

Small Group Study Guide
PEACE WITH GOD IS POSSIBLE
Ephesians 1
August 8, 2010

Leader's Notes

PLEASE NOTE: These “Leader’s Notes” are a resource to the Small Group Leader to help you in preparing for this study. They are meant to be supplemental. You do not need to cover all the information in these notes with your group. They are simply provided as a resource to you.

Welcome and Introduction:

- Encourage group members to bring their study guide with them that they use on Sunday to take notes on the sermon, but also have extra copies available in case they forget.

- Open with prayer.

A Closer Look:

The following notes are to help you better understand the passages you will be looking at in this study.

Notes from ESV Study Bible on Ephesians 1:

Eph. 1:1 apostle. See note on Rom. 1:1. Paul expresses his authority simply but powerfully: he is an apostle of Christ Jesus. **saints.** The saints (“holy ones” or “consecrated people”) are the faithful members of God's people. In Ephesians, Paul clearly uses the term for all members of the church (Eph. 1:15, 18; 2:19; 3:8; 4:12; 6:18), who are directly called to be holy (1:4; 5:3) and are **faithful in Christ Jesus. in Ephesus.** It is best to read these words as original even though they are missing in several early manuscripts. The esv alternative footnote reading, “saints who are also faithful,” is less likely because it is clumsy in Greek and because the phrase “saints who are” normally expects a place name like “in Ephesus,” rather than “also faithful.” Some scholars who believe Ephesians is a circular letter suggest that the words “in Ephesus” were deleted in the copies that were sent to places outside of Ephesus. On Ephesus, see Introduction: The Ancient City of Ephesus.

Eph. 1:1–14 Introduction. Paul opens his letter with greetings (vv. 1–2) and a lengthy blessing of God (vv. 3–14) where he expresses the two main themes of

the letter: Christ has reconciled all of creation and has united the church in himself.

Eph. 1:1–2 Greetings. This salutation is briefer than many in Paul's letters. Paul saves his richest introductory remarks for the long blessing of God in vv. 3–14.

Eph. 1:3 Blessed be. The blessing that opens Paul's prayer is similar to those that began first-century Jewish prayers that were commonly recited throughout the day (cf. 2 Cor. 1:3; 1 Pet. 1:3). **in Christ.** Paul's praise emphasizes the mediation of Christ for all God's blessings by repeating that these good things are ours "in Christ" (Eph. 1:3, 9), "in the Beloved" (v. 6), or "in him" (vv. 4, 7, 11, 13). **Spiritual** (Gk. *pneumatikos*) here communicates that the saving gifts of God are conveyed by the Holy Spirit (Gk. *Pneuma*), whose personal presence throughout this age is the guarantee of future heavenly blessings (see "spiritual songs" in 5:19; Col. 3:16). Hence, these blessings are in **heavenly places**, since that is the Christian's future abode in imperishable glory when he is resurrected in a spiritual body through the "last Adam," the "life-giving spirit" (1 Cor. 15:40, 44–50).

Eph. 1:3–14 Spiritual Blessings in Christ. In the original Greek, this section is one long, elegant sentence. Paul shows that the triune God initiated and accomplished cosmic reconciliation and redemption for the praise of his glory.

Eph. 1:4 He chose us in him means that the Father chose Christians in the Son (Christ), and this took place in eternity past, **before the foundation of the world**. This indicates that for all eternity the Father has had the role of leading and directing among the persons of the Trinity, even though Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are equal in deity and attributes. God's initiative in redeeming the believer from sin and death was not an arbitrary or whimsical decision but something God had planned all along "in Christ." Since God chose his people in his love, they can take no credit for their salvation. God was determined to have them as his own (see note on 2:8). **holy.** God chose them with the goal that they be holy and **blameless before him**. This goal is not optional for Christians—it is the purpose of election. Holiness here expresses moral purity, while blamelessness expresses freedom from the guilt of trespasses and sins in which the Christian formerly walked (1:7; 2:1, 5). **In love**, at the end of 1:4, properly belongs to v. 5, describing predestination, though the esv footnote indicates that "in love" can also be taken with the preceding phrase ("that we should be holy and blameless before him in love"). Versification was introduced into Bibles in the sixteenth century A.D. for convenience and is not part of the original inspired text.

Eph. 1:5 predestined. Previously ordained or appointed to some position. God's election of Christians (v. 4) entails his predestining them *to* something—in this case to **adoption as sons** (see also v. 11; Rom. 8:29–30). Hence, election and predestination in this context refer to God's decision to save someone. All Christians, male and female, are "sons" in the sense of being heirs who will inherit blessings from their Father in heaven. Paul qualifies and stresses God's

plan and initiation of redemption with the phrase **according to the purpose of his will** here and elsewhere in the passage (Eph. 1:9, 11). God cannot be constrained by any outside force, and his inexorable will for believers is to pour out his grace and goodness on them in Christ Jesus.

Eph. 1:6 God's ultimate purpose is not redemption as such but the **praise** of his glorious name through redemption. This theme is repeated at key junctures in the argument (see vv. 12, 14).

Eph. 1:7 Redemption denotes ransoming someone from captivity or from slavery. The supreme OT example was the exodus, where God redeemed Israel from slavery in Egypt (see Ex. 15:13; Deut. 7:8; 2 Sam. 7:23; Mic. 6:4).

