

Teaching Tips

December 4
Bible Study Guide 1

Words You Should Know

A. Predestined (Ephesians 1:5) *proorizo* (Gk.)—Decided beforehand.

B. Redemption (v. 7) *apolutrosis* (Gk.)—The act of being set free from imprisonment or slavery for a ransom.

Teacher Preparation

Unifying Principle—Chosen and Claimed.

The writer of Ephesians declares that, through Jesus Christ, we gain an inheritance as God's own people to become recipients of forgiveness and salvation's redemptive power.

A. Pray for your students and for lesson clarity.

B. Study the entire lesson.

C. Complete the companion *Precepts For Living*® Study Guide.

O—Open the Lesson

A. Ask a volunteer to open the class with prayer.

B. Discuss the comparison between an earthly adoption and spiritual adoption into the family of God.

P—Present the Scriptures

A. Ask volunteers to read the In Focus story. Discuss.

B. Present The People, Places, and Times and Background sections. Discuss.

C. Read and discuss the Focal Verses using the At-A-Glance outline.

D. Ask for volunteers to define “predestined” and “redemption” from today's Words You Should Know. Discuss.

E—Explore the Meaning

A. Divide the class into pairs or small groups. Instruct them to complete the Search the Scriptures section together and to discuss it among themselves.

B. Bring the groups back together. Read the Liberating Lesson section. Discuss ways that believers can enter into relationships with unbelievers with the intention of lovingly inviting them into the family of God.

N—Next Steps for Application

A. Read the Application for Activation section. Discuss.

B. Summarize the lesson.

C. Remind students to read the Daily Bible Readings.

D. Close with prayer.

Worship Guide

For the Superintendent or Teacher

Theme: Spiritual Blessings
in Jesus Christ

Song: “Wonderful Grace of Jesus”
Devotional Reading: Psalm 33:8–12

Spiritual Blessings in Jesus Christ

Bible Background • EPHESIANS 1

Printed Text • EPHESIANS 1:3–14 | Devotional Reading • PSALM 33:8–12

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: UNDERSTAND Paul’s explanation of being adopted by God through Jesus Christ; EXPRESS humility at God’s affirmation of our worthiness; and PRAISE God for the remarkable gift of His adoption of us through Jesus Christ.

In Focus

After six years of marriage and almost as many years of infertility, Regina and Aaron had not been able to conceive the child they desperately longed for. They decided to start the adoption process, praying God would give them a child who needed them.

Shortly after meeting with the adoption agency, Regina began having a series of dreams. Every night for months, she dreamed of a small girl with a tiny birthmark on the side of her cheek. Regina would run to the child, reaching out her arms, but the child would cry and push her away. She was deeply troubled and shared the dream with Aaron.

“Honey, I think God has a child for us,” Aaron said. “Maybe it’s just not the right time.”

Regina and Aaron kept praying. One night, Regina dreamed about the child again. This time, the child reached out to her and smiled. When Regina woke up, she knew that God was answering her many prayers.

Finally, after years of eager and hopeful prayer, Regina and Aaron signed adoption papers, welcoming 4-year-old Joy, who happened to have a tiny birthmark on the side of her cheek, into their family.

This week, we will see how God provided a way to adopt us into His family—redemption through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Keep in Mind

“Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.”

(Ephesians 1:5–6, KJV)

Focal Verses

KJV **Ephesians 1:3** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:

4 According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:

5 Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,

6 To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.

7 In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;

8 Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence;

9 Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself:

10 That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him:

11 In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:

12 That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.

13 In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise,

14 Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.

The People, Places, and Times

The Book of Ephesians. Paul wrote the book of Ephesians while he was imprisoned (see Ephesians 3:1; 4:1; 6:20), perhaps while jailed in Rome. Most scholars agree that Ephesians was written for a wider readership than just the church at Ephesus and was probably circulated among many churches in the Roman province of Asia, where Ephesus was located.

Background

In the original Greek text, the 12 verses of Ephesians 1:3–14 were a single sentence. This is one of the most joyful and profound passages in the Bible. Like an anthem of praise, it celebrates God's eternal and glorious plan of redemption. It is broken into three stanzas, each beginning or ending with the phrase "to the praise of his

glorious grace" (Ephesians 1:6, NIV) or "for" or "to the praise of his glory" (1:12, 14, NIV).

This passage examines the plan of redemption from a triune perspective: The first stanza (1:3–6) praises the Father for choosing to redeem us from our sin; the second highlights Jesus as the Redeemer (1:7–12); and the third stanza (1:13–14) reveals the Holy Spirit as the living, divine presence to the church and the world.

In these verses, the vast plan of redemption is revealed from eternity before creation to the time of its future completion at the time of Christ's Second Advent. The focus of redemption is always Christ, and the phrase "in Christ" or "in him" occurs repeatedly throughout this passage. In fact, this expression is the key phrase of this entire epistle, or letter.

