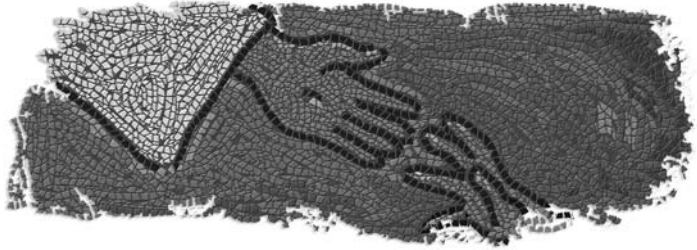


What God Has Done



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: Rom. 8:15, 16; 1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 1:3-14; 1 Pet. 1:20; Rev. 13:8.

Memory Text: “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace” (Ephesians 1:7, NKJV).

Praise and petition. In the original Greek, Ephesians 1:3-14 is one long sentence through which the apostle introduces major aspects of Christian theology, including the idea that the Godhead was involved in the formation of the church—God’s family on earth. God the Father “chose us in Him [in Christ] before the foundation of the world” (vs. 4, NKJV). It is in Christ that “we have redemption through His blood” (vs. 7, NKJV). Meanwhile, the Holy Spirit provides us security and guarantees our eternal inheritance (vs. 13, 14).

Paul recognizes that while God acts in history and time, He dwells in “heavenly places.” The phrase occurs five times in Ephesians in connection with where our blessings come from (vs. 3), where the risen Christ is seated (vs. 20), where we, too, will be seated (2:6), where God’s purposes will be made known because of the church (3:10), and where originated the powers of darkness with which we must struggle (6:12).

The Week at a Glance: What does the Bible mean by the idea of predestination? According to Ephesians, what has God done for us in Christ? What does Paul mean by “adoption”? How has Christ redeemed us?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 15.

The Chosen

“According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love” (Eph. 1:4).

Paul traces the origin of the church in the mind of God (*Eph. 1:4, 5*). God’s plan of redemption and His plan for the redeemed are not accidental; they were conceived before creation, before time began. God formed a purpose in His mind: to choose us in Christ. Even before we existed, God saw us through a relationship with Christ, and because of that He could make us His children. Hence, we are not saved by anything we are or do. We did not influence God; we could not work our way to God. In fact, when we were not in existence, He already purposed our salvation, so that when we came around, all we would need to do is accept what Christ offers.

How do the following texts help us understand this idea of predestination? *1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 1:4, 5; 3:11; 1 Pet. 1:20; Rev. 13:8.*

A lot of people get confused over the idea that God chose us beforehand to be saved, because it implies that some people were chosen beforehand to be lost. But that’s not the biblical teaching. Instead, God prepared beforehand the plan of salvation, according to His eternal purpose, in order that everyone would be saved (*1 Tim. 2:6, 2 Pet. 3:9*). The plan of salvation itself, which included every human being, was determined before the world began; what was not determined beforehand was what our individual responses to that plan would be. That God knows beforehand that our eternal destiny is not the same as saying He predetermined that destiny. Salvation has been offered to us because of what Christ has done for us, a plan worked out for us even before we were created. The only question is, How do we respond?

God chose beforehand that you should be saved; that is, His original plan was for you to be with Him forever in a new heaven and a new earth. Write out a prayer of thanksgiving and praise for this wonderful hope and what it means to you. Share it with the class on Sabbath.

Key Text: *Ephesians 1:4*

Teachers Aims:

1. To stress that God’s plan for our salvation existed even before we did.
2. To emphasize the centrality of Christ’s sacrifice to our salvation.
3. To understand that Christ’s salvation is available to all.

Lesson Outline:

I. Chosen by God (*Eph. 1:4-6*)

- A. God knew us and wanted us in His kingdom from the beginning.
- B. God’s decision to save His creation is not arbitrary but stems from His nature.
- C. We are predestined for salvation, not destruction.

II. Redeeming Blood (*Eph. 1:7*)

- A. Sin comes at a cost, and redemption for sin also comes at a cost.
- B. Sin leads to death, so in order for sin to be erased, a death must take place.
- C. Normally, it would be the sinner who dies for his or her sin. Christ has taken that death on Himself.

III. One Body (*Eph. 1:22, 23*)

- A. God’s ultimate plan is to unite all creation in Himself.
- B. As a foretaste of this, He brought all peoples together in His church.
- C. It is the Holy Spirit that unites all these people together in the one body of Christ, the church.