Forgiveness of our trespasses explains the nature of redemption: Christians are freed from slavery to sin and guilt. This was effected by Christ's **blood**, which means his death as an atoning sacrifice (see also Rom. 3:24; Eph. 1:14; 2:13; 4:30; Heb. 9:15).

Eph. 1:9 Mystery as used in Scripture (Gk. *mystērion*) refers to the revelation of something that was previously hidden or known only vaguely but now is more fully made known (see note on Col. 1:26–27). The mystery of God's will, now revealed **in Christ**, is “to unite all things in him” (Eph. 1:10; see also 3:3–11).

Eph. 1:10 fullness of time. “When the time was ripe,” i.e., the time for the fulfillment of God's plan. **unite.** This is the central theme of the passage: God has effected cosmic reconciliation in Christ. The work of Christ on the cross is the central axis for the history of creation, whether **in heaven** or **on earth** (see also Col. 1:15–20), since he has redeemed his people and silenced all hostile powers (see Eph. 3:10).

Eph. 1:11 Obtained an inheritance seems the best rendering of the Greek verb that normally means “to allot [a portion].” Some believe the meaning is that God has claimed his own portion, the believing Jews (see v. 14). **predestined.** Making those who believe in him heirs with Christ was not an ad hoc event; God had planned it from all eternity. By definition God is sovereign, directing all things freely according to his royal counsel. This is in sharp contrast with the pagan gods of the time, who were understood to be often fickle or bound by an inscrutable and arbitrary fate. God's predestination gives his people tremendous comfort, for they know that all who come to Christ do so through God's enabling grace and appointment (see 2:8–10). **Who works all things according to the counsel of his will** is best understood to mean that every single event that occurs is in some sense predestined by God. At the same time, Paul emphasizes the importance of human responsibility, as is evident in all of the moral commands later in Ephesians (chs. 4–6) and in all of Paul's letters. As Paul demonstrated in all of his remarkable efforts in spreading the gospel (Acts 13–28; cf. 2 Cor. 11:23–28), he believed that doing personal evangelism and making conscious choices to obey God are also absolutely essential in fulfilling God's

plan. God uses human means to fulfill what he has ordained. With regard to tragedies and evil, Paul and the other biblical writers never blame God for them (cf. Rom. 5:12; 2 Tim. 4:14; also Job 1:21–22). Rather, they see the doctrine of God's sovereignty as a means of comfort and assurance (cf. Rom. 8:28–30), confident that evil will not triumph, and that God's good plans for his people will be fulfilled. How God's sovereignty and human responsibility work together in the world is a mystery no one can fully understand.

Eph. 1:12 praise. See note on v. 6.

Eph. 1:13 Sealed can mean either that the Holy Spirit protects and preserves Christians until they reach their inheritance (see 4:30; 2 Cor. 1:22; 1 Pet. 1:5; Rev. 7:2–3) or that he “certifies” the authenticity of their acceptance by God as being genuine—they bear the “royal seal” (see John 3:33; Acts 10:44, 47). The first interpretation seems best here, though both ideas are biblically true.

Eph. 1:14 God pours out his Holy Spirit on all of his children to **guarantee** (or to provide a “down payment” on [esv footnote]) their share in his eternal kingdom because he applies to them all God's powerful working in redemption. **until we acquire possession of it.** This phrase can also be rendered “until God redeems his possession” (esv footnote). In that case it means that, like the Levites in the OT, believers are the Lord's specially treasured possession (see Num. 3:12, 45; 8:14; Josh. 14:3–4; 18:7).

Eph. 1:15 because I have heard. See Introduction: Author and Title.

Eph. 1:15–23 Paul's Prayer of Thanksgiving. This section, like vv. 3–14, is a single sentence in the original Greek. Paul prays that the church will gain deep insight into the Lord's powerful working and rich gifts in Christ.

Eph. 1:16 do not cease ... in my prayers. See note on 6:18.

Eph. 1:17 To name **the Father of glory** as **the God of our Lord Jesus Christ** is not to deny Christ's deity but to affirm his true incarnate humanity. Further, it expresses that Christians know God through the Lord Jesus as their mediator. **Spirit of wisdom** refers to the Holy Spirit's secret working in Christians to give them insights into God's Word and the saving knowledge of him (1 Cor. 2:6–12).

Eph. 1:18–19 Paul prays that believers will comprehend the blessings that are theirs in Christ: (1) their future **hope**; (2) God's **inheritance in the saints**; and (3) their **power** in Christ. The “inheritance” here is not the Christian's inheritance but **his** (God's). This indicates how precious his people are to God. They are, so to speak, what he looks forward to enjoying forever. Paul piles up “power words” to express the **immeasurable greatness** of God's power, **working**, and **great might** toward believers. Power over supernatural forces through magic and the

occult was a great concern in ancient Ephesus (Acts 19:19), but the power of the living God in Christ trumps all competing authorities (Acts 19:20).

Eph. 1:22 put all things. Paul quotes Ps. 8:6 as being fulfilled by Christ's exaltation over all creation and as head over the church. **head.** Like a present-day "head of government," this term points to Christ's preeminence as Lord (see note on 1 Cor. 11:3).

Eph. 1:23 body. Christ has so identified himself with his church that it is said to be his very body, much as Adam described Eve as "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Gen. 2:23) and as God declared man and wife to be "one flesh" (see note on Eph. 5:28–30). **fullness.** The church, filled by Christ, fills all creation as representatives of Christ.