At-A-Glance

1. God Blessed Us (Ephesians 1:3–6)
2. Jesus Christ Redeemed Us (vv. 7–12)
3. The Holy Spirit Sealed Our Salvation (vv. 13–14)

In Depth

1. God Blessed Us (Ephesians 1:3–6)

Paul begins this passage with joyful praise to God the Father for His plan of redemption, and He blesses Him for the blessing of Christ Jesus. Because of Christ's redemptive work, believers are beneficiaries of all the spiritual blessings of the "heavenly realms" (v. 3, NIV). These spiritual blessings come from living and abiding "in Christ." Verse 4 tells us of the first blessing: We are chosen to be holy and blameless. God did not choose us because we are holy and blameless, but He chose us so that we might become holy and blameless. Consider the implications: When we accept Christ as our Savior and Redeemer, we are accepting God's offer to make us holy and blameless. He is promising to take us unworthy sinners and make us into His very own children. And we are not only joining the family, but we are also gaining all the rights and privileges that come with the position.

In addition, we were predestined, or chosen ahead of time, to become God's children and be freely given the gift of His glorious grace. He determined beforehand what we would become or do. Some of these plans are listed in this passage of Scripture. He decided His people would be holy and blameless (v. 4), adopted as His sons and daughters (v. 5), redeemed (v. 7), for the praise of His glory (vv. 11-12), recipients of the Holy Spirit (v. 13), and given an inheritance (v. 14). Verse 6 says God has freely provided for us all these blessings by His grace and through Christ Jesus. It's up to us to accept them.

2. Jesus Christ Redeemed Us (vv. 7–12)

This second stanza of Paul's hymn highlights the wonder of God's grace revealed in the life and death of Jesus Christ. God takes sin very seriously, and it is only because of Christ's sacrifice on our behalf that we can be forgiven. But God does not forgive grudgingly. Rather, He forgives us "according to the riches of His grace" (v. 7, NKJV). God "lavished on us" His grace and forgiveness (v. 8, NIV). Just as parents love their children, God loves us. He not only adopts us into His family, but He does so in generosity and abundance.

God also promises that one day His plan for humankind will be fully accomplished. At the right time, the culmination of God's plan will come to pass, and all will be brought together under the Lordship of Jesus Christ (v. 10). In these confusing and fearful times, it is comforting to know that there will come a time when everything comes into right relationship under the leadership of Jesus.

3. The Holy Spirit Sealed Our Salvation (vv. 13–14)

In ancient times, a seal denoted ownership. In this last stanza of Paul's theological hymn, he speaks of the Holy Spirit's role in our redemption. The Holy Spirit "seals" the deal. When God adopts us into His family, He gives us the Holy Spirit as evidence that we are truly His sons and daughters (Romans 8:9) with all rights and responsibilities. The Holy Spirit is also a promise of greater things to come—when God's entire plan is accomplished, and our full redemption is realized. On that great day, when all is fulfilled, the family of God will truly be "unto the praise of his glory" (Ephesians 1:14).

Search the Scriptures

1. When and why did God choose us to become part of His family (Ephesians 1:4)?
2. How do we obtain redemption (v. 7)?

3. What role does the Holy Spirit fulfill in the redemption plan for believers (vv. 13–14)?

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Discuss the Meaning

1. What are some of the benefits of being a part of God’s family?
2. How do we know we are part of God’s family?

Liberating Lesson

People long for connection—a place to belong. Some search for relationships at work, at the gym, or online. Others hope for a sense of belonging within their own family. Still others move from relationship to relationship without ever really feeling loved or accepted anywhere. As believers, we can offer others meaningful relationships within the body of Christ. In fact, it is usually through relationships that we are able to lovingly invite others to join us in the family of God.

Application for Activation

Many people don’t have a clear understanding of sin. If people do not have a clear grasp of what sin is, then they don’t know that they need repentance and redemption. As believers, so that others may join us in the family of God, we must clearly point the way to the Cross. God loves every person in the world and wants him or her to join His family. It’s our mandated duty to extend the invitation.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

More Light on the Text

Ephesians 1:3–14

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:

The adjective “blessed” (Gk. *eulogetos*, yoo-log-ay-TOS) literally means “praised, well-spoken of” or “in a place of favor and benefit.” The verb “be” is not stated in the text but is implied. Therefore, Paul’s intended meaning could be either “God is to be praised” or “God is characterized by blessedness.”

The reason that Paul directs blessing toward God is because of the favor that God has poured out on His people. The blessings here are “spiritual” (Gk. *pneumatikos*, pnyoo-mat-ik-OS)—related primarily to our spiritual welfare—rather than material or physical. The spiritual blessings we have received are also comprehensive. The list to follow in verses 4–14 will show us what he means by “all.” The blessings are further described as “in heavenly places” and “in Christ.” “Heavenly places” (Gk. *epouranios*, ep-oo-RAN-ee-os) could literally be translated “heavenlies.” The heavenlies are mentioned in Ephesians 1:20 as the place where Christ sat down after ascending to heaven. Then, Ephesians 2:6 tells us that we are presently seated in the heavenlies with Christ (Darby Translation). The “heavenlies” are, therefore, the realm where God lives.

4 According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:

The word “chosen” (Gk. *eklegomai*, ek-LEG-om-ah-ee) means “picked out” or “selected.” Because the Scriptures are clear that God has chosen His people, there is a question regarding the basis on which He has chosen them. It could be argued that God’s choice is solely based on His sovereign will. This is rooted in the fact that sin has so thoroughly corrupted humanity that no one is able to choose Christ unless God first regenerates their heart (John 5:21; Ephesians 2:1).

