

The Book of Ephesians

Chapter 1

Ephesians 1

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

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, ⁴ just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, ⁵ having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, ⁶ to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.

⁷ In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace ⁸ which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, ⁹ having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, ¹⁰ that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him. ¹¹ In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, ¹² that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

¹³ In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.

¹⁵ Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, ¹⁶ do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: ¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, ¹⁸ the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power ²⁰ which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.

²² And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, ²³ which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”

Ephesians 1:1–2

“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Paul Chosen by God

Paul begins his letter by pointing out that he was chosen and commissioned as *“an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God.”* His earlier life as a Christ-rejecting Pharisee would have led him to eternal destruction—even though he was among the greatest Jewish zealots. We can see from his pre-

Christian activities that he had rejected Jesus and consented to (and participated in) the persecution, imprisonment, and death of untold numbers of the earliest believers (see Acts 6:8–8:3; 9:1–19). However, God chose him, opened his blind eyes, and redeemed him in order to make him an apostle—one called and sent, in particular, to the Gentiles (see 2 Timothy 1:11).

The early Church had made necessary that an apostle was an eye witness to the physical resurrection of Jesus (see Acts 1:21–22). This made Paul a peculiar apostle since his eye witness experience came later by special revelation of the Lord Himself (see Acts 9:3–6; 22:6–11 and 1 Corinthians 15:8–9).

By the Will of God

It is no surprise that calling, saving, and using Saul/Paul was *“by the will of God.”* God desires to save and takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (see Ezekiel 33:11). Likewise, it is important to note that when God saves, He uses! All He does is for His good pleasure; and it is His good pleasure to save, to transform, and work through us. Furthermore, as Paul will document in this chapter, those God calls and redeems are also promised security in Him. He will keep us. We have been given the promise of everlasting life and there is no possibility of forfeiture. Jesus Himself said, *“I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish”* (see John 10:28).

Greetings

This letter was written *“to the saints who are in Ephesus”* but also as a circular letter that would be enjoyed by the *“faithful in Christ Jesus.”* In this case we must show that there is an indirect application to those who study it today. We should all be aware of the fact that there are some books in the New Testament that were not written to us—even though they are to be read, understood, and learned. An example of this would be the pastoral epistles of First and Second Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, etc. However, in this case, Ephesians has personal and applicational significance to the Ephesians and all other *“faithful”* saints—Jew and Gentile alike.

Grace and Peace—to You

Typically, Paul opened his letters with the expressions of grace and peace. The exceptions are found in the pastoral epistles: First Timothy, Second Timothy, and Titus—where he adds *“mercy.”*

There is no reason to think that anyone can experience true peace without first having become the recipient of God’s saving grace—thus the priority of grace in his sentence formation. When adding the reference to *“mercy”* in the pastoral epistles, he layered the needed blessing into a greeting many leaders truly appreciate. This by no means suggests that mercy is reserved for the pastor/elders, but it is greatly appreciated by those who serve in leadership.

God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ

There is only one God, and there is only one begotten Son of God—Jesus. He Himself is the image of the invisible God, begotten of the Father, as God incarnate Himself (see Colossians 1:9–22). He is eternally existent as God the Son and shares all the attributes, character, disposition and personality of the Father—from all eternity. Paul shows that His incarnation came in time *“when the fullness of the time had come”* (see Galatians 4:3–5). Therefore, the God who dwells in eternity, entered the time continuum through the miracle of the virgin birth—by incarnation—through the womb of

Mary. He is the “*Savior of the world*” (see 1 John 4:14) and to the highest degree: “*especially*” among those who believe (see 1 Timothy 4:10).

The “*grace and peace*” the Ephesians enjoyed (that we too enjoy) was the result of the sovereign work of God the Father through the finished work of Jesus, God the Son, and now provided us through the working of God in and through the person of the Holy Spirit—who indwells and seals every believer for the day of redemption. To this end Christ died, was buried for three days and three nights, but physically rose again from the dead and ever lives to make intercession for us (see Romans 8:31–34 and 1 Corinthians 15:1–4). As mentioned above, no one can experience true peace (the peace that passes all understanding—Philippians 4:6–7) unless they have first experienced the grace of God.

Ephesians 1:3–12

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him.

In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.”

A Call to Love—A Call to Worship

“*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*” was the expression of praise and worship Paul offered as his personal expression. Then including the Ephesians, he declared, “*who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.*” This call was Paul’s way of reminding the Ephesians (and all of us) of the great spiritual blessings God has bestowed upon us. By understanding these blessings—and having become recipients—we should receive this call as an invitation to thankfulness and love for the Lord.

It is no surprise that Paul would remind the Ephesian believers about these wonderful blessings. As mentioned in the introduction, the Ephesians were in danger of losing their “*first love*” (Revelation 2:4), and this letter is the “*meat*” of that message as a precursor to their rebuke from the Lord Himself.

We are all in need of a fresh love for the Lord. Considering all He is and all he has done for us—on a regular basis—will keep us focused and refreshed in the Lord. Neglect of time with the Lord, in prayer, bible reading, worship, etc. will lead to dulling of the spiritual vitality we all need. We should all be thankful for the fact that we have this time with the Lord—and that He is stirring us up in the spirit.

Every Spiritual Blessing

The blessings Paul wrote about are listed here in the first section of this chapter. These blessings should be taken to heart and considered at regular intervals by every believer. Doing so will remind us of the love of God, the forethought of God, the purposes of God, the grace and mercy of God, and the keeping power of God. Every believer is promised these blessings! They are not subject to time as we know it, but are given to us in time, from outside of time, as related to the actual immutable result intended/accomplished for every believer in Christ. For this reason, Paul declared that these blessings are *“in the heavenly places in Christ”* (vs. 3) but are now, presently manifested in us, in time, although guaranteed by the Holy Spirit, for our future.

