

The Book of Ephesians, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 1: Every Spiritual Blessing in Christ

Ephesians 1:1–14

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This lesson carries the heaviest doctrinal weight of the entire study, because Ephesians 1:3–14 is one of the passages most often pressed into the service of Calvinistic election. The teacher's task is to let Paul's own language set the terms. Paul does not say God chose certain individuals to be saved and certain others to be lost. He says God chose us in Christ (v. 4), predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ (v. 5), and that this chosen people is entered when a person hears the word of truth and believes (v. 13). The choosing is real, eternal, and gracious, but it is corporate and in Christ, according to God's foreknowledge, and it is entered by faith. Keep the class anchored in verses 4 and 13 together, and the doctrine stays where Paul put it.

At the same time, this passage is not a debate to be won. It is a doxology to be felt. Paul wrote it on his knees, and the teacher should aim to bring the class to the same posture. Every line names a gift the student already possesses in Christ: chosen, adopted, redeemed, forgiven, sealed. Many believers live spiritually poor while sitting on this inheritance, fluent in their failures and forgetful of their wealth. Part of the teaching aim is to retrain the heart to begin with praise.

So aim at both targets at once. Give students the confidence to read this passage without fear of Calvinism, and give them the wonder of seeing how loved and how secure they are in Christ. The doctrine, rightly understood, does not cool the heart; it warms it. A people chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, and sealed by the Spirit as a guarantee, has every reason to live this week in gratitude rather than anxiety.

Question 1

Student Question:

Paul says God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ (v. 3). What does it mean that these blessings are spiritual and located in Christ rather than earned by us, and why does Paul anchor every single blessing in the phrase in Him?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul's opening sentence (vv. 3–14) is a single, unbroken outpouring in the Greek, and its repeated refrain is the little phrase in Christ or in Him, which appears about a dozen times. This is the key that unlocks the whole passage. Every blessing Paul names is not a free-floating gift handed to isolated individuals; it is treasure kept in a Person, and we come to possess it only as we are joined to that Person.

The blessings are called spiritual and are said to be in the heavenly places. This does not mean they are vague or unreal. It means they belong to the realm of God's Spirit and God's heaven, and they are therefore secure in a way that no earthly blessing can be. A prisoner in Rome can possess them as fully as a free man, because they do not depend on circumstances.

Notice that Paul begins with praise (Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ). The grammar of the Christian life starts in the indicative, with what God has done, before it ever reaches the imperative, with what we must do. Help the class feel the order. Ephesians will eventually call them to walk worthily (chapter 4), but only after three chapters of grace have filled the tank.

Stress that no blessing here is earned. Paul does not say God blessed us because we were impressive, but simply in Christ. The believer's whole standing rests on union with Jesus, not on personal achievement.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Union with Christ as the location of every spiritual blessing
- The priority of grace (indicative) before command (imperative) in the Christian life
- Spiritual blessings as secure and heavenly, independent of circumstances
- Salvation as a gift received, not a wage earned
- Worship and praise as the right starting point for theology

Discussion Prompts

- What is the difference between knowing about a blessing and actually living as though it is yours?
- Why does it matter that Paul starts with praise before he starts with instruction?
- What would change in your week if you truly believed your security rests in Christ and not in your circumstances?

Question 2

Student Question:

Paul could not stop praising God even from a prison cell. What occupies the space in your heart that praise is meant to fill, and what would it look like for you to begin this week, as Paul did, by blessing God before naming your needs?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is a formational question, meant to move the truth of verse 3 from the head to the heart. Paul praised God from prison, which exposes how much our own praise depends on comfort. When life is pleasant we are content; when it is hard we grow silent or bitter. Paul reverses that pattern.

Invite students to be honest about what fills their inner monologue. For most of us, worry is the native language and gratitude is a second language we speak haltingly. The point is not to deny real burdens but to dethrone them, to put praise first so that worry is heard in its proper, smaller place.

Encourage a concrete practice. Beginning prayer with blessing God before bringing requests, even naming one or two blessings from this passage by name, slowly retrains the heart. This is spiritual formation, not mere technique; we become what we habitually attend to.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The discipline of gratitude as a mark of spiritual maturity
- Praise that does not depend on circumstances
- The danger of a heart more fluent in worry than in worship
- Prayer that begins with God before it begins with our needs

Discussion Prompts

- What tends to crowd praise out of your heart during a hard week?
- How might beginning your prayers with blessing God change your outlook?
- Which blessing in this passage is hardest for you to feel as truly yours, and why?