Another view is that God’s choice of individuals is based on His perfect foreknowledge (prescience) of what those individuals would do if they were left to their own free will. This view holds that the prevenient grace of God makes it possible for anyone to choose to believe in Christ apart from a special regenerating work of God. This perspective emphasizes the Scripture’s offer of salvation to the entire world (John 3:16) and argues that God would not offer humanity salvation that we are not able to seek on our own. The Father’s work in the redemption of His people began before the foundation of the world. Other New Testament passages echo this thought. In Matthew 25:34, Jesus refers to the inheritance of the righteous as “the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” Jesus was destined for His role as our Redeemer from eternity (John 17:24; 1 Peter 1:20). Furthermore, the Lamb’s Book of Life has contained the names of God’s people since before the creation of the world (Revelation 13:8; 17:8).

Being chosen by God is a high privilege, but it also involves accountability. In Ephesians 1:4, the word “holy” (Gk. *hagios*, HAG-ee-os) means “consecrated, set apart, morally perfect.” It is sometimes used in the New Testament as a noun to mean “saint” (those set apart to God). The Greek work *amomos* (AM-o-mos,

“without blame”) is a word used ceremonially to describe a sacrifice as “without blemish” (see 1 Peter 1:19). In this context, it describes a state of moral faultlessness (see Philippians 2:15; Revelation 14:5).

5 Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,

The word translated “predestinated” (Gk. *proorizo*, pro-or-ID-zo) also means “decided upon beforehand,” “predetermined” or “foreordained.” When the authors of the New Testament used this word to describe God’s action in the redemption of humanity, they intended for us to understand that God did more than simply plan our redemption. He caused it to happen. God even predestined the crucifixion of Jesus (Acts 4:27–28; 1 Corinthians 2:7–8). He has predestined not only our adoption but also our complete transformation into the image of Christ (Romans 8:29).

In Ephesians 1:5, our salvation is also described as “adoption of children” (Gk. *huiiothesia*, hwee-oth-es-EE-ah). The predestination-to-adoption is based on the “good pleasure” (Gk. *eudokia*, yoo-dok-EE-ah) of God’s will. Eudokia is used in the New Testament to mean “satisfaction,” “good pleasure,” “favor,” or “approval.” The message of the Scriptures is clear: God purposed, planned, and accomplished our redemption, not because of any obligation or compulsion but because He is merciful and compassionate. It pleases Him to save His people from sin and bestow eternal blessing upon us (Luke 12:32; 1 Corinthians 1:21).

“Will” (Gk. *thelema*, THEL-ay-mah) in Ephesians 1:5 means “what one wishes or has determined shall be done.” Until the coming of Christ, God’s will for humanity’s salvation was mostly hidden and only partly revealed. It was a mystery because humanity had no

way of knowing exactly what God was going to do (Ephesians 3:4–5). But Christ’s advent, crucifixion, and resurrection—along with the proclamation of His word—have fully revealed to us what God has “determined shall be done” (see Daniel 11:36).

6 To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.

“Praise” (Gk. *epainos*, EP-ahee-nos) is used here and in verses 12 and 14 to refer to recognition that is due God for His work to save His people. The Lord will receive praise, thanksgiving, and honor from the redeemed for all eternity (Revelation 7:10). “Glory” (Gk. *doxa*, DOX-ah) can mean “brightness,” “splendor,” “majesty,” “fame,” “renown,” or “honor.” Here, the emphasis is on the fame and renown of God’s incredible “grace” (Gk. *charis*, KHAR-ece). Charis refers to the favor that God has shown to His people by selecting them and orchestrating their salvation, in spite of their sin.

7 In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;

Paul now switches his focus from the orchestrating work of the Father to the role of the Son, who accomplished the salvation of God’s people. All of the blessings of salvation are experienced “in Christ” (see comments on v. 3). “Redemption” (Gk. *apolutrosis*, ap-ol-OO-trosis) is a release from slavery or captivity brought about by the payment of a ransom, a “buying back.” “Forgiveness” (Gk. *aphesis*, AF-es-is) is the cancellation of an obligation—namely the obligation of payment for our sin. Christ’s work means that God promises to erase our sin from our record (Isaiah 43:25), to not count our sin against us (Romans 4:8), to not remember our sins (Hebrews 10:17), and to cleanse our

conscience so that we may walk in newness of life (Hebrews 9:14; 10:22).

We experience redemption and forgiveness through the “riches” (Gk. *ploutos*, PLOO-tos) of God’s grace. Ploutos can mean a literal abundance of wealth; here, the emphasis is on the fullness of the blessings experienced by believers in Christ. Furthermore, God’s cleansing work is a precursor to the spiritual prosperity for which we hope (Jeremiah 33:8–9).

8 Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence;

God has “abounded” or “lavished” (Gk. *perisseuo*, per-is-SYOO-o) the blessings of salvation upon us. In this context, *perisseuo* means “to make extremely rich.” His generosity is so great that it might cause us to question the soundness of His judgment. However, Paul uses two overlapping terms to clarify that the lavishing is deliberate and based on sound judgment. “Wisdom” (Gk. *sophia*, sof-EE-ah) is “the capacity to understand and function accordingly.” “Prudence” (Gk. *phronesis*, FRON-ay-sis) is “intelligence” or “the ability to understand.”