Herein we see the sovereign will, purposes, foreknowledge, accomplished atoning work, mercy and grace of God manifested, in time, for us. These spiritual blessings are listed as follows:

1. He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world (vs. 4).
2. He makes us holy and without blame before Him in love (vs. 4).
3. He predestined us to adoption as sons (vs. 5).
4. He made us acceptable in His Beloved Son (vs. 6).
5. He redeemed (purchased) us by His blood (vs. 7 and 14).
6. He forgave us of all our sins (vs. 7).
7. He made His grace abound toward us (vs. 7–8).
8. He made known to us the mystery of His will (vs. 9).
9. He promises to gather us together as one with all the saints of all dispensations (vs. 10).
10. He promises us an inheritance in Jesus (vs. 11).
11. He seals us with His Holy Spirit (vs. 13).
12. He revealed to us why He did it: His love, His good pleasure, His will, His grace, His glory, His purpose, in order to gather all—in Christ, as one—in Him (vss. 4–7, 9–12).

1. He Chose Us in Him Before the Foundation of the World

Endless debates and conversations have been offered in an attempt to disprove the simple fact that God has *“chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world.”* The contention is that God’s choosing seems to restrict our capacity to trust in Jesus for salvation. However, this is not the case. We see later in this chapter that the Ephesians who heard the Gospel, believed, were regenerated and sealed by the Holy Spirit. *“In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory”* (vss. 13–14).

It must be understood that first of all, the “choosing” in this context relates to the apostles themselves. That does not suggest that God has not chosen others—He has and does. God invites men to believe—and does so by others He has also chosen. Had God chosen not to save—offering no salvation—we would be left to ourselves as unredeemed, fallen and sinful men.

It is logical to understand that God has initiated a relationship with us. Moreover, we are not left to logic alone, for the Scriptures declare, *“In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins”* (1 John 4:9–10 NKJV) and *“We love Him because He first loved us”* (1 John 4: 19 NKJV). Therefore, we know that if

God had not first loved us, thus planning and offering us redemption, there would have been no extension of grace, no invitation would have been given, no hope of salvation offered, and thus no desire nor capacity to believe. We believe because He initiated the relationship. *“We love Him because He first loved us.”* Moreover, man left to himself would be unredeemable—for salvation is only provided *“in Him”* (vs. 3). Therefore, one can safely and biblically say that salvation is all of God, all of grace, by faith alone, in Christ alone, and most importantly, for the glory of God alone (see Ephesians 2:1–9).

“Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world” is no violation of our need or ability to believe. It is the initiating component that makes belief possible. God’s foreknowledge does not adjust those things done within the time continuum—it is the simple fact that God, who dwells within and outside of time, can see all, knows all, and never tricks Himself into not knowing—all. Therefore, His choosing of us, *“in Him,”* from *“before the foundation of the world,”* is not only biblical, it is certain. That said, there is no interruption to what actually occurs in time. We hear the Gospel in time and believe; from outside of time God sees, knows, and chooses! The seeming contradiction comes to naught when we understand things from the two perspectives: time and eternity.

He chose us! What an amazing blessing.

2. He Makes Us Holy and Without Blame Before Him in Love

The fact that God, from *“before the foundation of the world,”* intended to save those who trust Jesus for salvation, points to the fact that the salvation we experience is not an afterthought or “Plan B.” God, *“according to the good pleasure of His will”* (vs. 5) and *“to the praise of the glory of His grace”* (vs. 6a), *“made us accepted in the Beloved”* (vs. 6b). This should bring encouragement to each of us. God, knowing all things from before the foundation of the world, all about who we were, and all about who we are, desired to save to the utmost all who come to Him by faith alone, through grace alone, in Christ alone.

God’s work in us (for us and for His glory) does not simply redeem us, but also changes us. Man-centric religion attempts to change us from without, but the work of God changes us from within. However, that change will not see its fullest fruition come to pass until we are with the Lord fully redeemed (see Romans 8:18–25) in glory. However, inasmuch as we are still living in *“this body of death”* (Romans 7:24–25), we have been declared *“holy and without blame before Him in love”* (vs. 4). That is, God has declared us holy, and no longer holds us in contempt. We have (in God’s eyes) no blameworthiness—and will experience no future condemnatory judgment.

This should bring great joy and peace to all the redeemed—especially if and when we fall short or even intentionally and rebelliously sin. (I am not suggesting one should resist the Lord or act out in sin. Our sins added to the afflictions of Christ, and indeed there are temporal consequences: sickness, pain, discouragement, depression, destruction, and even death when we sin.) But if we do, the rebellion and resistance is/was foreknown by the God who previously desired to save us in spite of us. Hallelujah! He has made us *“accepted in the Beloved”* (vs. 6).

God, in Christ, has made it possible for us to be *“holy and without blame before Him in love.”* We stand before the Lord *“without blame”* and are recognized as *“holy.”* Believers do not need to fear standing before the Lord. We do not stand before Him in our own righteousness. We stand before Him in Christ—as the righteousness of God in Him! *“For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him”* (2 Corinthians 5:21).

3. He Predestined us to Adoption as Sons

We, as believers, have been predestined. Our English words predestination and foreordination are translated from the Greek word προορίσας: proorizo. Proorizo simply means plans made in advance, in order to determine a desired end result. We can safely know that God has determined in advance (from outside of time) the end result of His plans for His people. Never in Scripture is “proorizo” used to limit the salvific work of God or in the offer of salvation to fallen man. Proorizo is used only 6 times in the New Testament and is always related to the work of God as related to His work of redemption and the accompanying result intended for the redeemed.

Believers should find rest in Christ as they come to understand that it is God who has inspired the Scriptures, predestinates the believer, and therefore completes the work of redemption in every born again person. He alone initiates the relationship we have in Christ, calls us, justifies us, sanctifies us, and glorifies us—thus providing the believer all they need in this life, and in the life to come.

Three Things to Consider

Three specific things are mentioned in relationship to predestination in Scripture. Here in Ephesians 1, we are told that that we are adopted as sons; in Romans, we are told that we will be conformed to the image of Christ; and then again here in Ephesians 1, we are told that as sons we are guaranteed an inheritance—in Him.

a. To Adoption—as Sons

Here in Ephesians 1 we read, that God *“chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will”* (vss. 4–5).

It is of note that sons were given special privileges above those of daughters. Sadly, some attempts at neutralizing gender have done damage to this fact. We, whether male or female, are told that we are adopted *“as sons”*—not as sons and daughters. This is significant! We have the rights of adoption and inheritance specifically given to the son(s). This is not to suggest that God does not view the redeemed as sons and daughters (see 2 Corinthians 6:18).

