

Life Group Study Guide

Ephesians—carefully, reverently, prayerfully considered-- will change our lives. Its opening verses are a waterfall of grace and blessing that leave us in awe of God's work in bringing us salvation. This study is based on a sermon preached Sunday morning at WEFC entitled:

Blessings All Mine, With Ten Thousand Besides, and reflects on **Ephesians 1:1-10**.

Before you begin: Take some time as a group to *pray* that God would be at work in your minds and hearts. There is a real difference between knowing and understanding something intellectually and having a heart that is deeply affected by the truth. Pray that the Holy Spirit will help you to *understand* God's word, *welcome* it into your heart, and then *apply* it faithfully to your lives.

Ephesians 1:1-10 (ESV):

*1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,
To the saints who are in Ephesus*, and are faithful in Christ Jesus:
2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love 5 he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, 8 which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight 9 making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ 10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

**Some manuscripts: "saints who are also faithful" (omitting in Ephesus)*

Study Guide:

Paul describes himself "as an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God." Not so long ago, he was a militant opponent of Jesus Christ. What happened? What does he mean *by the will of God*?

In what way is "To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus" a succinct description of every believer? How is it also a concise description of this entire epistle?

Why does the apostle Paul often start his letters with lots of factual statements and then conclude with things Christians must do? How is this pattern reflected in the gospel (saved by grace, not *by*, but rather *for*, good works)? How is it also seen in v. 3?

You can not spend riches you do not know you have. Talk about how the older brother in the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15 proves this. Do you ever struggle with thanklessness, bitterness, or lovelessness? How can remembering our spiritual blessings change our attitudes and actions?

Bible scholars almost all agree that vv.4-14 amplify the thoughts of v. 3. This being so, spend some time going through vv. 4-10 identifying the blessings Paul says God has given us in Christ.

In vv. 4-6 Paul moves backwards beyond time to our eternal calling, "*as [the Father] has chosen us [in Christ] before the foundation of the world.*" It turns out **we were blessed a long time ago!** How does the doctrine of God's sovereign choice lift us up and show us our importance to God? Why should it also humble us and make us thankful?

God didn't choose us with a roulette wheel; it wasn't some dispassionate roll of the dice as it's often thought of. Paul says, "*In love, he predestined us for adoption.*" How does this give confidence to Christians that God will not abandon us or leave us victim to the times and tides of life?

Does the doctrine of election undermine free will? Wrestle with this as a group until your heads all start to hurt. Try not to fight! ☺

Pastoral thoughts: We must never allow our subjective experience of choosing Christ to water down the fact that we would never have chosen him if he had not first chosen us. The lost sinner, left to his own ways does not seek God (Rom. 3:10-11); but God in His love does seek the sinner (Luke 19:10). That said, we also must never allow his hidden will of decree to water down our real responsibility to choose Jesus. "Whoever wants to be my disciple *must* deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (Mark 8:34). "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts" (Heb. 3:15). However mysterious this all may be to our minds, it is still revelation from God's word to humbly accept into our hearts.

Our spiritual blessings all come through Christ! Run your eyes down through vv. 4-14 and see as a group how many times Paul makes this point. What are some other places people run to in their quest for inner richness? Have you been visiting an empty well hoping for what only Christ can bring?

Our blessings all have a purpose. **1) Praise:** (v. 6) Do you ever get carried away like Paul in praise? **2) Purity:** (v. 4) Is your life characterized by devotion to God? **3) God's plan:** (vv. 9, 10) Do you know where history is going? (cf. Col. 1:15-18).