9 Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself:

The verb “having made known” (Gk. *gnorizo*, gno-RID-zo) means, “to reveal” and may indicate either the time or means of God’s lavishing. This phrase could also be translated “when he revealed to us” or “by revealing to us.” What God revealed was the “mystery” (Gk. *musterion*, moos-TAY-ree-on) of His will. A biblical mystery is a secret that God has not previously disclosed. The exact nature of the mystery is not the point of this passage. The point is that God has entrusted the message of His plan for the redemption of humanity with the church. We are responsible

to be good stewards of that message by faithfully preserving it, guarding it from corruption, and sharing it with those who need to hear it.

The revelation of the mystery of God's will happened according to His good pleasure. The Greek word for "good pleasure," *eudokia*, was also used in verse 5 to describe the way God adopted us as His children. The word "purposed" (Gk. *protithemai*, prot-ITH-em-ahee) means "to set before oneself" or "to propose to oneself." The word is used figuratively here to mean, "plan," "purpose," or "intend." Again, we see that God's lavish blessing of His people in Christ is both motivated by passionate love and carefully planned.

10 That in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him:

God's plan, rooted in love and guided by wisdom, concerns more than the redemption of humanity. His goal is to change or renew the order of the entire created universe by manifesting the Lordship of Christ in a powerful and dramatic way. "Dispensation" or "economy" (Gk. *oikonomia*, oy-kon-om-EE-ah) refers to God's plan of salvation, which He is bringing to pass in the "fullness of times." As sovereign king of the universe, God did not simply set the events of history in motion, step back, and watch to see how things would play out. He is actively involved in bringing about His intended purpose for the world He created. "Gather together in one" (Gk. *anakephalaioimai*, an-ak-ef-al-AH-ee-om-ahee) also means to "unite" or "sum up." God's purpose is for Christ to be revealed and exalted as Redeemer and Lord of the entire universe (Ephesians 1:22; Philippians 2:9–10; Revelation 5:9). "All things" includes all people, as well as everything that Christ created when He formed the universe (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16–17). This is why

the Scriptures refer to the future with terms and concepts such as "new heavens and new earth" and "the restoration of all things" (Isaiah 65:17; Acts 3:21; 2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:5). Jesus, who created all things in the beginning, is in the process of recreating the world, which humanity damaged through sin.

11 In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:

The benefits of our status as God's heirs (or inheritance) are not the product of chance. Paul emphasizes the determining influence of God's sovereignty with a flourish of words that repeat themes from earlier in the passage and overlap in meaning. The word "predestinated" is the same word used in verse 5 to describe God's loving act of foreordaining our adoption. "Purpose" (Gk. *prothesis*, PROTH-es-is) here refers to a plan or something that has been resolved. "Counsel" (Gk. *boule*, boo-LAY) means "plan," "purpose," "resolution," or "decision." "Will" has already been used in verses 5 and 9.

12 That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.

The "we" of this verse is complemented by the "you" of verse 13—both of which groups are clearly composed of believers in Jesus. The "praise of his glory" is, of course, the appropriate response to God's saving grace (see v. 6). God chose and called the people of Israel to believe in the coming Messiah. He revealed the salvation that He would bring through signs and symbols, such as the temple worship and the Levitical priesthood. His purpose was not to restrict salvation to the Jewish people but to make them a light for the peoples of the world so that many would experience His salvation (Isaiah 49:6). Paul is among the Jewish people who heard the message of Christ and came

to believe that He was the Messiah. This also means that all of the many ways in which Israel experienced both the promise and fulfillment of God's deliverance (see Romans 9:4–5) are additional grounds for praise to God.

13 In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise,

Paul continues to point out the priceless benefits of the gospel but with special emphasis on the fact that Jews (the “we” of Ephesians 1:12) and Gentiles (“ye”) have shared equally in those benefits. The experience of salvation comes from hearing the word of truth, not from being born or being circumcised as a Jew. The Gentiles, having believed, also experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Elsewhere in the New Testament, Paul and the Apostles refer to the baptism of the Spirit as the fulfillment of both Old Testament prophecy (Joel 2:28) and the promise of Jesus (Luke 24:47–49). The fact that Gentiles experienced the same baptism as Jews did on the Day of Pentecost was something that many Jewish Christians found extraordinary. It served as incontrovertible evidence that Gentiles could be saved by faith in Jesus without first becoming Jews (Acts 10:44–46; 11:15–18). “Sealed” (Gk. *sphragizo*, sfrag-**ID**-zo) means “to mark for the purpose of identification or indicating ownership.” Sealing also carries with it a sense of certification—a guarantee of authenticity. The experience of Spirit baptism is, therefore, not a “second blessing” but a “down payment” toward the full benefits Christ has purchased for us.

14 Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.

