

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: *The Blessing of Salvation*, and reflects on **Ephesians 1:11-14**.

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.

Study Guide:

In the closing part of this opening section, we see Paul make a subtle shift in pronouns, introducing what will become one of the major themes of this epistle: The union in Christ that Jews and Gentiles share. In **v. 3-10** Paul mostly uses "**us**" language, "*God has blessed us; chose us; predestined us*" etc. Now, in **vv.11-14** he begins to use the *we/you* pronouns. Have someone volunteer to read aloud this week's passage.

Ephesians 1:11-14 (ESV):

¹¹In him [Christ] *we* [Jews] have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, ¹²so that *we* [Jews] who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. ¹³In him [Christ] *you* [Gentiles] also, when *you* heard the word of truth, the gospel of *your* salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴who is the guarantee of *our* [Jews and Gentiles] inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

So far as Paul was concerned, the inclusion of the Gentiles in God's plan of salvation was one of the most shocking and astonishing blessings to come out of the gospel. In these verses he wants his Gentile audience to know how it was that they came to be included in such a great salvation. What were the dynamics of it? Why are those dynamics so important? The purpose of this study will be to consider, and answer, those questions.

1) We were Included through the Wonder of Being "In Christ"

Just as the **Jews** "*who were the first to hope in Christ*" (**v.12**) [think Pentecost] "*obtained an inheritance*" through being "*in [Christ]*" (**v.11a**) So, the **Gentiles** were also "*sealed with the promised Holy Spirit*" when they "*believed in [Christ]*" (**v.13**).

Stop and think as a group about what it means to be "in Christ." **Helpful passages for discussion:** 2 Cor. 5:17; 1 Cor. 15:22; and Eph. 2:5.

In our culture the term "Christian" gets thrown around a lot allowing for a bit of an ambiguous interpretation. Interestingly "Christian" is only used three times in the New Testament (Acts 11:26; Acts 26: 28; and 1 Peter 4: 16), whereas "In Christ," or it's equivalent, is used somewhere between 130-170 times, depending on the translation. Why do you think the New Testament writers considered "in Christ" a more helpful term than "Christian" for describing Christianity?

As a group, scan through **Eph.1:3-14** and consider how many of the Father's blessings come to us *in Christ*. Christians have been placed *in Christ*. How does all this information encourage us not to shy away from Jesus, but to lean into our relationship with him?

2) Being in Christ brings Supernatural Unity

Why should our oneness with Jesus ["in Christ"] have a profound effect on our relationships with other believers (see **Gal. 3:28**)?

Major language, religious, racial, and national animosities existed in the ancient world, especially between Jews and Gentiles. How did "in Christ" help the early church conquer the world? What issues in churches today, might Paul argue, can be overcome by our unity in Christ?

How does the principle of self-denial play into our unity within the church? Read **1 Cor. 8:4-13; 1 Cor. 10: 25-32; and Rev. 2:20**. What do these verses teach us about the relationship between our personal rights and maintaining unity in the body of Christ?

3) We have been given the Holy Spirit

What does it mean, to be sealed by the Holy Spirit? And how is the Holy Spirit the "guarantee of our inheritance"? (cf. **Rom, 8:15-17; Eph 4:30**) Why should this excite us for our future glorified life?

4) God has done it all for His Glory

God has put Jews and Gentiles on equal footing in regards to the benefits of salvation, that we might live forever "to the praise of his glory." (v. 14 cf. v. 6; v.12). Consider closing by singing *The Doxology* together, or another song of praise your group is familiar with.