Summary: Before we existed, God knew and loved us. He had a plan that would enable us to know and love Him in return. That plan is what we see in the ministry of Christ and His sacrifice for us on the cross. God’s plan is the logical result of His nature and goodness. As Christians, we are to communicate our knowledge of God’s character to the world that doesn’t know Him.

COMMENTARY

In Greek, Ephesians 1:3-14 is one long sentence through which Paul offers a prayer of praise and thanksgiving. The doxology provides a panoramic, cosmic perspective of the plan of redemption: in heaven, on earth, and at the end of time.

I. Redemption: Planned in Heaven

Paul’s praise and thanksgiving begin where every believer’s day must begin and end: with an acknowledgment that God is the reason for our status as members of His family. He “blessed us” (*Eph. 1:3*), “hath chosen us” (*vs. 4*), “predestinated us unto the adoption of children” (*vs. 5*), “made us accepted” (*vs. 6*), and called us as instruments of “praise of His glory” (*vs. 12, NKJV*).

To which god is Paul referring at a time when there were, as

Praise God for Adopting Us (*Eph. 1:4-6*)

Read Ephesians 1:4-6. What are the three things God does for us as depicted in these verses?

● Verse 4

● Verse 5

● Verse 6

The church had its roots in the mind of God when He conceived the plan of salvation before the creation of the world. But who would form the church? Who would be participants of the family of God? Paul has already given a partial answer in Ephesians 1:4—those who were chosen in Christ to be “holy and without blame” and walk in love. “Chosen in Christ” does not indicate any arbitrary choice on the part of God but an acknowledgment of the divine provision, which provided salvation for the whole world but made it effective only to those who claimed it for themselves.

Salvation and eternal life are made available to all as a gift of God in Jesus (*John 3:16; Eph. 2:8, 9*), but only “whoever believes in Him” shall be saved. The universal nature of the gift is predestined. The contingent nature of the gift is determined by the choice of “whoever.”

Paul adds an additional thought: Those who accept God’s redemptive provision in Jesus are “predestined to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ” (*Eph. 2:5, NKJV*). Again, it’s not that God chose some and rejected others; instead, it’s that those who have accepted what Christ has done for them have simply fulfilled what was originally planned for them from the start.

Notice the emphasis on the idea of adoption (*vs. 5*). Why would Paul use such a term to describe what God has done for us? See also *Rom. 8:15, 16; Gal. 3:26-29; 4:5*.

God’s church is made up of adopted children. Natural children are orphans and prodigals—outside the family of God because of their sin and by their own choice to be in rebellion against God. But when they accept God’s predestined provision, they are adopted into God’s family. The relationship now becomes a family relationship, a relationship founded on love.

Think of someone you love. How does that relationship help you understand what your relationship with God, your adopted Father, should be?

today, “gods many, and lords many” (*1 Cor. 8:5*)? Not the Dianas of mythology. Not the refined gods of philosophy attractively packaged, such as the *unmoved mover* of Aristotle, the *idea of the good* of Plato, or the *first principle* of the intellectuals of all ages. Paul is speaking of the God who dwells “in heavenly places” (*Eph. 1:3*) but acted in history and space in the incarnation of Jesus Christ (*vs. 59*). He is God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and hence our Father “who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing . . . in Christ” (*Eph. 1:3, NKJV*). He is also the God who has sealed us “with that holy Spirit of promise” (*vs. 13*).

Thus, the Christian confession of Trinity—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—is at the core of the Christian rejoicing and thanksgiving for the salvation we experience. Without that confession in praise and prayer, our experience is meaningless and has no starting point.

II. Redemption: Executed on Earth

It is God’s activity on our behalf that moved Paul to pour out his heart in this magnificent expression of praise and thanksgiving. That activity is seen in the apostle’s usage of several words sprinkled throughout the doxology: *chosen*, *predestinated*, and *adoption*; *redemption*, *forgiveness*, and *inheritance* guaranteed and sealed by the Holy Spirit.

First, *chosen*, *predestinated*, and *adoption*. The apostle argues that God’s choosing us is not an afterthought. He had chosen us “in him before the foundation of the world” (*Eph. 1:4*). The key to God’s choice of us is “in him”—in Christ. “In the councils of heaven, before the world was created, the Father and the Son covenanted together that if man proved disloyal to God, Christ, one with the Father, would take the place of the transgressor, and suffer the penalty of justice that must fall upon him.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1070.