Please note that the predestination here is not to salvation. It is to adoption—as sons.

b. To Be Like Jesus

In Romans we read, *“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified”* (Romans 8:28–30 NKJV).

God foreknew us and predestined us to be conformed to the image of His Son. In this passage, the predestination is *to* conformity to the image of the Son of God: Jesus. This is the joy of every believer! God has purposed in Himself to make us like Jesus. As we grow in grace, we grow more and more like Him. Although we have not yet fully realized this complete transformation, we will when the

redemption we have in Christ is fully realized. This will occur when we see the Lord face to face. John wrote, *“Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.”* (1 John 3:2 NKJV)

The predestination mentioned here is not to salvation. It is to conformity: to be like Jesus.

c. To an Inheritance

Finally, Paul mentioned the fact that predestination referred to inheritance—*“In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will”* (vs. 11).

The predestination herein is to the inheritance promised. This seems to relate first to the Apostles and then to others. I mention this here because the text flows from “we” to “you.” *“In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise”* (vss. 11–13). However, this does in no way suggest the Gentile believers receive no inheritance for what they (we) do. In fact, *“He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son”* (Revelation 21:6–7 NKJV).

The predestination mentioned here is not to salvation. It is to our inheritance.

We are predestined!

4. He Made Us Acceptable in His Beloved Son

It is not at all uncommon to hear people say we must “accept Jesus.” None of us would suggest this is far off base. However, the truth is, we must be made acceptable to God. As unredeemed sinners we were enemies of God. Paul told the Romans, *“For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation”* (Romans 5:6–11 NKJV).

It was by the death of Jesus—through His shed blood—that we have access to God by faith. It is not a matter of our accepting Jesus; it is a matter of our being made acceptable to God—through the death of His Son. What a blessing we have in Jesus!

We have been made acceptable to God!

5. He Redeemed (Purchased) Us by His blood

“Redemption” means to be “bought out.” The term was used specifically in reference to the purchase of a slave’s freedom. As sinful man we are born as slaves to sin and death. Therefore, Jesus

purchased us from the slavery and bondage we were powerless to escape. He made us His own *“purchased possession.”* (See Acts 20:28, Ephesians 1:14, and Colossians 1:13–14)

The Bible makes it exceedingly clear that the only redemption we have from sin and death is to be found in the only begotten Son of God, God incarnate, Jesus Christ our Lord. Isaiah recorded, *“...there is no other God besides Me, a just God and a Savior; there is none besides Me. Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other”* (Isaiah 45:21b–22 NKJV). In the Book of Acts we read, *“Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved”* (Acts 4:12 NKJV). Therefore, we know that it is only in and through Jesus that we have redemption from sin and death.

Jesus paid the price for our sins and purchased us for Himself by laying down His own life in exchange for ours. He shed His own blood on the cross at Calvary in order to redeem us. *“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace”* (vs. 7).

In the Old Covenant sacrificial system, most of the sins of the Jews were atoned for by the bloodshed (sacrifice) of an animal. The blood being shed was necessary in order that the animal would die—for life is in the blood (see Leviticus 17:11). The sacrificial system was a foreshadowing of Christ’s work at Calvary and demonstrated the deeply painful and costly consequences of sin. Jesus shed His blood (gave His life) in order to offer us life in exchange for death, and forgiveness in exchange for the consequences we would have suffered without Him. What a love He has for us!

The blood that was shed in the Old Covenant could never “take away” sin and was therefore repeated day by day and year by year until Christ came. It was symbolic and used to point men and women to Jesus’ once-for-all sacrificial death (see Hebrews 10:1–14).

The redemption we enjoy and the forgiveness of sins we are given are, *“according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence* (vss. 7b–8). God planned for our redemption *“before the foundation of the world”* according to the *“riches of His grace”*, not as an inconvenience and not as the result of any meritorious work in us. We as undeserving sinners were so loved that God sent His only begotten Son into the world to die for us—in our place—*“according to His good pleasure”* (vs. 9). We are not an inconvenience to God—nor was our redemption.

In the book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ we read, *“And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth. Then He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne. Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying: ‘You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth’ ”* (Revelation 5:6–10 NKJV).

We have been redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus!

6. He Forgave Us of All Our Sins

Some would suggest that the believer's sins are forgiven if they are properly confessed. Others would contend that our past sins are forgiven but the sins we commit today or tomorrow have yet to be forgiven. However, neither are true. Jesus paid the price for all our sins, once for all, at Calvary.

As mentioned above, *"In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace"* (vs. 7). John wrote to Christians in the first century saying, *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (1 John 1:9 NKJV) and *"I write to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake"* (1 John 2:12 NKJV). To confess, in this context, means to say the same thing God says about your sins. Therefore, to confess our sins, in this context, is to agree with God concerning our sinful condition and that we are in need of His forgiveness. This is the condition of the redeemed sinner. We then who are in agreement with God concerning our sinfulness and look to Him for forgiveness have *"forgive[ness] [of] our sins and [are] cleanse[d] from all [our] unrighteousness."*

Paul told the Colossians, *"And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses"* (Colossians 2:13 NKJV).

He has forgiven us of all our sins.

7. He Made His Grace Abound Toward Us

Once again we return to verses 7–8 in order to grasp yet another of the manifold blessings God has given us. In this case we give attention to *"grace,"* for *"In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence"* (Ephesians 1:7–8 NKJV).

The abounding grace given us in Christ is not a grace just sufficient, it is abounding—abundant—exceedingly plentiful. Moreover, it is actively present in real time. This means that the grace God has given to us—He continues to give. There is therefore no limit to His grace toward those who believe.

It is said that grace is unmerited favor. Therefore, grace is not provided by our perseverance or performance. Grace is not granted by works—*"...if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work"* (Romans 11:6b NKJV). The *"riches of His grace"* cannot be purchased!

The grace of God—extended to every believer—cannot be measured, eclipsed, exhausted, extinguished, or expanded. *"His grace"* is a manifestation of Him. The grace of God cannot be quenched, dried up, spoiled, or sinned away. Why? *Because "where sin abounded, grace abounded much more"* (Romans 5:20b NKJV).

