

Ephesians: Grace Changes Everything

Part 2. The Riches of God's Grace

Today, we begin our study of the book of Ephesians. This letter, written by the Apostle Paul, is filled with profound theological insights and practical guidance for our daily Christian walk. In this first sermon, we will explore the opening fourteen verses of chapter one, where Paul introduces himself, blesses God for the spiritual blessings we have in Christ, and outlines the incredible riches of God's grace.

Ephesians 1:1-14 *"Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to God's holy people in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

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. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will - to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

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

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

This passage is packed with profound truths about who we are in Christ and the incredible blessings we have received through God's grace. We will break down this passage into three main sections: Paul's greeting and blessing (verses 1-3), the spiritual blessings in Christ (verses 4-10), and the assurance of our inheritance (verses 11-14).

1. Paul's Greeting and Blessing (1:1-3)

Paul begins his letter with a standard greeting, identifying himself as *"an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God."* This introduction establishes his authority and the divine calling behind his message. Paul then addresses his audience as *"God's holy people in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus."*

Grace and Peace:

Paul extends a blessing of grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. These two words, grace and peace, are central to Paul's message and the Christian life. Grace is God's empowering presence the foundation of our salvation. Peace is the result of this grace, a profound sense of well-being and reconciliation with God.

Spiritual Blessings:

Paul transitions from his greeting to a doxology, praising God for the spiritual blessings we have in Christ. *"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."* This verse sets the tone for the rest of the passage, emphasizing the abundance and completeness of the blessings we have received.

2. The Spiritual Blessings in Christ (1:4-10)

In this section, Paul outlines several key blessings we receive through our relationship with Christ. These blessings are not just material or temporary but are spiritual and eternal, rooted in the heavenly realms.

Chosen in Christ:

"For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight." This profound truth reminds us that our relationship with God is not based on our own efforts but on His sovereign choice. Before the world was created, God chose us to be His own, setting us apart to live holy and blameless lives. Being chosen by God before the creation of the world underscores the eternal nature of His love and purpose for us. It is a humbling and awe-inspiring thought that God knew us and set His affection on us before we even existed. This should fill us with gratitude and a deep sense of security in our identity in Christ.

Predestined for Adoption:

"In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will." Our adoption as God's children is a result of His love and predestined plan. Through Christ, we are brought into God's family, enjoying all the rights and privileges of sonship. This adoption is not based on our merit but on God's grace and His pleasure and will. The concept of adoption is rich with meaning. In the Roman world, adoption was a powerful act that gave the adopted person a new status and inheritance rights. Similarly, our spiritual adoption means that we have been given a new identity and a share in the inheritance of God's kingdom. We are no longer strangers or outsiders but beloved children of God with all the accompanying rights and responsibilities.

Redemption and Forgiveness:

"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 central to our salvation. Through the shed blood of Christ, we are redeemed from the bondage of sin and forgiven of all our transgressions. This redemption is a demonstration of the riches of God's grace, which He has generously lavished upon us. Redemption involves being bought back or set free from slavery. In our case, it means being set free from the slavery of sin and death. The cost of our redemption was the precious blood of Christ, highlighting the immense value God places on us. Forgiveness, which accompanies redemption, means that our sins are no longer held against us. We are cleansed and made new, able to stand before God without guilt or shame.

Revealing the Mystery of His Will:

"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, 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, in His wisdom and understanding, has revealed to us the mystery of His will. This mystery is His plan to unite all things in heaven and on earth under Christ. This cosmic plan demonstrates God's ultimate purpose and sovereignty.

The "mystery" Paul refers to is not something hidden or unknowable but rather something that was previously hidden and has now been revealed. God's plan to bring everything together under Christ was not fully understood until Christ came and completed His work of redemption. This plan is comprehensive, affecting not only our individual lives but the entire cosmos. It gives us a sense of our place in God's grand design and reassures us that history is moving toward a glorious fulfillment in Christ.

3. The Assurance of Our Inheritance (1:11-14)

In the final section of this passage, Paul assures us of our inheritance in Christ and the guarantee of the Holy Spirit.

Chosen According to His Plan:

"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." Our inclusion in God's family is not an accident but is part of His divine plan. We were chosen and predestined according to God's purpose and will. This assurance provides us with confidence and security in our salvation.

Knowing that we are chosen according to God's plan gives us a deep sense of purpose and belonging. We are part of a divine narrative that spans from eternity past to eternity future. Our lives have meaning and direction because they are woven into the fabric of God's redemptive plan. This should encourage us to live faithfully and confidently, knowing that God is at work in and through us.

For the Praise of His Glory:

"In order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory." Our salvation and the blessings we receive are ultimately for the praise of God's glory. Our lives are meant to reflect His greatness and bring Him honour. This purpose gives our lives meaning and direction, motivating us to live in a way that glorifies God.