Through Jesus, God has chosen us and predestined us for adoption as His children. The biblical teaching of predestination does not mean that God has arbitrarily determined some would be saved and others would be lost. *Predestination* means that it is God’s will that salvation be available to all, but God does not determine who will accept that salvation and who will not. Acceptance is entirely dependent on human choice (*John 3:16*; see also *2 Pet. 3:9*). That acceptance leads to adoption as children of God’s family (*Rom. 8:13, 14*; *Eph. 2:5*).

Second, *redemption*, *forgiveness*, and *inheritance*. The three words belong together and center around God’s activity on the cross. God’s adoption of us as His children is dependent on His redemptive plan carried out through His Son on the cross. Paul is precise and does not dillydally as to how our redemption is obtained. Our sins are forgiven through the blood of Jesus shed on

Redemption in Christ *(Eph. 1:7, 8)*

According to Ephesians 1:7, 8, through what do we have redemption?

Can there be salvation for any of us without blood? *See Heb. 9:22.*

Redemption means deliverance of a slave through payment of a price. In the Scriptures, redemption means God's provision in Christ to save us from the bondage of sin. The shedding of Christ's blood on the cross for our sins has made possible not only the forgiveness of sin but also redemption and adoption into the family of God (*Gal. 4:4-6; Eph. 1:7, 8*). Without Christ, none of these would have been possible.

Forgiveness of sin is free for us; indeed, we cannot put a price on it or pay for it. But forgiveness on the part of God cost Him much: the blood of Jesus. Sin by its very nature brings death; where a sinner ought to die, a substitutionary death was necessary. In the Old Testament sanctuary system God provided forgiveness on the basis of shedding an animal's blood. The whole sacrificial system anticipated the day when Christ, "the lamb of God," would take away the sins of the world (*John 1:29*). Jesus on the cross paid the penalty for our sins. His shed blood makes forgiveness of sins possible (*Rom. 5:8, 9; Eph. 2:13; Col. 1:20*).

Our redemption and adoption are made possible by the Cross, which was "in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us" (*Eph. 1:7, 8, NIV*). Paul uses the word *riches* six times in Ephesians (*1:7, 18; 2:4, 7; 3:8, 16*). We may be poor and destitute in many ways, but we are bountifully rich in God's grace. We are free from the guilt of sin.

Someone asked a wealthy industrialist how much more would satisfy him. "Always a little more," the multimillionaire replied. Ask a Christian, and the answer will be: "My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (*Phil. 4:19, NKJV*).

"Grace is unmerited favor, and the believer is justified without any merit of his own, without any claim to offer to God. He is justified through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, who stands in the courts of heaven as the sinner's substitute and surety."—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 398. Memorize this Ellen White quote; it will come in handy, especially when you feel discouraged or in doubt about your salvation.

the cross. Without that shed blood, without a sinless Savior dying for the sins of the world, there is no forgiveness and no redemption (*Heb. 9:22*). Jesus' blood paid the penalty for our sins. When we accept that substitutionary death, our sins are forgiven, and we become eligible for the heavenly inheritance, sealed and made sure by the gift of the Holy Spirit. Take away the Cross, and we have no forgiveness, no salvation, no promise, and no sealing of the Spirit.

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Romans 8:15, 16; Ephesians 1:3-14; 2 Peter 3:9; Revelation 5:6-13*

❶ When we take tests in school, we often do not know the answers the teacher requires before she or he distributes the test. Christ invites us to give Him the answer He wants in response to His offer of salvation. He prepared for salvation even before He created us. How does *Romans 8:29, 30* help us understand the concept of predestination? What prevents us, our neighbors, and our work associates from choosing the response God wants?

❷ In our culture, adoption is an alternate route if a couple cannot conceive. In the heavenly realm, adoption is not an alternate choice but God's first choice. Have class members share what this means to them personally. How would you use *Romans 8:15, 16* and *Galatians 3:26-29* to describe heavenly adoption to a child or an acquaintance who does not understand that God values them?

❸ “Now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near” (*Eph. 2:13, NIV*). Discuss what it is like to be far away from God. Describe the difference between alienation from God and having a saving relationship with Him. Pray with your class for God to provide you all with opportunities to share your personal redemption stories this week with someone who really needs to hear about God's salvation.

❹ Imagine the sound of the siren on an emergency-response vehicle speeding to the site of an accident. What thoughts race through your mind? “God did not ordain that sin should exist, but He foresaw its existence, and made provision to meet the terrible emergency.” —Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 22. Why was it so critical that God should respond to our sin crisis? How does knowing that He prepared for our rescue (predestined our salvation) before sin occurred give you a mission for today and hope for the future?