He has caused His grace to abound toward us!

"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not!" (Romans 6:1–2a NKJV).

8. He Made Known to Us the Mystery of His Will

When Paul uses the term *“mystery,”* he is referring to a truth earlier unknown or unexplained (at least in its fullness) that has now been revealed. Multiple times in the New Testament we have reference to mysteries. Mysteries of the Kingdom, the mystery concerning Israel’s discipline and restoration, the mystery of the Gospel, the mystery of God’s work among the Gentiles, the mystery of the indwelling Christ, the mystery of godliness, the mystery of marriage as a model of Christ and the Church, the mystery concerning the Rapture, the mystery of iniquity, the mystery of Christ’s second coming and earthly reign, the mystery of the woman who rides the beast—*“Mystery Babylon”*—and the mystery mentioned here in verse 10: the uniting into one, all the redeemed, in the *“dispensation of the fullness of the times.”*

Paul simply says that God has *“made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself”* (vs. 9). This blessing is the fullest revelation of God’s will for all of creation—with special emphasis on His purposes and plans regarding the redeemed. This mystery unfolds time from beginning to end and has given us insights that every prophet and the angels desired to fully understand.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls.

Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into.” (1 Peter 1:3–12 NKJV).

God has made known unto us the mystery of His will!

9. He Promises to Gather Us Together as One with All the Saints of All Dispensations

There is a day coming when God will gather together every believer from all the ages into one happy family in the Lord. Paul reminded the Ephesian believers of this when he wrote, *“that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him”* (vs. 10). This fact is undisputed by most good theologians. However, the methods and plan God has for these “ages” is still debated. Fundamentally there are two groups embracing two different models. These groups are “Reformed” and “Dispensational.” We approach the Scriptures from a Dispensational perspective.

Biblical Dispensationalism is a study of the Scriptures through the lens of God’s administrative work. In each of the color-coded and numbered eras (see model below), God dealt with men using a differing administrative method. For example, in the Old Covenant, God was primarily using Israel as

His chosen people to make Himself known to the whole world. He made a Covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that would forever remain. During the Old Covenant, God introduced the Law of Moses as a tutor for the Jewish people. It was designed to point God’s chosen people to the then-coming Messiah. The Law was insufficient to provide salvation and effectively condemned all men and women to death.

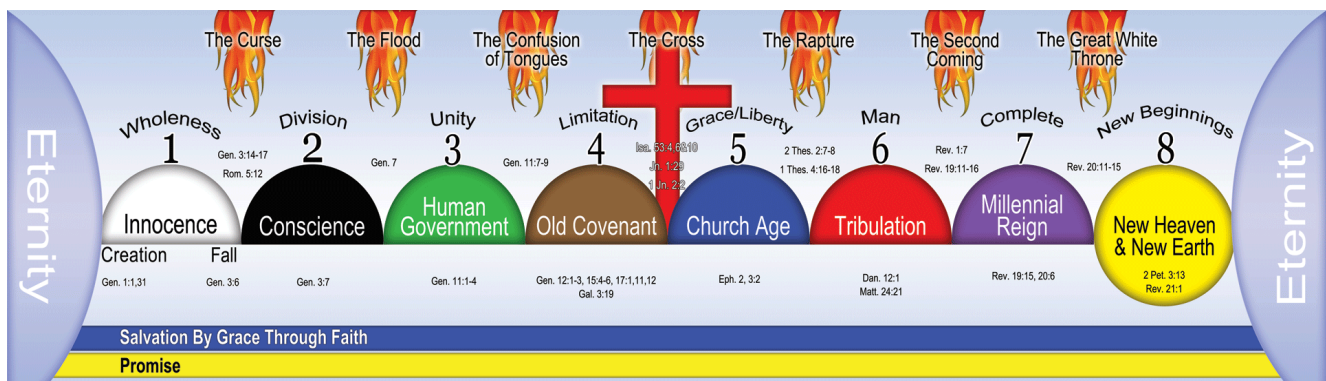
When Jesus came to this earth (during the Old Covenant Dispensation), He fulfilled the law and died as the one and only sacrificial lamb who could take away the sins of the whole world.

After Jesus’ physical resurrection from the dead and beginning on the Day of Pentecost, a new period of history began. It is a different form of administration. This period of history is known as the “Church Age.” During the Church Age, God is using the redeemed (the Church) to make Himself known to the world. This fact does not suggest that He has replaced Israel (which many Reformed Theologians aka “Covenantalists” suggest). He has not! In fact, God has ordained two more future dispensations wherein He will ultimately fulfill all His promises of discipline upon Israel (and the unbelieving world) and then fully restore her during the Kingdom Age, aka The Millennial Reign. This is the dispensation wherein God will bring Israel to her prophesied glory and fulfill His word regarding all He has promised her.

“The dispensation of the fullness of the times” refers to the “New Heaven and New Earth.” This is the time when God will “gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him” (vs. 10). Every believer from all the ages will be gathered together—in one, in Jesus—forever. We will forever be with the Lord and will enjoy all that He planned for us from before the foundation of the world.

God has promised to gather together all believers, from all dispensations, into one big happy family.

A careful understanding of the Biblical Dispensational study will remove many false interpretations of the Scripture and save the Bible student untold confusion.



10. He Promises Us an Inheritance in Jesus

As mentioned above, we have been predestined to an inheritance in Jesus—as the result of our being adopted into God’s family. Part of our inheritance is that we will be like Jesus. I can’t think of anything better. But wait, there’s more: “In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will,

that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory” (vs. 11). Therefore, another part of our inheritance is that Jesus will be glorified in us! We are His reward and our being awarded to Him, for His great work, becomes a reward to us. We were redeemed by Jesus’ blood and were therefore purchased by Him, for Him (see 1 Peter 1:18–19). We are His workmanship (see Ephesians 2:10) and our being transformed becomes an exceeding and great reward to Jesus—and to us. In fact, the greatest reward we will ever be given is the Lord Himself. As He said to Abraham, *“Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward”* (Genesis 15:1b NKJV).