An “earnest” (Gk. *arrhabon*, ar-hrab-**OHN**) is a “first installment, deposit or down payment.” We normally think of an “inheritance” (Gk. *kleronomia*, klay-ron-om-EE-ah) as property that changes hands at death. Even though God cannot die, the New Testament often uses this word to refer to the possessions promised by God to His children. The emphasis, therefore, is on God's incredible love for His children—that He longs to lavish everything He owns on them. “Praise of his glory” is the same phrase used in verse 12 to describe the purpose of God's redemption of those who were first to believe. Here, the phrase applies to the salvation of all God's people. God's mighty power and incredible grace will bring Him the enduring, thankful praise of all His people, for all eternity.

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Say It Correctly

Ephesians. ih-FEE-zhuns.
Predestinated. pre-DES-tuh-nay-ted.
Dispensation. dis-puhn-SEY-shuhn.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Blessed by God's Forgiveness
(Psalm 32:1-7)

TUESDAY

Blessed by Being Chosen
(Psalm 33:8-12)

WEDNESDAY

Blessed by God's Gift of Grace
(1 Corinthians 1:4-9)

THURSDAY

Blessed by God's Revelation
(Daniel 2:17-23)

FRIDAY

Blessed by the Word of Truth
(Colossians 1:3-8)

SATURDAY

Blessed by God's Redemption
(Luke 1:67-79)

SUNDAY

God Has Blessed Us
(Ephesians 1:3-14)

Notes

Teaching Tips

December 11
Bible Study Guide 2

Words You Should Know

A. Circumcision (Ephesians 2:11) *peritome* (Gk.)—The ritual removal of the foreskin of the Jewish male.

B. Commonwealth (v. 12) *politeia* (Gk.)—Citizenship within the community.

Teacher Preparation

Unifying Principle—Unity Not Uniformity.

The writer of Ephesians proclaims that it is in Christ that we, who are dead through our trespasses, are brought alive in Christ and that Jesus Christ is the One who breaks down all dividing walls and brings us together as one.

A. Pray that your students' hearts and minds will be fertile for the planting of God's Word in their lives.

B. Prayerfully study the entire lesson.

C. Prepare the companion lesson in the *Precepts For Living*® Study Guide.

O—Open the Lesson

A. After receiving prayer requests, ask a volunteer to open the class with prayer.

B. Have a volunteer read the In Focus story, and then ask the students to discuss how blending a family together is similar to blending churches full of people of diverse backgrounds.

P—Present the Scriptures

A. Ask for a few volunteers to read the Focal Verses.

B. Unpack the lesson using The People, Places, and Times and Background sections, At-A-Glance outline, and More Light on the Text.

E—Explore the Meaning

A. Discuss the Search the Scriptures questions, Discuss the Meaning, Liberating Lesson, and Application for Activation sections.

B. Examine the salient points.

N—Next Steps for Application

A. Close with prayer.

B. Pray that your church will be a welcoming place for people of all races and economic and social classes.

Worship Guide

For the Superintendent or Teacher

Theme: One in Jesus Christ

Song: "In Christ There Is
No East or West"

Devotional Reading: Ephesians 3:14–21

One in Jesus Christ

Bible Background • EPHESIANS 2-3

Printed Text • EPHESIANS 2:11-22 | Devotional Reading • EPHESIANS 3:14-21

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will UNDERSTAND Paul's explanation of Jews and Gentiles becoming one in Christ; EXPRESS pain and sorrow over the divisions within Christ's church and joy when divisions are broken down; and BECOME acquainted with church-unifying and church-dividing issues in order to devise strategies for addressing them.

In Focus

Marcus and Felicia held such high hopes when they married, but they could never have known that blending two families would be so difficult. Felicia's children from a previous relationship were crazy about Marcus, but they seemed to resent the things he did for his children during their weekend visits. Felicia felt that Marcus probably was doing too much for them, trying to make up for not being with them all the time.

Last weekend was the worst. Marcus and Felicia had to referee what was about to become World War III. Their two daughters were arguing about what to watch on the big-screen television. Felicia's daughter, Katrina, screamed at Marcus's daughter, Akira, "I don't care what you want! You're not really a part of this family, anyway. Your daddy lives with me!"

Marcus and Felicia had to explain to their children that, even though Marcus's children weren't there all the time, they were both an equal and important part of their family.

Christians often have similar problems with diverse members coming together as one. What are some of the divisions in the Christian church today? In today's lesson, Paul tackles the problem of division between the Jews and Gentiles in the Ephesian congregation.

Keep in Mind

"In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord"
(Ephesians 2:21, KJV).

Focal Verses

KJV Ephesians 2:11 Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands;

12 That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:

13 But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.

14 For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us;

15 Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace;

16 And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby:

17 And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh.

18 For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.

19 Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God;

20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;

21 In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord:

22 In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

The eople, Places, and Times

The Temple. The Temple at Jerusalem was made up of many courts. Paul focuses on the outer court, but there were four different ones. The outer court was where the Gentiles had to stay. A lot of money exchanging or selling took place in the outer court. Next, there was the court of the Jewish women. The women could only go as far as this court. Next is the court of the Israelites where the Israelite men would go and offer sacrifices. The inner court is called the “Holy of Holies.” No one could go into that court except the high priest; even he could go in only once a year. Before he could enter, he had to undergo a cleansing ritual. The Holy of Holies is the place where God dwelled, separated from the rest of the temple by a curtain. The Gospels report that when Jesus was crucified, the curtain was torn.

