is the presence of the Holy Spirit in our life. Paul then calls the Spirit 'a pledge of our inheritance'. The Greek could be translated a 'down payment' of our inheritance. It is something we have here and now but when we come into our inheritance at the end there will be more waiting for us. Remember the comment above about our blessings in the heavenlies. Paul always thought what awaits believers in heaven is known and experienced in part now

Q. 9. On the basis of this Pauline teaching, the Spirit has been called a 'foretaste of the blessings of heaven.' What do you think of this way of speaking of the Spirit

Q. 10. How can we better understand the work of the Spirit in our Christian life and church?

Q. 11. In writing to the Thessalonian church Pauls says to them, 'Do not quench the Spirit' (1 Thess. 5:19). How do we metaphorically pour cold water on the work of the Spirit? What modern day examples are there of believers quenching the work of the Spirit?

Q. 12. What have you learned from this passage? A number of people in the group should be given the opportunity to respond to this question.

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