

November 6 Lesson 10 (NIV)

God Picked You!

Devotional Reading: Esther 4:5-17

Background Scripture: Acts 19; Ephesians 1:1-14; Revelation 2:1-7

Ephesians 1:1-14

¹ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,

To God's holy people in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus:

² Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

³ 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. ⁴ For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace ⁸ that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, ⁹ he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, ¹⁰ to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

¹¹ 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, ¹² in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. ¹³ And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

Key Text

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

God's Exceptional Choice

Unit 3: We Are God's Artwork

Lessons 10-13

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How to Say It

Ephesus *Efuh-sus*.

Messiah *Meh-sigh-uh*.

Tychicus *Tick-ih-cuss*.

Introduction

A. The Love of the Father

Completing the paperwork for an international adoption is a grueling process. The prospective parents must assemble birth certificates, medical affidavits, financial statements, etc. The family doctor and social worker must include copies of their licenses. Every signature must be notarized, and the county courthouse must verify the authenticity of the notary stamps. The county seal is "apostilled" at the state capital, a fancy way of describing another level of

certification. The whole portfolio then goes overseas to be translated, with a new series of stamps added to verify the translation.

Now imagine if it were possible instead for just one person of great authority to look at the portfolio and put one stamp on the whole thing to approve the adoption. God himself has already placed his seal of adoption on us. Our text today celebrates our Father and his great love for us.

B. Lesson Context

The book of Ephesians is one of what we often call Paul's prison letters. As in Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon, Paul presented himself as "the prisoner" (Ephesians 3:1; compare 2 Timothy 1:8). It is reasonable to conclude that he wrote this letter while he was a prisoner in Rome (see Acts 22–28) in about AD 63.

Paul's letter to the Ephesians has many of the features of his other letters. But unlike the others, Ephesians does not clearly address a problem or issues that arose in a particular church. Rather, it reads as a general reminder and instruction in the nature of the gospel and the Christian life. This is one reason some believe it was a circular letter that was sent to the city of Ephesus (in present-day Turkey) to be read and then shared in the surrounding region (see Ephesians 1:1b, below; see lesson 11 for more information about Ephesus).

Ephesians includes challenging language and ideas. Our scripture text mentions many concepts that long have been debated. But when we remember the challenges that Christians of both Jewish and Gentile backgrounds faced, we can reframe those difficult concepts.

I. Greetings (Ephesians 1:1–2)

A. From Paul (v. 1a)

1a. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,

A Roman apostle was an official messenger who conveyed messages from authority figures to the public. On the road to Damascus, *Jesus* claimed *Paul* as his own messenger (Acts 26:12–16). The man's zeal, previously misdirected toward murderous ends (9:1–2; Galatians 1:13–14), was put to use for the making of disciples for *Christ*. All this happened according to *the will of God* (Acts 9:17–19; Galatians 1:15–24).

The word *Christ* is a translation of the Hebrew word *messiah*. Both designations refer to the anointed one, associated since David's days with God's chosen kings in Israel (1 Samuel 16:1, 12–13; 2 Samuel 7:8–16; compare John 1:41; 4:25). Before that, the term was not used but could have been appropriately applied to priests, who were anointed for their service in the tabernacle (Exodus 28:41; etc.). Jesus fulfills the roles of both priest and king (Hebrews 8:1–6; Revelation 17:14), making him uniquely positioned to be *the Christ*.

B. To the Faithful (vv. 1b–2)

1b. To God's holy people in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus:

This greeting is descriptive but generic. Since Paul's greetings are often very specific, this is one piece of evidence that the letter was meant for circulation instead of intended only to address those *in Ephesus*. Paul seemed intent to explain his doctrine succinctly, looking to what it means to be part of those who are *the faithful in Christ Jesus*. *Holy people* affirms that these believers were set apart from others because they belonged to God. This phrase had referred only to Israel until Jesus' time (Deuteronomy 28:9; Isaiah 62:12; etc.). Paul used this phrasing to emphasize that Gentiles were welcomed into faith in Jesus, on equal standing with their Jewish brothers and sisters who had also accepted Christ. It was not enough or even necessary to claim heritage in Abraham, because faith was and is the primary condition for determining whether one is part of the faithful. The lives of believers are different, even out of place in the world, because our identity is found in Christ, not in human families, clans, or nations (Galatians 3:27–29).

2a. Grace and peace to you

The greeting *grace* plays on the more typical Greek greeting *rejoice*. The words sound similar in Greek. Paul's choice emphasizes the Christian nature of this letter (compare 1 Peter 1:2; 2 Peter 1:2; Revelation 1:4). *Peace* was a typical greeting in Hebrew, a prayer for God's blessing to fall on his people. Far from the mere absence of violence or discord, the word has the much more positive connotation of wholeness and wellness. Grace acknowledges that asking for peace is totally based on God's good desires, not on anything a person or people have done to earn his favor. Together grace and peace turned an otherwise unremarkable greeting into an expectant expression of God's blessing.