Circumcision. It is the act of removing the foreskin of the male sex organ. In ancient Israel, this act was performed as a ritual on children, natives, servants, and outsiders on the eighth day after birth. In the Jewish faith, it was an external symbol of one’s total and complete allegiance and devotion to Yahweh. Controversy arose in the early church over the circumcision of Gentile converts (Acts 15:13–18). During the A.D. first century, Jews frowned upon non-circumcision among Christians. Apostle Paul played a crucial role in settling the dispute. He determined that physical circumcision was not essential to Christian faith and fellowship. Circumcision of the heart through repentance and faith were the only requirements of the faith for non-Jewish Christians.

Background

Many barriers divided the Jews and the Gentiles in the ancient world. Paul devotes much of his attention in this portion of the letter to the essential oneness of the church. For Jews and Gentiles alike, Paul explained that keeping the law was not a requirement for salvation. Christ is the fulfillment of the law, making it complete. (Salvation cannot be earned through strict adherence to the law or by works. Nevertheless, we are not absolved of our responsibility to do what is right. Salvation by grace through faith does lead to good works; thus, no one had the right to boast about personal goodness.) There was no need for Jews and Gentiles to be divided based on Mosaic Law. Christ became and remains the peace of all believers. Therefore, there is no need for division and discord. By lessening the significance of ethnic and cultural identity, both Jews and Gentiles gained something far better and greater.

At-A-Glance

1. The Gentile's Status (Ephesians 2:11–13)
2. Jews and Gentiles Together (vv. 14–18)
3. One Church, One Foundation (vv. 19–22)

In Depth

1. The Gentile's Status (Ephesians 2:11–13)

Paul reminds his readers that before they were converted, they were Gentiles by birth and therefore considered outcasts by the Jews. The Jews despised them, as indicated by the fact that they were called the Uncircumcision. The Jews regarded their circumcised state with snobbery, as this signified that they were God's chosen people. They referred to themselves as the Circumcision. Paul corrects their sense of superiority by clearly stating that their

circumcision was by human effort and therefore merely a physical act. What was really important, he told them, was circumcision of the heart.

While the Jews held on to a false sense of superiority about their status as the chosen, the Gentiles were without a savior altogether. The Messiah was promised to the Jews, even though Isaiah foretold that the blessing would flow to all nations. Christ was sent, “unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 15:24). The Gentiles were “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel” (Ephesians 2:12). They did not belong among God's chosen. They were strangers to His promise considering all of God's covenants had promised blessings to the Jews. For all practical purposes, the Gentiles stood on the outside looking in without hope. But because of God's love, the former establishment was done away with. When the Gentiles receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, God places them in Christ and accepts them through Him. Jesus Christ has broken down the barriers that separate all people.

2. Jews and Gentiles Together (vv. 14–18)

In the first part of chapter two, Paul traces the salvation of both Jews and Gentiles. The two groups held different perceptions of what it means to be saved. Here, Paul moves forward to dissolve their nationalistic and cultural biases to affirm unity in Christ and explain the necessity for unity. Through His shed blood, Christ broke down “the middle wall of partition between us” (v. 14). The barriers that divided Jews and Gentiles are now gone. Where there were two, there is now one. There is but one Christ for both the mighty and powerful and the lowly and powerless. For every race and culture, there is only one savior.

Paul describes Christ as our peace. When Christ came to us, He “preached peace” to those near and far (v. 17). In this instance, those who were near were the Jews. They had already

received a promise. Those who were afar were the Gentiles, those who had no covenant with God; they held no assurance of His presence or promise. This being the case, it is not difficult to understand why the Jews held a certain snobbery concerning their status as God's chosen people. Peace was needed to unify two groups that were alienated from each other. As our peace, Christ has created a new people, free from the limitations of imposed human boundaries such as culture, race, gender, education, social, or economic standing. All believers now have access to the presence of God at any time. This was in stark contrast to the Old Testament, when only the High Priest could go into the Holy of Holies, the place where God dwelled.

3. One Church, One Foundation (vv. 19–22)

Paul often uses the words “now therefore” when making a conclusion (see v. 19). He concludes that the Gentiles were in no way inferior to the Jews. Christ did away with all of that. The apostle lists some of the many great benefits available to all believing Gentiles, as they are no longer strangers and foreigners. Never again will they be looked upon as less than others or as outsiders. Now they are fellow citizens and equal heirs to the inheritance. Christians of Jewish ancestries have no advantage over the believing Gentiles. All believers are first-class citizens in the kingdom of heaven.

As they are now a part of the Church, they have become stones, or building blocks, in the construction of a holy temple. This new temple will also have a foundation, with Christ as the “chief corner stone” that bonds the temple together. This new Temple, the Church, is built upon the apostles and prophets of the New Testament. The apostles and prophets are not the foundation; Christ is the foundation. The foundation was laid in what the apostles and prophets taught about the Person and work of Jesus Christ. Christ is more than the

foundation of the Church, however; He is also the chief cornerstone, joining the two walls that were once separated: Jews and Gentiles. In this new temple that Christ has created, everyone will have an equal place. When Jesus created a new covenant between God and humankind, He made a new people of God, one body—the Church.

