

OneBook.

DAILY-WEEKLY

The Letter to the Ephesians

Fredrick J. Long



THE LETTER OF PAUL TO THE EPHESIANS

...of Christ Jesus by
...who are* also faithful*
...and peace from God
...the Lord Jesus Christ,
...the God and Father of
...Christ, who has blessed
...with every spiritual blessing
...in heaven, I gave to us
...the administration of the
...secret which he kept
...in himself, that he
...should make known to us
...his will, according to his
...good pleasure which he
...purposeth in himself,
...that we should bring forth
...the fruit of good works,
...which are prepared of God
...beforehand, that we should
...walk in them, as we have
...seen in love.
...He destined us in love* to be his sons through Jesus
...Christ, according to the purpose of his
...will, so that he might bestow on us the
...riches of his grace freely, in order that
...he might glorify himself through us in all
...goodness, according to the riches of his
...grace which he bestows on us in all
...wisdom and insight, making known to us
...the mystery of his will, according to his
...good pleasure which he purposed in
...himself, that we should bring forth the
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...of God before-hand, that we should walk
...in them, as we have seen in love.

A TWELVE-WEEK BIBLE STUDY

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Fredrick J. Long



Seedbed

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WELCOME TO THE ONEBOOK DAILY-WEEKLY

John Wesley, in a letter to one of his leaders, penned the following,

O begin! Fix some part of every day for private exercises. You may acquire the taste which you have not: what is tedious at first, will afterwards be pleasant.

Whether you like it or not, read and pray daily. It is for your life; there is no other way; else you will be a trifler all your days. . . . Do justice to your own soul; give it time and means to grow. Do not starve yourself any longer. Take up your cross and be a Christian altogether.

Rarely are our lives most shaped by our biggest ambitions and highest aspirations. Rather, our lives are most shaped, for better or for worse, by those small things we do every single day.

At Seedbed, our biggest ambition and highest aspiration is to resource the followers of Jesus to become lovers and doers of the Word of God every single day; to become people of One Book.

To that end, we have created the OneBook: Daily-Weekly. First, it's important to understand what this is not: warm and fuzzy sentimental devotions. If you engage the Daily-Weekly for any length of time, you will learn the Word of God. You will grow profoundly in your love for God, and you will become a passionate lover of people.

How does the Daily-Weekly work?

Daily. As the name implies, every day invites a short but substantive engagement with the Bible. Five days a week you will read a passage of Scripture followed by a short segment of teaching and closing with a question for reflection and self-examination. On the sixth day, you will review and reflect on the prior five days.

Weekly. Each week, on the seventh day, find a way to gather with at least one other person doing the study. Pursue the weekly guidance for gathering.

Share learning, insight, encouragement, and most important, how the Holy Spirit is working in your lives.

That's it. Depending on the length of the study, when the eight or twelve weeks are done, we will be ready with the next study. On an ongoing basis we will release new editions of the Daily-Weekly. Over time, those who pursue this course of learning will develop a rich library of Bible learning resources for the long haul.

OneBook Daily-Weekly will develop eight- and twelve-week studies that cover the entire Old and New Testaments. Seedbed will publish new studies regularly so that an ongoing supply of group lessons will be available. All titles will remain accessible, which means they can be used in any order that fits your needs or the needs of your group.

If you are looking for a substantive study to learn Scripture through a steadfast method, look no further.

WEEK ONE

Ephesians 1:1–14

God's Great Plan: A Holy People

INTRODUCTION

The apostle Paul had a vision for how God was accomplishing his purposes for the world through the gospel of his beloved Son. Paul constantly related the work of Christ to God's expressed goals for humanity as revealed in Scripture. Paul's Scripture was, of course, the Jewish Scriptures, the Old Testament. At the same time, Paul understood the relevancy of the gospel, that is, the implications it had for believers living in the world. At the core, we see in Ephesians Paul's combination of Jewish scriptural understandings of God and God's revelation of Christ with first-century political conceptions of right rule and the right to rule. Thus, Ephesians in many ways represents Paul's statement of God's political vision for the world, but only as understood through the lens (or the revelation) of Jesus as the crucified Messiah.

This wonderful vision is clearly set forth in the opening fourteen verses of Ephesians. After Paul introduced himself, identified the letter recipients, and offered initial greetings (1:1–2), he unleashed one large sentence spanning twelve verses (1:3–14) in the underlying Greek text. Our English translations struggle to break the thoughts into separate, sensible sentences for us. But, we must ask, Why would Paul begin a letter in this fashion, with such a long, exuberant sentence? Well, there are two good reasons.