We will reign with Him, be glorified in Him, inherit eternal life, etc., but the greatest blessing is that we will be with Him.

God has promised us an inheritance in Jesus.

11. He Seals Us with His Holy Spirit

The sealing with or by the Holy Spirit is unique to the Church Age believer. It is in fact one of the many blessings that assures the believer of their security in Jesus—in salvation. This sealing is the guarantee of our safe and secure delivery to our Lord, as His bride, bought with a price, through the precious blood of Jesus.

The sealing of an envelope or package dates back centuries. It is the practice wherein the sender and receiver are assured that the item, letter, or package has been delivered safely and without corruption, tampering, or damage. The believer therefore, being sealed by the Holy Spirit, signifies that each born again individual is safely cared for and delivered, in whole and without damage, to the Lord. In effect, the sealing of the Holy Spirit speaks to the believer’s salvific security. He is the guarantee of our salvation.

a. Eternally Secure

The eternal security of the believer has been a debated topic among Bible students and theologians for hundreds of years—with reason. Some Biblical passages indicate that a person can *“believe for a while”* (as is stated in the Parable of the Sower, see Luke 8:4–15) or declare that those who practice certain sins will not inherit the Kingdom of God (see 1 Corinthians 6:9–11 and Galatians 5:19–21). However, as would be true for many individuals, most passages of Scripture must be viewed in proper context and by recognition of specific details. A failure to understand the context in the proper Dispensation or to carefully attend to who is being referenced and/or addressed, has led to much confusion.

For example:

- I. The Parable of the Sower was communicated during the Old Covenant period and does not apply to regenerated Church Age believers. Church Age believers (unlike those in the Old Covenant) are born again and *“sealed with the Holy Spirit”*—and thus *“guaranteed”* safe passage into their eternal *“inheritance”* (see Ephesians 1:13–14).
- II. Those who will not *“inherit”* the Kingdom referenced in Galatians 5:19–21 are persons referred to as *“those”* not *“you.”* The *“unrighteous”* who will not *“inherit”* the Kingdom of God referred to in 1 Corinthians 6:9–11 are not the believers—for Paul told the Corinthian believers, *“but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were*

justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God” (I Corinthians 6:11). He also said that those who have been born again have been made “the righteousness of God” in Christ (see 2 Corinthians 5:21). Therefore, the believer is not “unrighteous” but is indeed “the righteousness of God.”

- III. Later in this study we will see how Paul addressed this with the Ephesians. He wrote, *“Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma. But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them” (Ephesians 5:1–7 NKJV). As stated above in the context of Galatians 5, we have the same illustration: It was “them” not “the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus” (vs. 1b).*

There are difficult passages that must be addressed. However, this is not our purpose herein. We should rest in the fact that we have been sealed with and by the Holy Spirit. It is God Himself who will present us *“faultless before the presence of His glory” (Jude 24)*. The genuine believer has been given *“eternal life”* and will *“never perish”* (see John 3:16 and John 10:28).

For the genuine believer there should be no trepidation concerning death nor fear over the loss of salvation. We as believers have been bought with the precious blood of Jesus and are kept by the power of God. These facts give hope to every genuine believer!

The sealing of the Holy Spirit is like a padlock on our spiritual lives. A seal was used in early cultures (and in some cultures today) as a glue to hold closed a document or package intended for transfer. It was generally made of melted wax which contained the signet (a stamped impression) of the sender. As mentioned above, the seal guaranteed that the entire document or package arrived safely and unopened—from sender to recipient. Only the recipient could break the seal. Because the Spirit has sealed us, we are assured of salvation.

The Holy Spirit serves as the guarantee or pledge (similar to earnest money placed upon a purchase), securing our place in Christ. *“You were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory” (vs. 14)*. Moreover, *“He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee” (2 Corinthians 5:5)*. The Holy Spirit is given to the believer as a “down payment” on our heavenly inheritance—an inheritance Christ promised us, and secured for us at the cross.

Need More?

For those who continue to debate, I contend that a born-again Christian cannot lose or forfeit their salvation based upon a simple lesson from the logical presentations of Scripture:

- 1) *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16)*

We who trust Christ for Salvation will “not perish but have everlasting life.”

2) Jesus said, *“And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand.”* (John 10:28–29)

We who trust Christ for salvation “shall never perish.”

3) Paul wrote, *“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”* (Ephesians 2:8–9)

We who trust Christ for salvation receive the “gift” of eternal life. The “gift” is not earned and is therefore not contingent upon our “works.”

4) *“The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.”* (Romans 11:29)

God does not change His mind about, retract, or make void His gifts and calling.

5) *“You were sealed for the day of redemption.”* (Ephesians 4:30b)

Therefore, we can with assurance say that, those whom God has called, and those who have trusted Him for salvation, are given the “gift” of eternal life, and will *“never perish.”* We who have trusted the Lord for Salvation receive *“eternal life”* as a gift—not by any human merit—and are *“sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.”* God will never change His mind about the “gift” He has given us. It is *“irrevocable.”* The salvation we enjoy is by *“grace”* alone, through *“faith”* alone, in *“Christ”* alone.

The believer, having heard the *“word of truth”* (vs. 13), and *“having believed”* (vs. 13), is *“sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise”* (vs. 13). This should bring peace and comfort to every believer. We are secure in Him and will be saved from the wrath to come.

b. A Word of Caution

There are many professing believers who carelessly name the Lord as Savior but lack saving faith or any real concern for obedience or honor. They willingly and intentionally practice sin with no apparent grief of soul or conviction leading to repentance. Sadly, many of these individuals have never been born again and (tragically) far too often have been given a false sense of security. For these, the doctrines of the genuine believer’s security in Christ are misapplied.

The professing believer who can willfully sin without the realities of inner conflict and grief should take that as a note of concern. It may well suggest that although they profess to know the Lord, in works they deny Him, and may be without genuine regeneration. I have seen this many times!

This kind of “profession” of faith is often found among “church goers” who think that being a part of a religious organization is enough, or that by virtue of knowing who Jesus is—and feeling “good” about Him—means they are believers. However, those who have truly trusted Jesus for salvation, not only know it personally, but know that their salvation has come as the result of a genuine exercise of faith and trust in Jesus to forgive their sin and provide the gift of eternal life.