Search the Scriptures

1. What were the Gentiles called (Ephesians 2:11)?
2. How did the Jews refer to themselves (v. 11)?
3. What barrier did Christ break down (v. 14)?

Discuss the Meaning

Because it is our responsibility to care for the Church of Christ and to continue to bring new stones, in what ways have we neglected our duties, both to the universal Church and in the local church?

Liberating Lesson

Some believers are determined to create cultural, racial, and ethnic barriers within the church. Many arguments and divisions have arisen over doctrinal issues. Some have attacked others as being unsaved for not adhering to certain standards. All believers should be careful to avoid ostracizing others. We should also be mindful of how what we do based on our preferences creates division. Christ desires that we engage ourselves in activities that draw us closer to Him and to one another.

Application for Activation

Think about who you are to people in your home, in your church, at your job, and in the community. Why is it important that you have good standing in all of these areas? How do you

devote yourself equally to maintaining your role as a follower of Christ (not merely a church member)? How do you try to hold yourself responsible to do what Christ desires of you? Think of at least one action or step you can take to show that it is important to you to continue to live as a disciple “in good standing.”

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Ephesians 2:11–22

11 Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands;

Paul, for the first time, identifies those whom he is addressing in verse 11—the Gentiles. He reminds them who they were before they received Christ. He uses different terms to describe their position before their union with Christ. First, they were “Gentiles in the flesh” (Gk. *ethnos*, ETH-nos), non-Jewish nations by

birth, which the Jews disrespectfully called the “Uncircumcision.” God had instructed Abraham in Genesis to circumcise every male child in his household, including his servants (Genesis 17:11). This practice became a visible sign of the covenant between the Lord and His people. Any Jewish male who was not circumcised was to be expelled from his people (Genesis 17:14) and regarded as a covenant-breaker (Exodus 4:24–26). The Jewish people took great pride in circumcision, and it became a badge of their spiritual and national superiority. Devout Jews, in recognition of God’s continuing covenant with Israel, faithfully practiced circumcision in the New Testament period. Both John the Baptist (Luke 1:59) and Jesus (Luke 2:21) were circumcised in accordance with Jewish tradition. The practice raised a spirit of exclusivity and resentment between Jews and Gentiles and later brought discord into the early Church (Acts 15:1). An exaggerated importance had been placed on the rite, and each side disparaged the other.

Paul de-emphasized the physical rite, and he said that the Jewish circumcision is only in the flesh and something done by human hands. He says that the true motive behind the circumcision of the flesh is a circumcision of the heart that is spiritual instead of physical. That kind of circumcision is needed and available to both Jews and Gentiles alike (Romans 2:28–29; Colossians 2:11–13). Writing to the Philippian Christians (both Jews and Gentiles), Paul says, “For we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh” (Philippians 3:3, NASB).

12 That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:

Acknowledging that they've been scornfully labeled, Paul calls their attention to spiritual and physical alienation. First, they are to remember that during that time ("in time past," Ephesians 2:11), they were separated from Christ ("ye were without Christ," v. 12). The word "Christ" is probably used here in the general sense of Messiah, and means they did not share in the then Jews' Messianic hope for the future. This Messianic hope is included in the Jews' privileges that Paul lists in Romans 9:4-5. Because the Gentiles are alienated from the promised Jewish Messiah, they are also distanced from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenant. The word "commonwealth" (Gk. *politeia*, pol-ee-TI-ah) means "citizenship." Therefore, Gentiles, by birth, are deprived of the privileges of Israel (Romans 9:4-5) and excluded from the participation in their national rights. We know from the Old Testament that this covenant is the very heart of Israel's relationship with God in which the Father solemnly pledges to be Israel's God and declares that they be called His people (Leviticus 26:12). To partake in the covenant relationship, one must have been born a Jew and be a circumcised male. Gentiles are excluded from this Old Testament covenant.

Gentiles were separated from the Messianic hope (without Christ), estranged from the commonwealth of Israel, and excluded from the covenant of promise as God's people. The Gentiles had "no hope, and (were) without God in the world" (Ephesians 2:12). It is like a chain reaction. The ultimate result is that they were without God and, as such, hopeless in the world. This describes their position in their unbelief before they became Christians.

13 But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. 14 For he is our peace, who

hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us;

After describing the apparently gloomy and hopeless situation of the Gentiles before they became Christians, Paul now moves to the present positive state brought about by their new relationship in Christ. He says, "You who once were far off have been brought near" (v. 13, NKJV). That means that they are longer aliens and strangers to the promises and covenant of God. They are no longer regarded as people without God and without hope (v. 12). They now have the same relationship with God, which was formerly reserved for Israel alone. Israel and God are said to be near each other. "Far off" describes how separated the Gentiles were from God compared with His nearness to Israel. The separation or alienation of the Gentiles from God and from Israel is symbolized in the construction of the Temple in Jerusalem. There were partitions between the outer and inner courts. The Gentiles were only allowed entrance to the outer court; hence, its name was Court of the Gentiles. The inner court, which was closer to the court of the priests and the Holy of Holies, was reserved for Jews. Inscriptions on the outer surfaces of the Temple warned that death was the punishment for any non-Jew caught entering the inner court (Holman Bible Dictionary, 1326-1327). Conversely, "Solomon's dedication (of the Temple) made clear that the door was never closed to the foreigner who wished to serve the Lord (1 Kings 8:41-43)," (Holman Bible Dictionary, 542).