2b. from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Naming *God our Father* in parallel with *the Lord Jesus Christ* highlights the Christian revelation of the Son's equality with the Father. Unbelieving Jews considered this new Christian belief a sin against the command to love the Lord alone (Deuteronomy 6:4–5). However, naming Jesus Christ as Lord makes clear that Paul and other Christians understood that Jesus was well worthy of love and praise, just as God the Father is (Galatians 2:8–11).

II. Unbridled Blessing (Ephesians 1:3–14)

A. Of God (v. 3)

3. 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.

We sense Paul's joy conveyed in the length of this sentence—in the Greek it doesn't end until verse 14! This is the longest sentence in the New Testament at just over 200 words in the Greek. We can imagine his scribe (likely Tychicus; see Ephesians 6:21) frantically taking down Paul's breathless praise.

Paul's presentation of God as the *Father of our Lord Jesus Christ* (compare 2 Corinthians 1:3; 1 Peter 1:3) is in keeping with Jesus' emphasis on God "Our Father" (Matthew 6:9). The Jews of Paul's day had many ways to describe God, but God as Father is not found very often. Yet God as

Father is an understanding that runs throughout Jesus' teachings (examples: 23:9; John 4:23; compare Romans 1:7; 8:15; 1 Corinthians 8:6).

Paul's repetition conveys his overwhelming awe. He was a scholar in the Hebrew Scriptures, and his writings' content and style both show Hebrew influences. One way Hebrew poetry strengthens a statement is by repeating it, either with the same phrase (example: Psalm 136) or with synonyms and other slight changes (examples: 1:1; 5:3). Paul's multiple use of forms of *ble* suggests (by word and by repetition) the greatness of our *God* and our *blessings*. To call God "blessed" (the more literal translation of *praise be* found in the *KJV*) is to acknowledge that he is praiseworthy and exalted. To call his people *blessed* is to acknowledge the reality that God gives us good gifts (James 1:17) and works out all things for our good (Romans 8:28).

In the heavenly realms refers to the throne room of God (Ephesians 1:20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12). Because we are already part of God's family, we experience blessing in his presence now, though we still suffer because of the fallen world around us.

B. Through Christ (vv. 4–12)

4. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love

Before the creation of the world focuses on God's everlasting plan (compare 2 Thessalonians 2:13). Though God's choosing *us* may seem like a statement of predestination (see Ephesians 1:5, below), it is actually a much broader statement of God's loving intent for all people. We were all meant to *be holy and blameless in his sight*. The fall threw all people into a sinful tailspin outside of God's good plan (Genesis 3:16–24; 6:5–6, 11; etc.).

But God was unwilling to let sin take its natural course and condemn all people to death. So God set in motion the plan that would call us back to him *in love*. Jesus was that plan. And through his death he conquered both sin and death, doing what we could not accomplish for ourselves. Our status changes as a result. We are counted as being holy (set apart in a godly way) and without blame (having our sins forgiven). We gain these attributes because of God's efforts through Christ.

5. he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—

This verse implies that Paul's audience is primarily Gentile, as they would identify with being adopted into the "natural" family Israel. The practice of adoption goes back thousands of years. Properly motivated, adoption is an act of grace toward orphans or children whose parents are unable to care for them. In the Roman world of Paul's day, there was another important consideration when it came to adoption: a father who had no sons might adopt someone to be his heir. This allowed the father's assets to be distributed according to his will—and for his family line and name to continue.

Predestined echoes God's pre-creation choice for people (see Ephesians 1:4, above; also 1:11, below). Some scholars believe this means that everyone's eternal status was decided by God before anyone was born. However, we should not fall into fatalism—the belief that free will does not exist, that we can make no choices that influence the outcome. God has chosen us by his grace; we must choose him through our faith (John 1:12).

The emphasis here is not on predestination but on *adoption*. God's plan to adopt humans as his children in holiness was fulfilled only in *Jesus Christ*. Nothing that happened around Christ's coming or in his ministry, death, and resurrection was haphazard, a fluke, or a mistake. This act of loving mercy is described as coming from *his pleasure and will*. Our adoption is not done grudgingly or under compulsion. God's desire is for us to be reconciled to him, to be included among his people. Inclusion into God's family is a marvelous demonstration of God's love (see 1 John 3:1).

6. to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

God's pre-creation plan, when put into action, produces worship. Believers of all nations worship the God who made them his people (Revelation 15:4). Angels worship the God whose plan has been fulfilled (5:11–12). In Heaven and on earth, through both time and space, we are one congregation glorifying God (compare 5:13–14).

This blessed acceptance cannot be separated from the grand act of love that characterizes God's work in Jesus Christ. He is referred to here as *the One* the Father *loves* (compare Matthew 3:17). Christ is the Son of God in a unique way, but God's love is extended to all who believe and are adopted as sons and daughters in Christ (John 1:12; Galatians 3:26). Our adoption results in full acceptance as children of God, with all the rights of an heir (4:7).

7–8a. 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.