The true believer would not and cannot go on willfully practicing sin without experiencing a deep and nagging lack of peace. This grief of soul is what I call “blessed misery.” Those who are willfully sinning and do indeed experience grief over it should be thankful for the work of the Holy Spirit who is grieving within them over their condition. However, the ones who in rebellion against the leadership of the Lord continue practicing sin may indeed be eternally secure and make heaven their home, but by their rebellious acts mock the sacrifice Jesus made for them, harm their testimony, injure others around them, and misrepresent the Lord who saved them. This practice is unacceptable for any believer. Moreover, it calls for rebuke and repentance. Those who are unwilling to repent should experience proper Church discipline and/or may find themselves under the chastening rod of the Lord.

I have said it before and will say again, “As a genuine believer, I am motivated to live righteously by considering that my sins have added to the afflictions of Christ much more than through the fear of a punitive consequence doled out at a future Judgment.” We should be compelled to live for Jesus as an offering of worship—inspired by grace and love—rather than by the fear of personal sufferings. Jesus paid it all, all to Him we owe.

We have been sealed by the Holy Spirit.

12. He Revealed to Us Why He Did It: His love, His Good Pleasure, His Will, His Grace, His Glory, His Purpose, In Order to Gather All—In Christ, As One—In Him

If we take the time to review the passage again and note the personal pronouns, we will see that the salvation we enjoy is all of God. It was His blood that redeemed us providing forgiveness of sins, His grace that abounded to us, His desire to make known the salvation He provides, and His purpose to save. It was His good pleasure to save us, to provide us an inheritance, and to gather us together with every believer from all the ages—into one happy family in Him!

“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him.

In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory” (vss. 7–12).

When we say that salvation is all of God, all of grace, by faith alone, in Christ alone, for the glory of God alone, these 12 verses give us potency for the position. Here in these verses there is no human action or response. God is the provider, initiator, redeemer, justifier, sanctifier, and the only one who can and will glorify Himself in the saints. Only in the next verses do we see any response from man.

Praise the Lord for His glorious grace!

God has revealed to us why he desired to redeem us, justify us, sanctify us, and glorify us. It was by His great love, by His good pleasure, according to His will, by His grace, according to His purpose, in order to gather us all as one in Christ—for His glory alone.

Ephesians 1:13–14

“In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.”

Our Response to Him

As mentioned above, had God chosen not to save—offering no salvation, we would be left to ourselves as unredeemed, fallen and sinful men. *“In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins”* (1 John 4:10 NKJV) and *“We love Him because He first loved us”* (1 John 4: 19 NKJV). Therefore, we know that if God had not first loved us, planning for and offering us redemption, there would be no extension of grace, no invitation given, no hope of salvation offered, and thus no desire nor capacity to believe. We believe because He initiated the relationship. Man left to himself would be unredeemable—for salvation is only provided *“in Him”* (vs. 3). Therefore, one can safely and biblically say that salvation is all of God, all of grace, by faith alone, in Christ alone, and most importantly, for the glory of God alone. Therefore, our response must be attributed to His grace, just as all otherwise provided—*in Him*. However, this fact does not suggest that man is not given the freedom to believe—and for this reason Paul wrote, *“In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory”* (vs. 13–14).

Arguments and confusion have arisen about the irresistibility of God’s grace with little hope of resolve this side of eternity. Therefore, one must rely on Biblical fact and plain sense observation in order to form an opinion. It is apparent that many people resist the gracious and merciful offer God has made to all men—all men. Therefore, we must conclude that in the same way God enables man to believe He has also given man the option to reject His glorious offer.

The Offer is Made to All

Jesus said, *“And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me”* (John 12:32), and we know that God *“...desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth”* (1 Timothy 2:4). However, not all men will be saved, and for this reason, *“...the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse”* (Romans 1:18–20). Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest that the forfeiture of salvation—freely offered to all men—places blame on man—not on the Lord! However, for we who are saved, we must admit that God’s grace was irresistible. We do indeed believe and we do indeed love Him because He first loved us.

More On Our Inheritance—In Him

As mentioned above, believers in whom the Holy Spirit resides, are both sealed and guaranteed an eternal inheritance. The Holy Spirit is *“the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory”* (vs. 14). This means that believers will, with absolute assurance, receive the inheritance purchased for them in Christ. This includes everlasting life; complete

deliverance from the presence and power of sin, all forms of disease, and corruption; and even climactic deliverance from the propensities of the flesh. We are also told that we will inherit the blessing and privilege of ruling and reigning with Jesus. (See Revelation 20:6)

Every believer will be with Jesus forever and will enjoy the glories of His Kingdom. It is an inheritance we simply cannot describe or comprehend. However, there is a day when we will know all the glories He has promised—and has intended to share. Remember, *“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him. In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory”* (Ephesians 1:7–12).

Until The Redemption of the Purchased Possession

Paul has been clear about our having been redeemed, and that we are sealed with the Holy Spirit. Here he speaks of a future event in the time line of our lives: *“until the redemption of the purchased possession.”* This redemption refers to the climactic renewal of our bodies and complete maturity of the soul; *“for we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body”* (Romans 8:22–23). We have been saved from sin and death and are spiritually complete in Him (vss. 13–14 and Ephesians 2:1), are maturing by the renewing of the minds—the soul (Ephesians 4:23 and Romans 2:2), are growing in our walk and behavior—body and soul (Ephesians 2:2–3 and 10), but will one day be physically redeemed and provided a new eternal physical body (see also 1 Corinthians 15). This climactic redemption will occur for the Church Age saints at the Rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:15–18), and for both the Pre-Church Age Saints (Ezekiel 37:11–14, Daniel 12:1–3) and Tribulation Martyrs, (Revelation 20:4–6) just after the Second Coming in preparation for the Millennial Kingdom.

By now it should go without saying that all is done *“to the praise of His glory”* (vs. 14b).

Ephesians 1:15–23

“Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”

Give Thanks

One of the great joys of teaching or being a pastor is seeing those in the family of God multiply and grow in their faith. The joy of every pastor/teacher is seeing excitement in the lives of fellow believers. This joy comes through a variety of expressions and through various circumstances.