First, Paul expressed lavish praise on God with a corresponding lavish rhetorical style. He used a manner of speaking that his audiences in Ephesus and the surrounding region would have appreciated, especially when it came to honoring and praising politicians, such as kings, military commanders, and most recently and importantly, the Roman emperors. So, Paul's opening

sentence to the Ephesians, which praises God's gifts, graces, peace, and salvation, essentially compares God's plan of salvation in Christ to the contemporary practice of praising emperors as human gods for their gifts, graces, peace, and salvation! Paul's language here occupies the same playing field of god(s) and politics. Yet, for Paul, this was not an even playing field, since God has placed Christ "far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come" (1:21). Yet, we should pay attention to where, how, and why Paul shows God in Christ surpassing all other religious and political claims.

Second, Paul's long sentence in 1:3–14 begins and ends with an allusion to a central goal of God's in the Old Testament: God has "chose[n] us [for himself] . . . to be holy and blameless before him" (Eph. 1:4) who are his "own possession" (Eph. 1:14 NASB). By beginning and ending with this central Old Testament theme of God having a holy people as his special possession, Paul was thus affirming that God has now realized this goal through the gospel of Jesus Christ. Surprisingly, this holy people includes both Jews and non-Jewish Gentiles together in one body since both groups receive the same graces, gifts, and benefits of Christ's sacrifice and the promised Holy Spirit. So, Ephesians 1:1–14 presents us with a summary of God's plan for humanity, which fulfills God's heart intention as found in the Old Testament.

ONE

Paul's Conduit Piping

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

Understanding the Word. We can think of the apostle Paul as someone laying down electrical conduit piping, connecting people to God. Of course, God had started the connection and energized and electrified the connection through Jesus. But Paul's work was to lay down more and more line, to bring more and more people into contact with God and to help them stay connected and properly grounded. Even though some people thought Paul was running

his own business, Paul understood himself to have been “sent out” directly by the Boss—that is what the word “apostle” means. An apostle is an official representative of someone superior; Paul understood his superior to be the Master Electrician, Christ Jesus. Now, the interesting thing about Paul was that he was initially an unwilling worker. He rabidly (think, “big dog foaming at the mouth”) persecuted the church (see Acts 8:1–3), but then was converted and accepted his important role as an apostle, representing Jesus to others. This was his official capacity. Paul was so convinced of this fact that he could say, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1).

For Paul to be an apostle and represent Jesus, connecting people to God, took some guts. Okay, lots of guts. But Paul understood that he was acting according to God's will. God stood behind him. What Paul meant by this is that God had dramatically called him to a special task, to preach the gospel to all the nations. We can read about his calling and God's purpose for him in Acts 9:15–16. God had prepared, authorized, sent, and packaged Paul to preach the good news of Jesus Christ.

Now, how exactly did Paul help people stay connected to God in Jesus? Well, he did so through evangelizing and teaching them. But afterward, he had to leave to lay down more conduit elsewhere. So, he would send coworkers back to check up on his work; he would also return himself, as he was able (between jobs). But a very important way that he would help to keep people connected was through writing letters. Letters can convey the heart of a person, and have the benefit of being read again and read again and read again, to more and more people.

So, Paul was a letter writer. Paul's letters began in the standard way, by indicating sender(s) and recipient(s). Here in 1:1 we see that Paul was sending the letter alone, with no one else, which was not always the case (compare Galatians 1:1–2 and 2 Corinthians 1:1). We may assume that he had a letter secretary to write for him; and he indicated that he was writing as a prisoner (see Ephesians 3:1, 13). He wrote to “the saints” (1:1), or “the holy ones.”

What can be communicated by the simple greeting “Grace . . . and peace”? Most people may not realize that this greeting is multicultural: it involved a converted Greek greeting (“grace”) along with a Jewish greeting (“peace”). Paul made clear that the grace and peace he offered was from the Boss (God the Father) and the Boss's Son (the Lord Jesus Christ). So, importantly, Paul

began each of his letters by acknowledging both Greek and Jewish cultures and identifying who lies behind the grace and the peace. You will see these two terms several more times as you read through Ephesians.

1. How far did Paul go to represent Jesus to other people? How far do you go?
2. How did Paul help people get connected to God and stay connected to God?
3. How might your greetings be more inclusive of others to convey God's grace and peace?