Redemption and forgiveness are both terms used to speak of the liberation of slaves. The Ephesian believers were familiar with both words as they related to slavery in the Roman world. *Redemption* means to be "bought back," as a slave might be repurchased. Forgiveness means "letting go" and can refer to the release of a slave. Paul drew on this cultural example to describe the passage from a sinful life into one of *forgiveness* in Christ (compare Colossians 1:14, 20).

The idea behind the word *sins* is "to stray from the correct path while traveling." We are reminded of the common biblical depiction of life as a journey made up of choices (see Deuteronomy 30:15–18). Through the *blood* of Jesus, we have the means to be delivered from wrong choices and be put back on the path of God's choosing (Romans 2:4; 3:24–25). *The riches of God's grace* (also Ephesians 2:7) are truly marvelous!

8b–9. With all wisdom and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ,

All wisdom and understanding describes God's way of dealing with his wayward children. Wisdom conveys the sense of knowing the difference between right and wrong and making the choice to do the right thing (compare Proverbs 1:10). In this context, understanding refers to correct thinking.

In the Bible there are various ways that God makes his will known to humans. One is that of a mystery being revealed, something initially hidden from human understanding but now being shown (Ephesians 3:9). We understand God as a self-revealing God, for we cannot unravel the deep things of God by our own deep thinking (Romans 16:25). A god that people can fully comprehend is more likely made in their *own* image rather than the other way around (Genesis 1:27).

10. to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

God's fulfilled plan restores and reconciles *all* of creation (Romans 8:19–22). Everything God created suffers because of the effects of sin. And because God loves all of his creation—from people created in his image to deep-sea creatures we will never see to mountains we can't miss—He will *bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ* (Colossians 1:20). A key part of this is the reunification of humanity, which is divided into hostile groups. The barrier between Jews and Gentiles is broken down through Christ (Ephesians 2:14); these groups can be brought together in Christ according to God's will and purpose (3:4–6).

All this is according to God's plan, for it takes place *when the times reach their fulfillment* (see Galatians 4:4). Bringing everything together in Jesus will not be fully realized until he returns. But let us not miss how Christ is already accomplishing this promised future. Whenever by God's mercy a sinner becomes a saint, whenever through the gospel the estranged are reconciled, whenever through their lives of loving service Christians bring a greater measure of justice to the world, we see God's plan already being fulfilled (Mark 1:15; Romans 5:6).

11–12. 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 put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.

Once again Paul reassures the reader that nothing happens without God's allowing it (Romans 8:28; see Ephesians 1:5, above). Regardless of believers' physical circumstances, we are experiencing already the blessings of God. The proper response following redemption is giving *praise* to God. This concept is once again couched in adoption language. Our adoption results in the inheritance (Romans 8:29–30; Hebrews 6:17–20). We do not inherit money or property, though, but the spiritual treasures of God (Ephesians 1:18–21).

C. In the Spirit (vv. 13–14)

13. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit,

Roman officials affixed wax seals to documents to indicate their authenticity and authority. Paul used this image to help us understand the nature of the gift of God's Spirit to the believer. After we accept *the message of truth, the gospel*, we are in line for a marvelous inheritance (Colossians 1:5). We do not wait to begin to enjoy the blessings of this inheritance, for we are sealed by God through the gift of the *Holy Spirit* (Ephesians 4:30).

Paul pictures this spiritual sealing as a promise (compare Acts 2:16–18). This gift of the Holy Spirit is bestowed *after* faith (John 14:16–17). While the Holy Spirit plays a role in drawing people to faith, the Spirit's presence in the heart is a gift promised to believers (Acts 2:38–39).

14. who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

The gift of the Holy Spirit is not our full inheritance, but is the *deposit guaranteeing our inheritance*. The key word *deposit* is a legal term that refers to a down payment in a transaction. The idea is that of a "first installment" (compare 2 Corinthians 1:22; 5:5). The Spirit is a gift

promising more gifts to come. Through the Holy Spirit, believers experience God's presence and power now, a taste of what we will experience in full when Christ returns. The future holds not only the final defeat of sin and its effects but also spiritual fulfillment and completion.

Paul finished this long, complex, Greek sentence (which began in verse 3 of our text) with an observation regarding praise. Praise of God is our recognition of his mighty works and person. When Paul said that God acts for *the praise of his glory* (see Ephesians 1:6, 12, above), the apostle was not implying that God somehow needs human approval. Humans should praise God because it is good, proper, and part of our created nature.

Conclusion

A. Praise Him!

The ability to praise and worship God freely and properly is indeed a part of our inheritance and a manifestation of the Holy Spirit in our lives. While all his works offer opportunity to worship, our adoption into God's own family is an especially joyful reason for praise. May we, who have been brought into the Father's family through his loving Son and his trustworthy Spirit, erupt in praise for our salvation.

B. Prayer

Glorious Father, we are in awe of your grace! Remind us always of our standing before you, even as we wait for your Son to return in glory. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Rejoice in God's plan for your salvation.¹