1. Genuine discovery of the hope we have been given through an understanding of the true gospel of grace—forgiveness
2. The blessing of being in the family of God—we belong
3. A deepening understanding in the sovereign plan and purposes of God—knowledge
4. The power of God given to us by grace, enabling us to live through the various trials we face in this life—power
5. An understanding that God is at work in our lives, and works all things together for the good of His own—trust
6. The personal joy of seeing others come to faith and maturity in Jesus—fruitfulness
7. The understanding of future events and the eternal destiny we have in Christ—glory

Paul either directly addresses these attributes or indirectly implies them when writing to the Ephesians. He rejoiced over them and thanked the Lord for the joy he experienced with them. His prayer is for their maturity in the things of God and that they may have a full and fruitful maturity in Jesus.

Let's Take a Closer Look

1. Genuine Discovery of the Hope We Have Been Given Through an Understanding of the True Gospel of Grace—Forgiveness

As believers, we are completely forgiven—in Christ. All of our sins (past, present, and future) have been paid for and will be remembered no more (see Hebrews 8, 10:1–18, and 1 John 1:9, 2:1–2 and 2:12). This demands an understanding of the fact that there will be no future condemnatory judgment for the believer—and no condemnation in the present. We, as believers, are free to worship God without shame or trepidation. Even the shortcomings we still experience were known to God—from before the foundation of the world. We cannot surprise Him and therefore cannot disappoint Him! He saves us in spite of our shortcomings and weakness. We are forgiven our sins immediately when we place our faith and trust in the Lord, not by our works or any measure of human achievement. God designed His salvific process this way *“lest anyone should boast”* (Ephesians 2:8–10). By grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, we have been *“perfected forever”* (Hebrews 10:14) for the glory of God alone. We are forgiven!

2. The Blessing of Being in the Family of God—We Belong

As we have seen, God has predestined the believer to adoption: *“...having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will”* (vs. 5). As believers we are forgiven all sin and provided eternal life, but there is more to the salvation provided than forgiveness and eternal life—there is belonging. We belong to the Church. We belong to the Lord as His inheritance. We have become *“the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints”* (vs. 18).

As adopted children we were chosen in Christ from before the foundation of the world. *“...He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before*

Him in love” (vs. 4). Believers are no longer orphans or strangers; we are family. We are the sons and daughters of God and fellow heirs with our siblings: the redeemed. We belong!

3. A Deepening Understanding in the Sovereign Plan and Purposes of God—Knowledge

Paul wrote, *“Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling...” (vss. 15–18a).*

Paul’s expressed desire shows that he longed to see the Ephesians (and all other believers) come to maturity in the knowledge of God. The more we know the Lord and the more we understand His ways, the greater will be our peace, joy, hope, and fullness. Believers who understand and experience maturing knowledge in the Lord are best prepared to minister to others and demonstrate the hope we have in Him. With this in mind Peter wrote, *“sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear” (1 Peter 3:15).* Therefore, we must prayerfully study the Scriptures and prepare for service to others. Growing in the Scriptures, by the Spirit, through grace, is the method by which God enables us, with ever growing capacity, to be a blessing to those with whom we share. Moreover, the only way we as believers can authoritatively know the character, ways, and plans of God is by *“the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of [our] understanding being enlightened”* through the written word of God—the Bible as revealed in truth by the person of the Holy Spirit—not through clever manufacturing, I.Q. or naturally obtained informational systems. The Bible is a spiritual book for spirit-led people who have experienced the enlightening of the Spirit Paul prayed for. It provides the believer with objective truth that we can stand upon and defend. Some would have us believe that its “truths” are relative, but not so! The Bible is authoritative, makes clear, is absolute, and is the final word for all that pertains to life and godliness (see 2 Peter 1:2–3). God provided us with the knowledge we all need—in Him. What a blessing we enjoy!

A Word of Caution

The believer must be careful not to rely on emotions, feelings, the motivations of our hearts, or natural circumstances in order to discern the truth. Our circumstances, feelings, and emotions can be very deceptive. We must also be aware of the fact that even books about God and the Bible can provide error and confusion. Only the Bible contains all the objective and definitive truths the believer can safely trust.

Every believer has been given the indwelling Holy Spirit who leads us, guides us, and teaches us the Scriptures. We must be diligent in our reading to attentively study, pay attention to detail, context, dispensational relationship, etc. in accord with the Spirit in order to properly understand what the Bible has to offer. Those who allow emotions and feelings, or the so-called impulses of the heart (see Jeremiah 17:5–10), are prone to error. Even the commentaries of studied men, yes, even this one, carry the potential of error and must be viewed in the light of the Bible alone. Far too many false teachings have been promulgated through the flesh and left unchecked. The Scriptures alone must be the final authority. Therefore, as believers, we should read the Bible regularly, continually, and completely. As we do, we will be equipped in the knowledge God desires we should each possess.

“But let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight, says the LORD” (Jeremiah 9:24).

“I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure’” (Isaiah 46:9b–10).

We are a people of knowledge—the knowledge of the Lord.

4. The Power of God Given to Us by Grace, Enabling Us to Live Through the Various Trials We Face in this Life—Power

As believers, we have been given the power of God to live in the present age—and in the ages to come. Many believers in and around the world suffer various difficulties—difficulties God allows them to endure. This is true of our generation, has been true in the past, and will be true for those in the future. Whatever our lot in life, God has and does give each believer the grace to live, by His power, in and through the circumstances we face. He desires that we know *“the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead”* (vss. 19–20).

As we come to understand that God has given us the power to live in the present age, we will be encouraged to call upon Him and trust Him through times of difficulty. Those who trust in themselves, feelings, or circumstances will be tempted to take things into their own hands in order to cope. This fact has led many to turn to drinking, drugs, sex, etc. in order to numb their pain. Others seek recognition, personal places of authority, money, and pleasure. Sadly, some have even resorted to suicide in order to escape the circumstances they face.

Believers are given the power of God to “endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (2 Timothy 2:3).

God has given us power!