TWO

The Blessings of Being Back in the Family

Ephesians 1:3–6 *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, ⁴just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. ⁵He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.*

Understanding the Word. Paul leads us, like a worship leader, to praise God. We are asked to join Paul in attributing blessedness to God. It is worth pausing to think about how greatly God is blessed and to be blessed. God is the source of all blessings that flow through Jesus Christ. In many ways, the entire epistle of Ephesians elaborates on the multidimensional nature of the blessings that come from God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, first mentioned here in 1:3. It is important for us to understand that the blessedness offered to us is relational—it is not material; too often, we selfishly (let's just admit it!) think in material terms. But we must pay attention to how Paul delineated God's blessings here, which are spiritual and in the heavenly realms. The blessings pertain to belonging, having a significant purpose, and

being caught up in something worthwhile that is bigger than ourselves. The good news of Jesus delivers on these blessings. Here we will focus on the blessing of belonging.

We belong. We are family; we are God's children when we are adopted into God's family. There is nothing that we could add to make this happen; God has provided it all. God has made it happen, and God invites our embrace of the truth on the matter. I find that this reality—my adoption into God's loving presence and family—is the core of my struggle in this world. It is hard to accept it freely; I want to earn it, to confirm it, to legitimate and justify myself in it. However, God supplies all the legitimacy, all the sufficiency, all the grace for this complete reality even to occur.

In the ancient Greco-Roman world, there was no stigma attached with adoption whatsoever, which carried with it the full rights of parental access and inheritance. Even the emperors Augustus, Tiberius, and Nero, living in the first century, were gladly adopted—it allowed each to become the reigning new emperor! As Paul explained, believers in Christ will reign with Jesus, seated in the heavenly realms with him, experiencing the wealth of God's grace and kindness (see 2:6–7)! So, as important as adoption is, it matters more *whose* you are, *whose* family you belong to, and *who* else belongs with you. The good news is that God has placed Jesus at the head of the family—each of us stands accountable to him and each of us stands equal before him. Your family line, your ancestry, your history are all made relative to God's history and God's family. It was God's plan all along (even as God foresaw our falling from grace) gladly to adopt us all back into the family as his children.

But the fact that we *must* be adopted back into the family presupposes that we all first find ourselves estranged and outside the family of God. Indeed, we are outside, if left to our own vices (see 2:1–3; 4:17–19). But God is fully pleased, fully prepared, to adopt us back into the family, fully ready to extend grace to each of us, to make the transaction official and true—that is what the Holy Spirit signifies to us, that we belong (see 1:14). This restoration and reentry can only happen because of the beloved Son, Jesus. And so our role in all this is to receive the grace, to come home, to receive the blessings and give praise for the glorious grace that restores us back to God, back to our family responsibilities to be holy and blameless in love before God. God likes this, because he “wants all people to be saved” (1 Tim. 2:4 NIV).

1. How does your understanding of blessedness match with Paul's statements here?
2. What characteristics of God lead you to praise him? Why does Paul lead us to praise God?
3. What does it mean that God wants you and everyone else to be in his family? How is this possible?

THREE

Christ's Sacrifice Reveals God's Will

Ephesians 1:7–10 *In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace ⁸that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight ⁹he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, ¹⁰as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.*

Understanding the Word. We have “redemption” through Christ’s blood. This term refers to a purchase or a ransom paid. We were held captive, and God bailed us out. We receive forgiveness for our missteps, for our transgressions, for our hurtful actions. God’s buy-back plan, however, doesn’t leave us where we were. We are set free. When someone is ransomed, he or she is released. We don’t pay the large sum of money only to leave someone captive. This is how God does it too. In fact, God’s transaction to redeem and forgive corresponds with the great wealth of his grace—his grace is bottomless and limitless.

So much of our walk with God depends on his grace. But the good news is that God is not stingy with it. Instead, as 1:8 indicates, he “lavished [it] on us.” God is like the Father who receives back a rebellious son living on the streets; although that son would be content to remain well fed with a roof over his head, God lavishes upon us the full restoration of relationship so that we can know for certain that we are his sons and daughters (see 2 Corinthians 6:18).

But is grace experienced if it is not known? Jesus Christ is the linchpin to God’s grace revealed; Christ is God’s marvelous and mysterious instrument of revelation. In the middle of verse 8, the prepositional phrase “With all wisdom

and insight” should be understood as modifying “lavished . . . us”; there should be no period before it. Grace becomes lavished to the extent that the person knows about it, and elsewhere in Scripture this is affirmed. Peter said, “Grace and peace *be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord*” (2 Peter 1:2 NKJV; emphasis added). The more we know about God and Jesus and what they have done for us, the more we understand God’s grace. God doesn’t want it to be a mystery; it’s for our good that grace is revealed.