The Mystery *(Eph. 1:9-12)*

Read Ephesians 1:9-12. Notice how many times in these few verses Paul talks about God’s will or purpose being fulfilled. Add them with how many times that same idea is found in the first eight verses of the chapter. How does this idea, that of God’s purposes being fulfilled for us, help you learn to trust Him?

God’s people have much to praise Him for: election, adoption, redemption, forgiveness, and acceptance. Today’s lesson adds one more: a great mystery that God has “made known to us . . . according to His good pleasure” (*vs. 9, NKJV*).

Paul uses the word *mystery* six times in Ephesians. The Greek term has two meanings: first, something secret and known only to a select few; second, something formerly hidden but now revealed by God. It is in the second sense Paul uses the word.

What is this “mystery” of the will of God that Paul talks about in Ephesians 1:9-12?

Ephesians 3 identifies it as God’s plan to bring Jews and Gentiles into one fellowship; that is, to create a common humanity without any divisions: a church without walls. But there is another dimension to this mystery. What Christ has accomplished through the Cross by bringing the Jew and Gentile into one body is only a foretaste of what God has “set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (*Eph. 1:9, 10, RSV*). Just as in “the fullness of the time” (*Gal. 4:4, NKJV*) God sent His Son to redeem and unite the Jew and the Gentile, so He has a plan to unite “all things in [Him]” (*Eph. 1:10, NKJV*) in the fullness of time—that is, when Christ comes the second time.

“This is the divine purpose—the restoration of a lost unity. It must necessarily be in Christ, because He is the center of all things. . . . The unity of God’s universe had been broken by sin. The mystery of God’s will was His plan to restore this unity when the occasion was ready, a restoration to be accomplished through Christ. That mystery will find its culmination at the end of the great controversy, when all things in heaven and on earth will be united in Christ, and the character of the Godhead will have been vindicated.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1000.

III. God's Eschatological Purpose

Paul's thanksgiving and praise are not only for what God has done in heavenly places or for what He accomplished through His Son in the earthly theater on the cross but also for what He will do in the future. That is, He will "gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him" (*Eph. 1:10*). Christian theology is incomplete without a conclusive eschatology. That means that the great controversy between God and Satan that caused disunity and conflict in heaven will finally see its fitting end—when all things will be united so that "one pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 678.

With the destruction of sin (Satan and the unrepentant sinners), the cosmic conflict will give way to cosmic unity. All created order

Witnessing

Bigotry. Prejudice. Intolerance. Hatred. These are emotionally charged and inflammatory words. Words that wound. Words that cut deeply into hearts and souls. Words that describe injustice to humanity. Words that should *never* linger on the tongues or reside in the hearts and minds of God's children.

Breaking down barriers, leveling the playing field, equalizing it all is what inclusion in God's remnant church brings to each member. Nurturing one another, uplifting one another, and loving one another *because of* (and not *in spite of*) our unique qualities and dissimilarities are the blending processes brought on by the mutual belief that each of us is God's child and special in His sight.

Two thousand years ago, the apostle Peter said, "Now I know it's true that God doesn't respect one person more than another. Anyone who loves Him and does what is right, He accepts as part of His people, no matter what nationality or race he or she belongs to." (*Acts 10:34, 35, The Clear Word*). The unity found within God's remnant church crosses all perceived racial, gender, age, and socioeconomic barriers. In a world torn apart by such separations, what a light we can, and must, be! How needed is our message of personhood in Christ!

Those around us watch carefully; they see when we practice what we preach and when we fail miserably. Our example can often be the clarifying moment for someone teetering on the edge of positive behavioral change. How we eliminate barriers that artificially separate people comes under close scrutiny by those who wish to discredit our Lord and His church. We have an awesome responsibility to live our lives in such clear terms that those around us will have no doubt we are an *inclusive* body of believers—a body of believers where there is room for all.

Jews and Gentiles *(Eph. 1:11-14)*

In Ephesians 1:11-13, Paul presents an example of the new unity Christ brings between Jews and Gentiles. He uses the words *we* and *you*—“we have obtained an inheritance” (*vs. 11, NKJV*); “we who first trusted in Christ” (*vs. 12, NKJV*); “you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth” (*vs. 13, NKJV*). The “we” refers to Jewish Christians with whom Paul identifies himself, and “you” refers to Gentile Christians.

In what sense were Jews first? God chose them first to be His inheritance (*Deut. 4:20, 9:29, Zech. 2:12*). To them were given “the oracles of God” (*Rom. 3:2, NKJV*). To them the gospel was preached first (*Rom. 1:16*), and, hence, the first to believe in the gospel were the Jews (*John 1:11, 8:31, Acts 1:8, 3:26*).