The phrase *"for the praise of his glory"* occurs multiple times in Ephesians 1, underscoring its importance. God's ultimate goal in redemption is His own glory. As we live out our faith and experience the blessings of salvation, we bring glory to God. This is not an egotistical desire on God's part but a reflection of His worthiness and the proper response of creation to its Creator. When we live for God's glory, we find our highest joy and fulfillment.

Sealed with the Holy Spirit:

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

The Holy Spirit is the seal and guarantee of our inheritance. When we believe in the gospel, we are marked with the Holy Spirit, who assures us of our future redemption and inheritance. This seal signifies that we belong to God and that He will fulfill His promises to us.

The imagery of sealing is significant. In the ancient world, a seal was used to mark ownership and authenticate documents. Similarly, the Holy Spirit marks us as God's own and assures us of our authentic relationship with Him. The Holy Spirit is also described as a *"deposit"* or *"down payment,"* guaranteeing that the full inheritance will be ours. This gives us great assurance and hope as we await the final redemption when Christ returns.

Practical Applications:

Embrace Your Identity in Christ:

Reflect on the truth that you are chosen, adopted, redeemed, and forgiven in Christ. Embrace your identity as a child of God, and let this truth shape your self-image and your interactions with others. Remember that your worth and value are not based on your achievements or the opinions of others but on God's unchanging love and grace. Take time each day to remind yourself of your identity in Christ. Meditate on passages like Ephesians 1:3-14 and allow these truths to sink deeply into your heart and mind. Let your identity in Christ give you confidence and security as you face the challenges of life.

Live a Life of Holiness and Blamelessness:

Recognize that you have been chosen to live a holy and blameless life. Seek to honour God in your thoughts, words, and actions. Strive to live in a way that reflects the character of Christ and brings glory to God. Pursue spiritual disciplines that help you grow in holiness, such as prayer, Bible study, and worship. Surround yourself with fellow believers who encourage and support you in your journey of faith. Seek to live a life that is set apart for God's purposes and rely on the Holy Spirit to empower you to overcome sin and live in righteousness.

Celebrate Your Adoption into God's Family:

Rejoice in the fact that you have been adopted into God's family and enjoy the privileges and responsibilities that come with being a child of God. Celebrate the intimate relationship you have with your Heavenly Father and seek to deepen your connection with Him through prayer and worship. Take time to reflect on the significance of your adoption. Consider how this truth impacts your sense of belonging and your relationship with others in the body of Christ. Celebrate your adoption by participating in the life of the church, serving others, and sharing the love of Christ with those around you.

Rest in the Assurance of Your Redemption:

Find comfort and peace in the knowledge that you have been redeemed and forgiven through the blood of Christ. Trust in the finished work of Christ on the cross, and rest in the assurance that your sins are forgiven and that you are reconciled to God. Reflect on the significance of your redemption. Consider how this truth impacts your relationship with God and your daily life. Rest in the assurance of your redemption by continually turning to Christ in faith and relying on His grace to sustain you.

Seek to Understand God's Will:

Cultivate a desire to know and understand the mystery of God's will. Spend time in prayer and study of God's Word, seeking to discern His purposes and plans for your life. Trust that God, in His wisdom and understanding, will reveal His will to you in His perfect timing. Ask God to give you wisdom and understanding as you seek to know His will. Be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit, and be willing to follow God's direction, even when it requires faith and obedience. Trust that God's plans for you are good and that He is working all things together for His glory and your good.

Live for the Praise of His Glory:

Remember that your life is meant to bring praise and glory to God. Seek to live in a way that reflects His greatness and honours His name. Let your actions, attitudes, and relationships be a testimony to the transformative power of the gospel. Consider how you can live for the praise of God's glory in your daily life. Look for opportunities to serve others, share the gospel, and demonstrate the love of Christ. Let your life be a reflection of God's grace and a testimony to His faithfulness.

Rely on the Holy Spirit:

Depend on the Holy Spirit as your seal and guarantee of God's promises. Seek to be filled with the Spirit daily, allowing Him to guide, empower, and transform you. The Holy Spirit is your helper, comforter, and advocate, ensuring that you remain in God's grace. Pray for the Holy Spirit's presence and power in your life. Ask Him to help you live out the truths of Ephesians 1:1-14, to grow in your relationship with Christ, and to bear fruit that brings glory to God. Trust that the Holy Spirit is at work in you, sealing you for the day of redemption and guaranteeing your inheritance in Christ.

Conclusion:

In Ephesians 1:1-14, Paul presents a breathtaking view of the spiritual blessings we have in Christ. We are chosen, adopted, redeemed, and forgiven, all according to the riches of God's grace. These blessings are not just for our benefit but are ultimately for the praise of God's glory. As we reflect on these truths, let us embrace our identity in Christ, live lives of holiness and love, and rely on the Holy Spirit to guide and empower us.

Thank you for joining me on this journey through Ephesians. As we leave this place, may we carry the truths of this powerful letter in our hearts and live out our faith boldly and joyfully. God bless you.