Question 3

Student Question:

In verse 4 Paul says God chose us in Him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before Him. What was God's stated purpose in choosing a people, and what does the phrase in Him reveal about how a person comes to be among the chosen?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 4 is the first great statement of election in the letter, and it must be read with care. God chose us in Him before the foundation of the world. Two things stand out immediately. First, the choosing is ancient, rooted in God's eternal purpose and not in any merit we produced in time. Second, and crucially, the choosing is in Him, that is, in Christ. The sphere of God's choice is the Messiah and the people who belong to Him.

Equally important is the stated purpose of the choosing. God did not choose us merely so that certain individuals would be saved and others lost. He chose us that we should be holy and blameless before Him. The goal of election is a holy people, a transformed people, conformed to His character. Election aims at holiness, not at arbitrary selection.

The phrase in Him answers the question of how a person enters this chosen people. God's eternal decision was to save a people in His Son. We come to be among the chosen the same

way a branch comes to share the life of the vine, by being united to Christ. As verse 13 will make explicit, that union happens when we hear and believe the gospel.

Guard the class against two errors. One is to empty election of all meaning, as if God chose no one in particular. He genuinely chose, and the language is strong. The other is to read it as unconditional individual selection apart from Christ and apart from faith. Paul's own words (in Him, that we should be holy) rule out a cold, arbitrary picking of names.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Election as eternal, gracious, and centered in Christ
- The purpose of election: a holy and blameless people
- Being chosen in Him as union with Christ, not selection apart from Him
- The contrast with arbitrary individual selection
- Holiness as the goal, not merely status

Discussion Prompts

- What does it change to know that God's choosing aims at making you holy?
- Why is the little phrase in Him so important when we talk about election?
- How would you explain to a friend that being chosen is good news and not cause for pride?

Question 4

Student Question:

God's purpose in choosing you was that you would be holy and blameless before Him in love. Where in your daily life is God pressing you toward holiness right now, and how does knowing that this is His ancient purpose for you change the way you respond?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 4 does not leave holiness in the abstract; it says God chose us to be holy and blameless before Him in love. This question presses the doctrine into daily life. If God's eternal purpose for you is holiness, then the struggle you are having this week against a particular sin is not an interruption of His plan but part of it.

Help students name a specific arena. Holiness is rarely fought in general; it is fought in the tongue, the temper, the thought life, the use of money, the way we treat a spouse or coworker. Ask where God is currently pressing. The very fact that they feel the press is evidence that the ancient purpose of God is at work in them now.

Reframe sanctification as cooperation with God's deepest desire for them rather than as joyless rule-keeping. Because holiness is His purpose, the believer is never fighting alone or upstream; the current of God's eternal will is flowing in the same direction.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Sanctification as the outworking of God's eternal purpose
- Holiness lived out in concrete, specific areas of life
- Cooperation with God rather than mere self-effort
- The link between being chosen and becoming Christlike

Discussion Prompts

- In what specific area is God pressing you toward holiness right now?
- How does it help to know God's purpose runs in the same direction as your struggle?
- What is one practical step toward holiness you could take this week?

Question 5

Student Question:

Verses 5 and 6 say God predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, to the praise of His glorious grace. What does it mean to be adopted into God's family, and why does Paul say this is all to the praise of His grace rather than to the credit of the ones adopted?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verses 5 and 6 move from choosing to adoption: He predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will, to the praise of His glorious grace. In the Roman world, adoption was a deliberate, legal act by which an outsider was given the full status, name, and inheritance of a son. Paul reaches for that image to describe what God has done for us.

Adoption means we are not merely forgiven criminals released from a courtroom; we are welcomed children brought into a family. The relationship is warm and permanent, secured through Jesus Christ. Note again the channel: through Jesus Christ. There is no adoption that bypasses the Son.

Paul says this is all to the praise of His glorious grace. The accent falls entirely on the Giver. An adopted child contributes nothing to the decision to be adopted; the initiative, the cost, and the love are all on the side of the Father. This is why grace, not human achievement, gets the praise.

Help the class hold together status and warmth. Adoption is legal (a real change of standing) and relational (a real change of heart and home). Both belong to the believer in Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Adoption as a change of family, not merely a verdict
- The Father's initiative and love in adoption
- Grace, not merit, receiving all the praise

- Adoption secured through Jesus Christ alone
- The believer's permanent standing as a beloved child

Discussion Prompts

- What is the difference between being a forgiven stranger and an adopted child?
- Why does adoption lead Paul to praise rather than to pride?
- How might living as a true son or daughter change how you approach God this week?

Question 6

Student Question:

An adopted child can still live with the fearful heart of an orphan, working to earn a place that has already been given. Where do you still strive to earn what God has freely made yours, and what would it look like to rest in your adoption?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question turns the doctrine of adoption inward. Many believers know on paper that they are God's children, yet they still live with the anxious heart of a hired servant, always auditioning for a love they assume they could lose. The orphan keeps striving; the child rests.

Ask students to locate where they still try to earn what is already theirs. It may show up as perfectionism in service, as fear that one failure will undo them, as an inability to receive rest or grace. These are symptoms of an orphan heart that has not yet caught up with an adopted reality.

Resting in adoption is not passivity; it is working from acceptance rather than for it. The adopted child still serves in the household, but out of belonging rather than to secure belonging. Help students feel the freedom in that distinction.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The orphan heart versus the adopted heart
- Serving from acceptance rather than for acceptance
- Resting in a secure relationship with the Father
- Freedom from the fear of losing what grace has given

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you still strive to earn what God has already given you freely?
- What does it look like to serve out of belonging rather than to gain belonging?
- How would resting in your adoption change one relationship or responsibility this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

In verse 7 Paul says in Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace. What does the language of redemption and blood tell us about the cost and the nature of our forgiveness?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 7 names the costliest blessing: in Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace. The word redemption comes from the marketplace and the slave market; it means a release secured by the payment of a price. We were held captive by sin, and we did not buy our own freedom.

The price named is His blood. Forgiveness is free to us but it was not cheap to God. Paul will not let us treat grace as though it were careless or easy. The cross stands behind every soft word about being forgiven; the Father's costliest gift was the life of His own Son.

Paul measures it all according to the riches of His grace. God does not forgive grudgingly or in small portions. He forgives lavishly, out of an abundance that matches the wealth of His own character. The believer's debt was real, but the supply of grace is greater.

For application, connect redemption to assurance. Because our forgiveness was purchased by Christ's blood and not by our performance, it is as secure as the worth of that blood. This is the ground on which the next question will press.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Redemption as release purchased at a price
- The blood of Christ as the cost of our forgiveness
- Grace as lavish, not grudging or rationed
- Assurance grounded in Christ's work, not our performance
- The seriousness of sin shown by the price of its remedy

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Paul tie forgiveness so closely to the blood of Christ?
- What does it mean that our forgiveness is free to us but costly to God?
- How does seeing grace as lavish change the way you come to God after you have sinned?

Question 8**Student Question:**

Forgiveness is one of the blessings Paul names, yet many believers still carry guilt for sins God has already washed away. What sin or failure are you still holding against yourself that the

blood of Christ has already covered, and what would it mean to receive that forgiveness as truly yours?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question addresses a quiet epidemic among sincere believers: carrying guilt for sins God has already forgiven. Paul has just said our trespasses are forgiven according to the riches of His grace, yet many Christians keep paying a debt that Christ has already settled.

Gently help students name what they are still holding against themselves. Often it is a particular failure, a past sin, a season they are ashamed of. They have confessed it, but they have not received the forgiveness as real. The problem is not that God has withheld pardon but that they have refused to accept it.

Distinguish between godly sorrow, which leads to repentance and then to peace, and the corrosive false guilt that lingers after God has forgiven. To keep punishing yourself is, in a sense, to value your own verdict above the verdict of the cross. Receiving forgiveness is an act of humble faith, taking God at His word.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Receiving forgiveness as an act of faith
- The difference between godly sorrow and corrosive false guilt
- Trusting God's verdict over our own self-condemnation
- Living in the freedom that the blood of Christ secured

Discussion Prompts

- What sin or failure are you still holding against yourself that God has already forgiven?
- Why is refusing to accept forgiveness a failure to trust God's word?
- What would change this week if you truly received your forgiveness as final?

Question 9

Student Question:

Paul says God predestined us according to the purpose of His will (v. 11) and that He has made known the mystery of His will to unite all things in Christ (vv. 9 and 10). Yet in verse 13 he says, in Him you also, when you heard the word of truth and believed in Him, were sealed. How do these verses together shape what God's choosing and predestining actually mean, and how does this differ from saying that God unconditionally picks certain individuals for salvation while passing over the rest?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal center of the lesson, and the teacher should give it the most time. Paul says God predestined us according to the purpose of His will (v. 11) and has made known the mystery of His will, a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Christ (vv. 9 and 10). Read alone, these verses are sometimes taken to mean that God, before creation, unconditionally selected certain individuals for salvation and passed over the rest, and that nothing they do or believe enters into it. That reading collapses the moment we keep reading to verse 13.

Verse 13 tells us exactly how a person comes to be among this predestined people: In Him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in Him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. The sequence is plain. They heard. They believed. Then they were sealed. The blessing is entered through the gospel and through faith, not apart from them. Whatever predestination means, it cannot mean something that bypasses hearing and believing, because Paul puts hearing and believing right in the middle of the description.

The key, as throughout the passage, is the phrase in Him. God's eternal predestination is His settled plan to save a people in Christ and to unite all things in Christ. The choice is corporate and Christ-centered. It is according to His foreknowledge (Paul will use related language, and Peter says it plainly in 1 Peter 1:2, elect according to the foreknowledge of God). God, who knows the end from the beginning, determined before creation to have a people in His Son, marked out for adoption and holiness, and that people is entered by faith. To be in Christ is to be among the predestined; to refuse Christ is to stand outside that plan, not because God arbitrarily excluded anyone, but because the blessing is located in His Son.

This is very different from Calvinistic unconditional individual election. Scripture presents the gospel call as genuine and universal (God desires all to be saved, 1 Timothy 2:4; whoever believes, John 3:16; come, Revelation 22:17). Human beings are really able to respond. God's grace can be received or resisted (the same Stephen who preached said his hearers were resisting the Holy Spirit, Acts 7:51). So God's choosing is not a secret lottery that determines individuals regardless of faith; it is His glorious, gracious, eternal purpose to save everyone who comes to Him in His Son.

Bring it home with assurance, not anxiety. The believer does not have to wonder whether he or she is secretly among the chosen. The question is simpler and kinder: Are you in Christ? Have you heard the gospel and believed and obeyed it? Then you are exactly where God's eternal purpose has always aimed, and you have been sealed with His Spirit as the proof.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Predestination as God's eternal plan to save a people in Christ, according to His foreknowledge
- Election as corporate and Christ-centered, entered by faith (vv. 4 and 13 read together)
- The contrast with Calvinistic unconditional individual election
- The genuine, universal gospel call and the real human ability to respond
- Grace that can be received or resisted, not irresistibly imposed

- Assurance found by being in Christ, not by speculating about a secret decree
- The seal of the Spirit as God's pledge to those who believe

Discussion Prompts

- How does verse 13 (you heard and believed, then were sealed) guard us against misreading predestination?
- Why does it matter so much that we are chosen in Him rather than apart from Him?
- How would you reassure a believer who fears they might not be among the chosen?

Question 10

Student Question:

Verses 13 and 14 say that when you believed, you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance. Looking back across this whole passage, name one specific way the Lord is using these truths to form you, and what difference the seal of the Spirit makes in how you will live this week.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone question gathers the whole passage and asks for one concrete response. Verses 13 and 14 supply the climax: having believed, you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of His glory. A seal in the ancient world marked ownership and guaranteed authenticity. The Spirit Himself is God's mark on the believer.

The Spirit is also called the guarantee, a word drawn from commerce meaning a down payment, a first installment that pledges the full amount to come. The Christian's present experience of the Spirit is a foretaste of the inheritance, God's own deposit assuring us that He will finish what He started.

Press students to name one specific way these truths are forming them. The goal of the lesson is not information but transformation. Perhaps it is greater security, a freer conscience, a heart more inclined to praise, or a renewed pursuit of the holiness for which they were chosen. Ask each person to leave with one named change.

Close by reminding the class that the inheritance is held to the praise of His glory. Even the believer's final destiny circles back to worship, which is exactly where Paul began. The passage ends where it started, in praise.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The Holy Spirit as the seal marking God's ownership
- The Spirit as the guarantee and down payment of the inheritance
- Assurance that God will complete the work He began

- Transformation, not just information, as the aim of study
- All of salvation moving toward the praise of God's glory

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean for your security that the Spirit is God's down payment on your inheritance?
- Which truth from this passage most needs to shape your heart this week?
- How can the certainty of your inheritance change the way you face this coming week?