

p 11 WEEK 2: BELIEVERS' SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS

Ephesians 1:1–14

The Place of the Passage

Paul begins Ephesians by revealing that the church is a spiritual entity initiated and formed by Christ, leading to a social identity of earthly relationships. The blessings of the church's heavenly identity become the basis for the new kind of conduct Paul exhorts the church to practice.

The Big Picture

Ephesians 1:1–14 shows that the church is part of the plan of God from all eternity. God forms the church in Christ to bring himself glory. This is a demonstration of God's grace based on the work of Christ and intended to accomplish God's will both here on earth and in heaven.

Reflection and Discussion

Read through Ephesians 1:1–14 and make note of significant words and concepts. Then review the questions below concerning this introductory section to Ephesians' discussion of the church and write your notes on them. (For further background, see the *ESV Study Bible*, pages 2262–2263; available online at www.esvbible.org.)

p 12 1. Apostolic Greeting and Initiation of Themes (1:1–2)

Paul writes to this church as an “apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God.” What authority does his designation as “apostle” give to this writing? What might the phrases “of Christ Jesus” and “by the will of God” say about the motive of the writing? Why will the combination of this motive and authority be important to the remainder of this letter?

The believers who comprise this church are identified as “saints” who reside “in Ephesus.” How does the first term influence the second? How should a local congregation view itself in light of what “saints” means in relationship to both the Lord and fellow believers?

Paul calls this church “faithful in Christ Jesus” and communicates grace and peace to them from God. What sort of relationship with God is indicated by a judgment of their faithfulness? Why might such a congregation need grace and peace from the Father and Jesus Christ?

2. Revelation of Spiritual Blessings in Christ from the Father (1:3–10)

“Blessed be” denotes that Paul is offering praise to God for the spiritual blessings listed in the verses to follow. The blessings are anchored “in Christ”—in his person and work in salvation—and “in the heavenly places.” List the spiritual blessings “in” and “through” Christ mentioned in 1:4–6. What defining **p 13** boundaries do “in Christ” and “in the heavenly places” place on “chosen in him,” “predestined,” and “adopted”?

Paul includes “redemption” and “forgiveness of our trespasses” among the blessings lavished upon believers by grace. What does this working of grace indicate about the Ephesians’ previous and current condition?

Several terms indicate the Lord’s intentions for spiritual blessings: “that we should be,” “in love” (1:4), “to the praise of his glorious grace” (1:6), and “to unite all things in him” (1:10). These intentions align with God’s eternal will (or “purpose” or “plan”; 1:1, 5, 9, 10). How would you summarize the earthly and eternal goals of the work of Christ in the church and for every believer?

3. Revelation of Spiritual Blessings in Christ through the Spirit (1:11–14)

In 1:11, “in him,” “predestined,” “purpose,” and “will” carry over previously mentioned truths related to the believers’ spiritual blessings. According to these truths, how do believers gain an inheritance in Christ? What is the goal of this inheritance, and why might it carry special significance for those “who were the first to hope in Christ”?

p 14 The work of Christ in redemption, which began in eternity past, includes the sealing of the Holy Spirit. Hearing the truth of the gospel actualizes this sealing (1:13). What role, then, does belief play in the entire tapestry of salvation discussed in 1:3–14? What assurance of salvation does the working of the Spirit provide?

Read through the following three sections on *Gospel Glimpses*, *Whole-Bible Connections*, and *Theological Soundings*. Then take time to consider the *Personal Implications* these sections may have for you.

Gospel Glimpses

FORGIVENESS. As sinners we have offended God, broken his laws, disobeyed his commands, and rebelled against his will. This puts enmity between our Maker and us. If this breach is not repaired, the sinner remains in jeopardy of punishment from God. However, in the death and resurrection of Christ, the Lord himself has provided for our forgiveness. (Matt. 27:28). It is an act of his grace toward us (Eph. 1:7–8).