5. An Understanding that God is at Work in Our Lives, and Works All Things Together for the Good of His Own—Trust

When believers go through trials, trust is critical. Many believers exercise faith in God for salvation because they believe the facts of the Gospel. However, faith in God for salvation and trust in Him to work in our lives may be distinguished. Many believers struggle to trust the Lord to accomplish His purposes. They desire to help Him solve the problems (or perceived problems) they face. Abraham and Sarah provide a great example in illustration. When God told Abraham and Sarah that they would have a son in their old age and that the son would be naturally born to the two of them, they felt that the possibilities were too great and therefore attempted to solve the perceived problem by engaging Hagar in order to fulfill the promise. We often do the same. We look for ways to solve problems rather than trusting the Lord to do what He says He will do.

For example, as believers we desire to see our kids and grandkids saved. Therefore, as instructed, we train them up in the way they should go, pray for them, and encourage them in all the

ways we are told to in Scripture. However, when we see them go through trials, struggle in their faith, or even rebel against what we have clearly taught them, we are tempted to manipulate, control, or threaten them in order to get them to the place we think they should be. However, God knows all those who are His, and will lose none of them (see John 6:37). He draws them and works with them in the way only He can. It is in these times we learn to trust the Lord to work in their lives and accomplish His plans with them.

A man may struggle to provide for his family in the ways he would like and therefore try to take things into his own hands in order to accomplish his goals. For example, he may be tempted to cheat on his taxes, or steal from the company cash register. However, he will soon learn that he is better served to pray and ask the Lord to open doors of opportunity, allow him to see ways to trim his budget, or simply provide a miracle. He must learn to trust the Lord.

We are all challenged from time to time with trust. However, the more we know God, the plans and ways of God, and the truths of the word of God, the easier trust becomes.

Our experiences in life tend to make us all struggle with trust. God understands this and therefore encourages us—in His Spirit and through His word—to grow in grace and in the knowledge of His will and ways (see Jeremiah 9:24).

Although faith and trust are closely linked, there are some distinctions we note. Faith to believe the Gospel is a gift and is based upon what we know to be true. Trusting God during times of trial and difficulty comes by growth in our relationship with Him. When we come to know the purposes and plans of God, and as we grow in the knowledge of Him, we will come to understand more fully that He is at work in every area of our lives and nothing escapes His attention. *“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose”* (Romans 8:28).

We are called to trust!

6. The Personal Joy of Seeing Others Come to Faith and Maturity in Jesus—Fruitfulness

We are not responsible for the salvation of others. We are fully incapable of saving anyone. Salvation is the work of God, and it is God alone who can open the blind eyes of an unbeliever, soften their hearts, and grant them faith to believe. However, as we grow, we learn that it is the great privilege of every believer to share the Gospel with others and to assist others in their walk with the Lord. There is a tremendous joy that overwhelms our souls when we see a sinner turn to Christ for forgiveness of sin and experience regeneration. This is what Paul experienced (and expressed) when he said, *“Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers”* (vs. 15).

Secondly, we, as members of the household of God, are privileged with the opportunity to minister to one another and assist one another in growth. This is true fellowship—when we speak together, pray together, and grow together in the things of God, a joy that is unexplainable grips us and we celebrate.

Whether we are the ones who pray with a person just coming to Christ, meet a stranger that we discover is a fellow believer, or are blessed with the fellowship of other believers in a group setting, we have a spiritual joy and blessing knowing that others are being saved and built up in the things of

God. We are a people of fruitfulness and have personal joy seeing others come to faith and maturity in Jesus.

In Christ we are fruitful.

7. The Understanding of Future Events and the Eternal Destiny We Have in Christ—Glory

Finally, as believers, we are given tremendous insight into the things to come. The Bible is loaded with prophecy and insight into future events. The study of end times is called eschatology. Scholars have been entertained and challenged through the study of eschatology for centuries.

Paul gives a briefing when he says that God *“...raised Him [Jesus] from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all”* (vss. 20b–23).

Here we learn that there is a throne room in heaven and that Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father. We learn that the Father declared Jesus *“far above”* all of creation: all in heaven, in the earth, in hell, and for all time. Jesus is the preeminent one and to Him every knee will bow! We learn that Jesus is the head of the Church and that the Church is called the *“body”* of Christ. We are uniquely united with Him. *“And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence”* (Colossians 1:18).

As mentioned above in verse 10, we learned that in the days to come, every believer will be gathered together as one in Christ and enjoy all the fullness promised us in Him.

In Jesus’ *“High Priestly Prayer,”* He prayed that we would all be one—in Him. He prayed, *“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them”* (John 17:20–26). Jesus’ prayer will be answered with a *“Yes”* and *“Amen”*! Praise the Lord for the wonderful things we have to look forward to—in Him.

As believers, we are privileged with access to God in prayer. Today, we all agree with Paul and pray even as he prayed, *“that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to*

come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all” (vss. 17–23).

All glory belongs to the Lord; however, in Him we enjoy the riches of His glory by our inheritance in Him (vss. 14 and 18).

The Climactic Testimony of His Grace and Power—the Bodily Resurrection

God *“raised Him [Jesus] from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places”* (vs. 20). This is a climactic testimony to Jesus’ accomplished work as fully acceptable to God the Father—as planned from the foundation of the world (see 1 Peter 1:18–21). Jesus being seated at the *“right hand”* of the Father declares that the work was finished and that all believers are complete in Him (see Colossians 2:10 and Hebrews 1:3). The fact that He is (and has always been) *“far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come”* (vs. 21) declares His authority over all time and eternity, in the heavenly places—both in the realm of darkness and light—*“principality and power.”* He maintains all power, glory, and rule as the Resurrected Savior. As believers, we enjoy His authority and power at work in and through us. We celebrate (as did Paul) His work in the saints. We are His; we belong to Him! As we grow in His grace and the knowledge He reveals, we will come to understand His person and majesty. God is at work in us, by His mighty power, to accomplish all His good pleasure and purposes. He cannot be thwarted, cannot lie, and will fulfill all He has promised (see Isaiah 46:9–10).

As the Church, we are the unique people God has prepared and given to Jesus as His bride! God has *“put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all”* (vs. 22).

Notes:

