

## The Blessings of Being Chosen

Do you have any experiences from your younger days when there was a “pick-up” game? I can remember in elementary school gym class, when two team captains would be selected, and then one by one, each captain would choose who would be on their team. And there were several occasions when I was one of the last chosen.



Or there is the college selection process. The application is made and then the prospective student waits. Letters from the colleges start arriving. Was the student chosen?

Or when we seek a life-long partner, there is a period of searching, dating, and courtship.

And we hope through that process that a prospective spouse is chosen. We hope to be chosen. We hope the one we have chosen will say, “yes” to the proposal.



This week our devotions will focus on the first half of chapter one of Ephesians. From verses 3 to 14 there are 202 words, 32 prepositional phrases, 6 relative clauses, and 5 adverbial clauses. And that is all in one long sentence! It is as if, for Paul, language fails to convey the wonders of God.

The main verb in this long sentence comes in verse 4. “He chose us, in Him before the foundation of the world.” God chose us. That is the central thesis of this section. And this may raise questions for you. Much pondering and debate has ensued between Christians ever since this Scripture was written. Didn’t I choose God? What about those not chosen? And these are good questions, but such questions were not what Paul was addressing. He was writing to a people living in a culture with great uncertainty. The entire pagan religious worship of the gods was built around the uncertainty of life. The gods were seen as fickle. They needed to be placated. Offerings had to be given with the very uncertain hope that they might garner favor. They sought some hope and some security by means of their offerings to the gods. Paul writes to reassure the Ephesian Christians, and by extension all Christians, that God has a plan. He is taking this world somewhere and He is acting with loving purpose toward the people whom He has made. God has already chosen us in love. There is great hope, peace and security that can be found in that truth. And there are many aspects to it. Paul is so encouraged by it that he is taken up with ecstatic praise. May his words, inspired by the Holy Spirit, encourage you this week.

## Day 5, Monday

Preparation: As you enter God's Presence today, consider that He has a word just for you. You are about to read a letter, in which Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, shared a word from God and about God with God's people. And today, could you believe that this letter was written not just to God's people who lived long ago in Ephesus, but also to you and for you? (Many believe this was a circular letter meant to be shared widely with other churches, and now that we consider it Holy Scripture, we believe it applies to us.) Can you begin in faith, thanking God for writing to you today? Pray asking Him to help you not miss what He has for you – ask Him to help you listen to His word to you today.

Introduction: This epistle has been attributed to Paul, though some have doubted that it is genuinely his because the content seems a little different than Paul's normal themes and because of the vocabulary. We have such a small sample of Paul's writing that it is hard to make such assessments, though The ESV Study Bible notes that a computer analysis has shown remarkable similarities between Ephesians and the other epistles of Paul in the New Testament. Perhaps the uniqueness of the situation in Ephesus as described in Acts 19 would prompt a letter to be written containing unique themes, vocabulary and content.

In ancient times the author of a letter put his or her name first. This was because most letters were written on scrolls and one didn't want to unroll the entire scroll just to determine who the letter was from.

Reading: Ephesians 1:1-2 **Author, Recipients and Blessings**

Questions for Reflection:

1. How does Paul describe himself?
2. Are there areas in your life that you would speak of as being "by the will of God?"
3. How are the recipients described?

*Note: "Saints" are not people, who have by extraordinary deeds of devotion earned the title as we might think of today. Saints are literally "holy ones" that is ones set apart from the world for God. This is a way of saying, to the "Christians".*

4. How does Paul describe the saints, that is, the Christians in Ephesus?
5. What would it mean to you if an Apostle, or even a bishop or church leader described you as "faithful"?
6. What "blessings" does Paul extend in verse 2?

*Note: Ancient Roman letter writers would usually write "greetings" at this point in the letter – using the Greek word, charein. Paul changes this typical greeting to charis, meaning grace in his letters.*

*Grace means God's free gift extended but not earned. Someone has said it is God's Riches at Christ's Expense. But Paul will also refer to the Grace of God sustaining and strengthening a person. Dallas Willard used to describe this kind of grace as God's "jet fuel" for the believer.*

*Peace is Shalom in Hebrew. It refers to more than just the absence of hostility, but wholeness, well-being and God's favor.*

7. Are there ways you might change your typical greetings to others into blessings?
8. How have you experienced God's grace and peace in your life?

## Day 6, Tuesday

Preparation: It has been said that our view of God is too small, your God is too small. Take a moment as you seek God's presence to remember how great He is and how He is even greater than all the ways you can think to recount. Praise Him and ask the Lord of the Universe to open your heart to Him this day.

Introduction: For the rest of this week, we are going to dwell in these verses of chapter 1:3-14. Today we are looking at the bigger picture and in subsequent devotions we will dig deeper. This section opens with the Greek word for blessing. It is the word from which we get eulogy. It was the custom of Jews in the first century to say various "blessings" or benedictions throughout the day. These benedictions typically began in the same way, with the words, "blessed be God."

Reading: Ephesians 1:3-14 **Blessed Be God in All His Eternal Grandeur**

1. Consider the actions of God in this passage. List the verbs. What is it that God has done and how should that be a cause for blessing Him and how does that bless us with blessings?
2. Where is it that God has blessed us? What might this be referring to?
3. Where do you see various persons of the trinity mentioned in this passage?
4. Count how many times your Bible translates "in Christ" or in "Him" or some other reference to in Christ. What might be meant by "in Christ"?
5. The Jews "blessed" God with certain prayers every day. What might be the impact on your life if you were to recite this Scripture in praise to God every day?

## Day 7, Wednesday

Preparation: As you ask God to speak to you today thank Him, for choosing you, calling you to love and worship Him.

Introduction: There has been much debate about the doctrine of "predestination". The Bible asserts that we have free will; Jesus is constantly challenging people to choose the right path. And yet the Bible speaks of the Sovereignty of God and here we see He chose us from before we were ever born. Somehow it seems both things are true. This is not meant to confound you and get you asking questions about free will or wondering about those who are not chosen. Try to set those concerns aside today. Look for the purpose for which these truths were shared. What does Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit hope will be the effect of these truths upon us?

Reading: Ephesians 1:3-6 **God Chose You**

1. List the completed actions of God in these verses (the Greek uses the aorist tense indicating completed, one time action.)
2. How has God chosen us, in what manner, with what attitude?

3. To what end has God chosen us? Chosen for what?
4. What was God's overarching purpose in choosing us (in verse 6)?
5. Try to imagine God thinking of you from before the creation of the world. He selected you; He chose you. He loved you. He decided He wants to adopt you into His family. How does that make you feel, especially knowing that God knows all the things you would do before you were ever born, and still, He chose you to be His Daughter or His Son?

## Day 8, Thursday

Preparation: God bids you come today, regardless of the mistakes you've made, the faults you have, and the ways you have sinned. He welcomes you into His Presence. Take a moment. Just sit and bask in God's love for you.

Introduction: The redeeming work of Christ is depicted in these verses. It would be well known to the first century Ephesian readership the process of redemption, buying persons out of slavery. Redeem means to buy back. God has purchased you to free you from slavery. To what have you been enslaved, do you think?

Reading: Ephesians 1:6-12 **The Riches of Grace in the Redemption Worked by Christ**

1. Who is the "beloved" here?
2. List what these verses tell us about Christ.
3. How is the grace that comes to us in Christ described?
4. What was the price paid to redeem us?
5. What do you think are the "riches" in verse 7?
6. How might this redeeming work of Christ reflect the glory of God and lead to praise?
7. The inheritance could mean an inheritance for us (but Paul will speak about our inheritance in just a few verses.) This is most likely meaning the redeemed, we, are God's portion, as if His inheritance. What does it mean to you that God views you like that? What value does that impart to you?

## Day 9, Friday

Preparation: God has given His Holy Spirit to all who affirm Jesus Christ as His Son. Have you done so? If you have not, what is preventing you? If you have, that means that the Holy Spirit dwells in you. Take a moment today, to pray to the Holy Spirit within you and ask Him to help you know and experience His presence in your life. Ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you through the Scriptures today.

Introduction: A seal in ancient times was an imprint, or the word could even describe branding animals or persons. The seal had a unique symbol that identified the owner and was used to mark something as belonging to that person.

**Reading: Ephesians 1:13-14 **The Seal of the Holy Spirit****

1. What is noted about the recipients of this Word from God in this epistle?
2. What has the Holy Spirit done for these? What does this indicate?
3. Besides the image of a seal, what other image is used for the Holy Spirit?
4. Think of your life when you have witnessed the Holy Spirit at work in yourself or in others. Think of times when this experience is the best you could hope for. How could the greatest experiences of the Holy Spirit now, be merely a deposit, a down payment of what is to come? What does this indicate heaven will be like?
5. Why has God done it this way according to verse 14?

**Day 10, Saturday/Sunday**

**Preparation:** As you seek God today, praise Him for how wondrous majestic and glorious He is. Tell Him what inspires you about Him. Seek to enter into the glorious presence of God today, and marvel.

**Introduction:** Glory is a word that in the Hebrew Scriptures of the Old Testament referred to weightiness, literally weight. Glory, weight, revealed the value. Note as you read this passage today what it reveals about the character and weightiness of God.

**Reading: Ephesians 1:3-14 **To the Praise of His Glory****

1. Note the repeated phrase, to the praise of His glory. What is glorious about God in this passage?
2. What does this passage indicate about who you are and who God intends for you to be? What is your God-given identity?
3. What does this passage indicate about God's purpose? What does it suggest about His purpose for you?
4. Why should these actions, character and emotions of God as described in this passage bring us hope (v.12)?
5. What would it mean in your life right now if you remembered more often, and more fully understood your purpose in God? What would it mean to live your life if you more fully understood yourself to be one made and redeemed for the praise of God's glorious grace?