At the core of it, God has freed us from the darkness and revealed himself. That is the nature of God: to reveal, but yet not to force himself and his ways onto us. He respects our distance, but in the midst of a crisis, he presents himself to save us. When we watch children play with other children, we may sometimes need to let the playing get ugly to see how it resolves (it’s not easy to do!). Why? Because important lessons are learned. But we watch intently, ready to come in to save. Just when and how God has chosen to save is marvelous for us to ponder—because God shows a new way to be in the world that does not involve hating and killing our enemies. Instead, the good pleasure of God’s will is to save; he wants all people to be saved. Christ is the linchpin to this plan, the one fulfilling God’s plan to reconcile all things to himself.

1. How does your understanding of God’s grace match up with Paul’s description here?
2. How do you understand God to be active in the world, yet respecting our free will?
3. How is Jesus the linchpin to God’s saving work?

FOUR

Inheritance Rights and Privileges

Ephesians 1:11–12 *In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, ¹²so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory.*

Understanding the Word. For those living in poverty, who have no land of their own, who are out of the mainstream of power and influence, whose family may have abandoned them altogether—Paul’s opening statement in 1:11 would be unbelievable: “we have also obtained an inheritance.” This is too good to be true! I suspect that most of us who are reading this OneBook study cannot fully understand the magnitude of the statement. But in Paul’s day, a good number of people—the majority of those living in the Mediterranean world—had no such hope. They were renters, squatters, or slaves, with no hope of making any real gains in the world, let alone having any inheritance that meant anything. And yet, in support of this claim that we have obtained an inheritance, Paul piled up descriptors such as “destined,” “purpose,” “accomplishes all things,” “counsel,” and “will.” What he was trying to communicate is that *our inheritance is as certain as it gets*.

But what kind of inheritance are we talking about? We need to remember the context and where he will further describe our future (see esp. 2:4–7). Paul began and ended 1:3–14 with references to God’s plan to have a “holy” people as his “own possession” (NET). The Old Testament texts that Paul had in mind are from Exodus and Deuteronomy, where God was giving the Law as a covenant agreement with Abraham’s descendants for living in the new land. Moses was addressing Israel just as the Jewish nation was ready to take possession of this inheritance that God had granted. Under the Mosaic covenant, the inheritance was the land of Israel; however, as God sent prophets to help the people of Israel understand more and more his purposes, it becomes more and more clear that the inheritance is the whole earth, and not simply one strip of land. Moreover, the land was simply a covenant benefit that now has been expanded.

Was God more concerned about the land inheritance or the people inheriting the land? All along God has been more interested in having a people uniquely his own. The gift of the land was always subordinate to God’s larger plan of having a holy people who would be numerous and would bless the nations. In Christ, there is a return to God’s original purposes to inhabit the whole earth and bless the nations. Thus, Jesus said, “Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5 NASB). Just when and how this inheritance will happen is in God’s hands, but it will extend for ages and ages (see Ephesians 2:6–7); our responsibility here and now is to be faithful in carrying out God’s purposes.

The purpose of God’s gift of inheriting is expressed in 1:12. Paul used a very marked Greek construction to express this: “in order that we, who were

the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory” (NIV). Here, I think, Paul affirmed a fundamental aspect of human existence: we were made for relationship with God that involves bringing glory to God. Humans are manifestations of God's image, and to the extent that we reflect that image, we reflect the glory of God's image. When God adopts us back into his family and establishes our certain inheritance, we respond by praising him. This is our privilege as fully restored sons and daughters.

1. What inheritance do you look forward to?
2. How are you able to trust the certainty of God's will and purposes?
3. What are ways that you live for the praise of God's glory?

FIVE

Marked for Life

Ephesians 1:13–14 *In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; ¹⁴this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.*

Understanding the Word. Paul began verse 13 with another “in him,” referring to Jesus Christ. Throughout 1:3–14 Paul used this and equivalent expressions eleven times. Indeed, Christ is the key that unlocks God's will and divulges God's plan. Paul here singled out the audience as “you also.” It's as if he added them here explicitly into the conversation that they had been hearing. He particularly had in mind non-Jews, or Gentiles, whom he affirmed as also included among God's “own people,” in Greek literally, God's “acquired possession.” This fact—that non-Jews are now included in God's plans explicitly—was good news.

