

**Second Baptist Church of Doylestown**  
**Bible Study Notes: Ephesians**

*"Unity In Christ"*

6/26/13

**SUMMARY**

Following a brief salutation (1-2), Paul begins this epistle with an expression of praise to God for the spiritual blessings that are in Christ (3). In this doxology is a list of blessings divided into three sections. The first section describes those blessings related to the Father, how He has chosen us in Christ, predestined us to adoption as sons to Himself, and made us accepted in the Beloved (4-6). The second section focuses on those blessings in relation to the Son, e.g., redemption through His blood, forgiveness of sins, the revelation of His will concerning Jesus Christ, and the inheritance we have obtained, as predestined according to God's will (7-12). The third section describes blessings related to the Holy Spirit, how we are sealed with the Spirit of promise, and how He serves as a "guarantee" (or deposit) of our inheritance (13-14). The key phrase throughout this section is "in Him" (or "in Whom") which stresses the point that all spiritual blessing come through Jesus Christ and enjoyed by those who are "in" Him (cf. 1:1,3).

The last half of the chapter contains Paul's first of two prayers that are in this epistle. The prayer in this chapter is for their "enlightenment", that their knowledge and understanding might increase. Paul especially desires that they might know God more fully, what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the great power of God toward those who believe (15-19). Regarding this "power", it is the same power God used to raise Jesus from the dead and seat Him at His right hand. The exalted position now enjoyed by Christ includes authority over all things, especially the church which is described as "His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all." (20-23)

**I. INTRODUCTION (1-3)**

**EPHESIANS 1:1**

Paul wrote this letter to the Ephesian believers and all other believers to give them in-depth teaching about how to nurture and maintain the unity of the church. He wanted to put this important information in written form because he was in prison for preaching the Good News and could not visit the churches himself. The words "in Ephesus" are not present in some early manuscripts. Therefore, this was very likely a circular letter. It was first sent to Ephesus and then circulated to neighboring local churches. Paul mentions no particular problems or local situations, and he offers no personal greetings.

Paul had been a Christian for nearly 30 years. He had taken three missionary trips and established churches all around the Mediterranean Sea. When he wrote Ephesians, Paul was under house arrest in Rome (see Acts 28:16ff). Though a prisoner, he was free to have visitors and write letters.

Ephesus was one of the five major cities in the Roman Empire, along with Rome, Corinth, Antioch, and Alexandria. Paul first visited Ephesus on his second missionary journey (Acts 18:19-21). During his third missionary journey, he stayed there for almost three years (Acts 19). Paul later met again with the elders of the Ephesian church at Miletus (Acts 20:16-38). Ephesus was a commercial, political, and religious center for all of Asia Minor. The temple to the Greek goddess Artemis (Diana is her Roman equivalent) was located there.

"Faithful followers of Christ Jesus"—what an excellent reputation! Such a label would be an honor for any believer. What would it take for others to characterize you as a faithful follower of Christ Jesus? Hold fast to your faith, one day at a time; faithfully obey God, even in the details of life. Then, like the Ephesians, you will be known as a person who is faithful to the Lord.

#### EPHESIANS 1:3

"Who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms" means that in Christ we have all the benefits of knowing God—being chosen for salvation, being adopted as his children, forgiveness, insight, the gifts of the Spirit, power to do God's will, the hope of living forever with Christ. Because we have an intimate relationship with Christ, we can enjoy these blessings now. The "heavenly realms" means that these blessings are eternal, not temporal. The blessings come from Christ's spiritual realm, not the earthly realm of the goddess Artemis. Other references to the heavenly realms in this letter include 1:20; 2:6; 3:10. Such passages reveal Christ in his victorious, exalted role as ruler of all.

## II. OUR SPIRITUAL POSSESSIONS IN CHRIST (4-14)

#### EPHESIANS 1:4

Paul says that God "chose us" to emphasize that salvation depends totally on God. We are not saved because we deserve it but because God is gracious and freely gives salvation. We did not influence God's decision to save us; he saved us according to his plan. Thus, there is no way to take credit for our salvation or to allow room for pride. The mystery of salvation originated in the timeless mind of God long before we existed. It is hard to understand how God could accept us. But because of Christ, we are holy and blameless in his sight. God chose us, and when we belong to him through Jesus Christ, God looks at us as if we had never sinned. All we can do is express our thanks for his wonderful love.

#### EPHESIANS 1:5

God's "unchanging plan" is another way of saying that salvation is God's work and not our own doing. In his infinite love, God has adopted us as his own children. Through Jesus' sacrifice, he has brought us into his family and made us heirs along with Jesus (Romans 8:17). In Roman law, adopted children had the same rights and privileges as biological children, even if they had been slaves. Paul uses this term to show how strong our relationship to God is. Have you entered into this loving relationship with God?

#### EPHESIANS 1:7

To speak of Jesus' blood was an important first-century way of speaking of Christ's death. His death points to two wonderful truths—redemption and forgiveness. *Redemption* was the price paid to gain freedom for a slave (Leviticus 25:47-54). Through his death, Jesus paid the price to release us from slavery to sin. *Forgiveness* was granted in Old Testament times on the basis of the shedding of animals' blood (Leviticus 17:11). Now we are forgiven on the basis of the shedding of Jesus' blood—he died as the perfect and final sacrifice (see also Romans 5:9; Ephesians 2:13; Colossians 1:20; Hebrews 9:22; 1 Peter 1:19).

#### EPHESIANS 1:7, 8

God showered his kindness on us—this is also called God's "grace." This is his voluntary and loving favor given to those he saves. We can't earn salvation, nor do we deserve it. No religious, intellectual, or moral effort can gain it, because it comes only from God's mercy and love. Without God's grace, no person can be saved. To receive it, we must acknowledge that we cannot save ourselves, that only God can save us, and that our only way to receive this loving favor is through faith in Christ.

## EPHESIANS 1:9, 10

God was not intentionally keeping his plan a secret, but his plan for the world could not be fully understood until Christ rose from the dead. His purpose for sending Christ was to unite Jews and Gentiles in one body with Christ as the head. Many people still do not understand God's plan; but at the right time, he will bring us together to be with him forever. Then everyone will understand. On that day, all people will bow to Jesus as Lord, either because they love him or because they fear his power (see Philippians 2:10, 11).

## EPHESIANS 1:11

God's purpose is to offer salvation to the world, just as he planned to do long ago. God is sovereign; he is in charge. When your life seems chaotic, rest in this truth: Jesus is Lord, and God is in control. God's purpose to save you cannot be thwarted, no matter what evil Satan may bring.

## EPHESIANS 1:13, 14

The Holy Spirit is God's guarantee that we belong to him and that he will do what he has promised. The Holy Spirit is like a down payment, a deposit, a validating signature on the contract. The presence of the Holy Spirit in us demonstrates the genuineness of our faith, proves that we are God's children, and secures eternal life for us. His power works in us to transform us now, and what we experience now is a taste of the total change we will experience in eternity.

### **III. PAUL'S FIRST PRAYER: FOR THEIR ENLIGHTENMENT (15-23)**

## EPHESIANS 1:16, 17

Paul prayed that the Ephesians would know Christ better. Christ is our model, and the more we know of him, the more we will be like him. Study Jesus' life in the Gospels to see what he was like on earth nearly 2,000 years ago, and get to know him. Personal knowledge of Christ will change your life.

## EPHESIANS 1:19, 20

The world fears the power of the atom, yet we belong to the God of the universe, who not only created that atomic power but also raised Jesus Christ from the dead. God's incomparably great power is available to help you. There is nothing too difficult for him.

EPHESIANS 1:20-22 Having been raised from the dead, Christ is now the head of the church, the ultimate authority over the world. Jesus is the Messiah, God's anointed one, the one Israel longed for, the one who would set their broken world right. As Christians we can be confident that God has won the final victory and is in control of everything. We need not fear any dictator or nation or even death or Satan himself. The contract has been signed and sealed; we are waiting just a short while for delivery. Paul says, in Romans 8:37-39, that nothing can separate us from God and his love.

## EPHESIANS 1:22, 23

Christ fills the church with gifts and blessings. The church should be the full expression of Christ, who himself fills everything (see 3:19). When reading Ephesians, it is important to remember that it was written primarily to the entire church, not merely to an individual. Christ is the head, and we are the body of his church (Paul uses this metaphor in Romans 12:4, 5; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27; and Colossians 3:15 as well as throughout the book of Ephesians). The image of the body shows the church's unity. Each member is involved with all the others as they go about doing Christ's work on earth. We should not attempt to work, serve, or worship merely on our own. We need the entire body.