ATONEMENT. Although mentioned directly only once in 1:3–14, the death of Christ is the centerpiece of spiritual blessing. As the Levitical code states, “It is the blood that makes atonement by the life” (Lev. 17:11; see Heb. 9:22). Christ’s life-giving act provided the blood sacrifice that atones for the sins of believers. The cross of Christ is central to all the spiritual blessings we read about in Ephesians.

Whole-Bible Connections

GOD’S DECREE. Terms in Ephesians 1:1–14 such as “will,” “purpose,” “plan,” and “counsel” reveal that God has a decree from eternity that cannot be altered or thwarted (Prov. 21:30). As ruler of the universe and eternity, he controls the outcomes of all things, bringing them to their completion. That doesn’t mean our own choices don’t matter; we still must exercise our will and believe in him (Eph. 1:13). Yet God’s decree establishes the entire plan of salvation for the church. The decree guarantees that God will obtain glory for the full working of salvation (1:6, p 15 12, 14), which will include the final sanctification of believers (1:4, 14). This is the fulfillment of the plan that God announced in the garden of Eden (Gen. 3:15). The disobedience of Israel and the church, whatever form it may take, will not at any stage truncate the plan of salvation, because God’s decree remains in force (Rom. 8:28; 11:29). This planned togetherness of Jews and Gentiles in the church was not clearly revealed prior to Paul and his fellow apostles (Eph. 3:4–10); hence God calls it a “mystery,” meaning a secret previously hidden but now revealed (1:9–10).

INHERITANCE. God’s promise to Israel was that they would be his “treasured possession among all peoples” (Ex. 19:5; Deut. 7:6; 26:18; Mal. 3:17) and he would give them a land (Gen. 15:18–21; Ex. 3:8; Deut. 26:1–3). Peter reveals that all believers in Christ share this same promise of being the inheritance of God (1 Pet. 2:5–9). Through the work of Christ, believers receive the inheritance of Christ himself and the riches of eternity (Eph. 1:11, 14, 18; Heb. 9:15; 1 Pet. 1:4).

Theological Soundings

ELECTION. Just as the Lord lovingly chose Israel from among the nations as his own people (Deut. 7:7–8; 10:15; Hos. 11:1; Mal. 1:2), so in mercy the Lord lovingly has chosen those he will save from all the people of the earth (Rom. 9:11–13; Eph. 1:4–5). This choice is part of his eternal decree, occurring before the creation of the world or any of its inhabitants (Eph. 1:5; 2:10). The choice is *in Christ*, not man; therefore, it does not rest on any foreseen decision of any human person (2:9). Gloriously, in his act of election, God chooses to save people who deserve his greatest wrath and who would otherwise never choose to come to him. Election is the only way anyone receives salvation in Christ. Those who are chosen will experience God’s eternal mercy (Rom. 8:29–30).

GUARANTOR. When the Lord wished to assure Abraham that he would receive the promised inheritance, the Lord himself sealed the covenant, making the promises depend on his character alone (Gen. 15:7–21). Similarly, in order to guarantee the work of salvation from beginning to end, the Lord gives the Spirit of God as the guarantor (or down payment) of our inheritance. The presence of the indwelling Spirit in believers secures salvation for the elect forever. It guarantees

that those predestined to be holy and blameless will not lose the gift of Christ but will acquire its full possession.

Personal Implications

Take time to reflect on the implications of Ephesians 1:1–14 for your own life today. Ponder what the Lord is doing in you to bring glory to himself. Make notes below on the personal implications for your walk with the Lord of the (1) *Gospel Glimpses*, (2) *Whole-Bible Connections*, (3) *Theological Soundings*, and (4) this passage as a whole.

p 16 **1. Gospel Glimpses**

2. Whole-Bible Connections

3. Theological Soundings

4. Ephesians 1:1–14

As You Finish This Unit ...

Take a moment now to ask for the Lord's blessing and help as you continue in this study of Ephesians. And take a moment also to look back through this unit of study, to reflect on some key things that the Lord may be teaching you—and perhaps to highlight and underline these things to review again in the future.