So important was this news that Paul described the exact steps involved in the process of the Gentiles' conversion to Christ: first *hearing*, then *believing*, then *being marked* with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit. What they *heard* was “the word of truth” further described as “the gospel of . . . salvation.” The word “gospel” referred to the announcement of political good news such as when there was a military victory or when a new king was inaugurated. Well,

Jesus won the victory over sin, oppression, and death in the world and brought salvation; and Jesus was indeed heralded as King of kings and Lord of lords. That Paul referred to this good news as “the word of truth” reminds us that the gospel is objectively true, not just subjectively true for some people in some places and times. The gospel is true for all people; it brings God’s salvation to everyone—there is no restriction to race, ethnicity, gender, social status, or any other label by which we could subdivide and categorize people. The gospel is enjoyed by non-Jews also, the Gentiles and the nations. God is not a respecter of persons, but loves and seeks after all people. Jesus came to seek and save what was lost (see Luke 19:10).

The next step in the process is *believing*. The verb for “believing” has more to do with trusting and being convinced of something on a good basis than with blind faith. So, believing is not simply intellectual assent, but active trusting, where one is all in and fully committed. Of course, we believers will grow more and more into this complete trust as we experience God as faithful. God shows himself again and again as trustworthy

Finally, the last step is *being marked* with the Holy Spirit. This verb designates the official marking of documents with signet rings for various legal purposes: wills, letters, receipts, and so forth. By analogy, believers get officially marked, which is a pledge or guarantee of their future inheritance. Paul here described the coming of the Holy Spirit as “sealing” believers. Some people will misunderstand this sealing to mean that believers are locked in and cannot turn away from God; they miss the metaphor. We are legitimate and official, bearing God’s mark. Scripture is clear that people who have shared in the Holy Spirit can tragically walk away from the Lord (see Hebrews 6:4–6). In Ephesians Paul used the verb “sealed” to stress the official, royal, divine marking of the believers (esp. Gentiles) to signify their authenticity. There is no doubt whose we are and to whom we belong. Moreover, the Holy Spirit empowers believers to truly live “to the praise of [God’s] glory.”

1. How is the gospel good news for all people?
2. Why would Paul stress the official legitimacy of believers, and especially Gentile believers?
3. What in life most leaves its mark on you? In what way does God want to leave his mark on you?

WEEK ONE

GATHERING DISCUSSION OUTLINE

- A. Open session in prayer.
- B. View video for this week's readings.
- C. What general impressions and thoughts do you have after considering the video, readings, and the daily writings on these Scriptures?
- D. Discuss questions based on the daily readings.

1. **KEY OBSERVATION:** God has gone to extremes to reach out to people. Jesus called Paul, a persecutor of God's people, to become an apostle. He equipped him and sent him out. Then Paul represented Jesus Christ to others. As he wrote letters, he acknowledged different cultural greetings, but in greeting Jew and Gentile, he pointed them to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

DISCUSSION QUESTION: How did Paul help people get connected to God and stay connected to God?

2. **KEY OBSERVATION:** God's blessings flow out of Jesus Christ. They are particularly spiritual in nature and in the heavenly realms. God has strategically placed Jesus in the heavenly realms for our benefit. One particular blessing is God's realization of having a people that are holy and blameless in love. Such a people have been adopted back into God's family as full sons and daughters of God, with all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities appertaining thereto.

DISCUSSION QUESTION: What does it mean that God wants you and everyone else to be in his family? How is this possible?

3. **KEY OBSERVATION:** God's grace saves us, but in a vulnerable way. It was costly, but God was well pleased to send Christ into the world to die for us and pay the ransom. In this costly act, God's will is revealed. Christ is the key to how God saves. We need to keep looking at how God has revealed his will, because as we continue learning, we come more and more to understand God's lavishing of grace upon us.

DISCUSSION QUESTION: How does your understanding of God's grace match up with Paul's description here?

4. **KEY OBSERVATION:** We have obtained an inheritance that we can be assured of. Although it is kept for us in the future, its scope is large: the entire world. God has longed to have a people that are his people. Jesus came as the Messiah to form a people that would belong to God. God's purpose all along is that his people would praise his glory.

DISCUSSION QUESTION: What inheritance do you look forward to?

5. **KEY OBSERVATION:** The good news is for all people. Gentiles are included with the Jewish nation in receiving the gospel, which announces both Jesus' victory over sin, oppression, and death and the inauguration of God's kingdom. Believers in Jesus are marked with the promised Holy Spirit when they hear and believe the Word of truth. The Spirit designates that believers are official and legitimate. The Spirit guarantees that they belong to God as his "acquired possession" that leads to living for the praise of God's glory.

DISCUSSION QUESTION: What in life most leaves its mark on you? In what way does God want to leave his mark on you?

- E. What facts and information presented in the commentary portion of the lesson help you understand the weekly Scripture?
- F. Close session with prayer.