By saying Jews were the first, however, Paul does not attribute any superiority to Jewish Christians. Indeed, he says in Ephesians 1:13, “You [Gentile Christians] also trusted” (*NKJV*) and the Holy Spirit has become the guarantee of “our [both Jews and Gentiles] inheritance” (*vs. 14*).

In God’s kingdom, knowing Christ or coming to Christ first does not provide any special status. The point is not when we accepted the gospel but whether we remain true to its claims.

Paul reinforces the certainty of our inheritance by referring to the work of the Holy Spirit, to whom he gives three designations. *First, He is the Spirit of promise.* God promised the Spirit through Jesus to everyone who repents and believes (*Luke 24:49; Gal. 3:14, 16*). *Second, the Spirit is God’s seal.* A seal is a sign of ownership and authenticity. God makes the Spirit to dwell within us as a sign that we are His (*see also Rom. 8:14-17, 2 Cor. 1:22*). *Third, the Spirit is God’s guarantee.* The word *guarantee* is also translated “a deposit,” “a pledge.” Through the Spirit, God has made a deposit, a pledge, that He will fulfill all His promises to both Jews and Gentiles to “the praise of His glory” (*Eph. 1:14, NKJV*).

Though the exact experience of salvation varies from individual to individual, verses 13, 14 speak of three basic steps. Read through them and write down the processes as expressed there. In what ways have they reflected your own experience? In what ways was your own experience different? Is there anything you can do, or change, to deepen or enrich this experience? If so, what?

and the redeemed of the earth will hail the One who brought about the great victory and unity: “Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever” (*Rev. 5:13*).

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: As a child, were you ever given the opportunity to choose one puppy out of a litter? How did you decide which one would go home with you? Paul tells us we were chosen by God (*Eph. 1:4*). On what did God base His decision? How is God’s method of selection based on different criteria than human choices? Why is this such good news?

Thought Questions:

❶ “The whole world . . . followed the beast” (*Rev. 13:3, NIV*). Why would anyone follow a beast, much less the one described in Revelation 13? Discuss the great-controversy theme in your Sabbath School class. Why did God reveal this concept to humanity? How does this knowledge help us? If some of your work associates are following “the beast,” how can you redirect them to the Savior, using His methods of reaching people?

❷ Even before our children are born, we make plans for them. We think of colleges we would like them to attend so they can be successful in a respected profession. God predestined us to adoption (*see Eph. 1:5*). How do we alter God’s purpose for us? Why is it important to make a daily decision to be *in Christ*? Have class members share why they are thankful for the plans God has for them.

Application Question:

How do you begin letters (or emails) to close friends? Paul begins Ephesians with this salutation: “Praise be to the God . . . who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing” (*Eph. 1:3, NIV*). Reread Ephesians 1:3-14. Make a list of the blessings God desires to give us. What impact does it have on you knowing that God wants to bless you even though He has full knowledge of who you are? Design a worship service for your church in which your congregation can praise God for the good things He has “lavished on” us (*Eph. 1:8, NIV*). Talk with the pastor about when your class could present this program.

Further Study: “*Before the foundations of the world.*” “The plan for our redemption was not an afterthought, a plan formulated after the fall of Adam. It was a revelation of ‘the mystery which hath been kept in silence through times eternal.’ Rom. 16:25, R. V. It was an unfolding of the principles that from eternal ages have been the foundation of God’s throne. . . . God did not ordain that sin should exist, but He foresaw its existence, and made provision to meet the terrible emergency. So great was His love for the world, that He covenanted to give His only-begotten Son, ‘that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.’ John 3:16.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 22.

God’s predestination. “In the council of heaven, provision was made that men, though transgressors, should not perish in their disobedience, but, through faith in Christ as their substitute and surety, might become the elect of God, predestinated unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself according to the good pleasure of His will. God wills that all men should be saved. . . . Those who perish will perish because they refuse to be adopted as children of God through Christ Jesus.”—Ellen G. White *Comments, The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1114.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Have people read aloud the prayers of thanksgiving and praise they wrote in response to Sunday’s lesson. What have you learned from each other?
- ② Imagine what it must be like to be an orphan who is adopted into a loving, caring family that loves that orphan as much as it would a natural family member. How does that analogy help you (a) understand God’s love for you and (b) how you should treat your brothers and sisters in the Lord?
- ③ Discuss what you can do, as a class, to help someone in your church—maybe a new member or someone really discouraged or the young people—understand what it means to be part of God’s family.