This segregation and special understanding of the responsibility given to the Children of Israel figuratively and literally represented the far-off position of the Gentiles. Apart from symbolizing alienation from God and Israel, the partition was also a symbol of hostility between the Jews and the Gentiles. The cross is the uniting force that binds the two sides into one community. Paul makes the unification of

the two groups clear in the next verse through a profound declaration: “He is our peace.” The use of the pronoun “He” (Gk. *autos*, ow-**TOS**) is emphatic, which means “He, Himself” or “He and He alone” is our peace. This echoes the prophecy of Isaiah 9:6, where Christ is given the title “Prince of Peace.” Christ is peace personified; only through Him are believers reconciled to God and one another. He has made both one.

15 Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace;

In addition to the separating walls of the temple, the Jews lived distinct and separate lives from their surrounding neighbors in many respects. Traditional Jewish laws separated them from the rest of the world, as did the physical walls in the temple. These were symbols of separation between the two. Christ, through His sacrificial death, abolished the Law of Moses with its rituals, provided a new covenant that is inclusive for both Jews and Gentiles, and made them one. He brings everyone to the same level. This breakdown is demonstrated in the rending from top to bottom of the temple veil. This demonstrates that the way into the Holy of Holies is left open and accessible to all—Jews and Gentiles alike.

The abolition of the law raises some questions. What does Paul mean by abolishing the law in relation to Christ’s words in Matthew 5:17? There, Christ teaches that He has come not to abolish but rather to fulfill the law. Is it then a contradiction of Scriptures? In what sense was either used? The difference, as someone has suggested, seems to lie in the two types of laws: the moral law and the ceremonial law. Christ requires from His followers a more radical obedience to the moral law as compared with the Pharisees’ standards (Matthew 5:18). Paul refers to Christ’s abolishing

of the ceremonial law, which includes the physical ritual of circumcision (Ephesians 2:11), rather than the spiritual circumcision of the heart. This also includes some of the dietary regulations in Colossians 2:11, 16–21. These constitute barriers between the Jews and the Gentiles that Jesus has abolished through His death on the Cross. He has made the two one in Himself and has made peace between them. The unification of all believers in Christ includes the abolition of the gendered, social, and racial distinctions that exist and cause oppression among different groups.

16 And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: 17 And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh.

Verses 16 and 17 speak to the same theme using different terms. These terms further describe what Christ has done through His blood: He has reconciled both Jews and Gentiles unto God in one body by the Cross. In verse 15, the law that brought about the enmity is “abolished” (Gk. *katargeo*, kat-arg-**EH**-o), or “done away with,” “rendered idle,” or “destroyed.” In verse 16, the enmity caused by the law is “slain” (Gk. *apokteino*, ap-ok-**TI**-no), or “inflicted a mortal death” or “killed.” This word denotes total annihilation. In the single act of sacrifice on the cross, Christ abolished the ceremonial law, which separated humanity from itself and from its Creator.

Second, He created a new humanity, slaying the enmity among people and making them equal to one another. Third, by this act of sacrifice, Christ reconciled this new society to the Creator. Paul continued the theme of Christ’s activity in bringing near those who were far away and reconciling the two entities, uniting them into “one new man” by abolishing the law. Paul does this by describing this same activity in a different way in verse 17. While

in verse 14, Christ “is our peace” personified, here, he preaches “peace to you which were afar off” (the Gentiles, vv. 11–13) as well as “to them that were nigh” (the Jews). “He came and preached peace” refers to Christ’s earthly mission and the ministry of the early Church. The word “preached” (Gk. *euaggelizo*, yoo-ang-ghel-**ID**-zo) is the same Greek word translated “preach the good news” in Luke 4:17, where Jesus announced His mission in fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy (see Isaiah 61:1–2).

18 For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. 19 Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God;

Verses 18 and 19 tell us the effect of Christ’s preaching. Through Him, Jews and Gentiles are now reconciled to one another and both to God. Consequently, by Him they both can approach God the Father in one Spirit. It is noteworthy to recognize a reference to the Trinity here that reveals the distinctions of the three persons in the Godhead (see 1 John 5:7). In Ephesians 2:18, the word “access” (Gk. *prosagoge*, pros-ag-ogue-**AY**) means the freedom we have to approach God as our Father. We can approach Him with boldness and assurance that we are acceptable to Him and that we will not be turned away. In verse 19a, Paul’s use of metaphor shifts from membership of a family unit to the metaphor of citizenship. In verse 12, the Gentiles are said to be outside of the family of Israel and strangers without hope and without God. Now, they are no more “strangers and foreigners” (Gk. *paroikos*, **PAR**-oy-kos); both terms are synonymous, meaning “one who lives in a place without the right of citizenship.” Here, Paul reminds the Gentiles that through Christ, they have become “fellowcitizens” (Gk. *sumpolites*, soom-pol-**EE**-tace) with Israel in God’s Kingdom.

20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;

Paul now moves from speaking of the church as God’s family or community, to referring to it as a building (house) whose foundation is laid upon the apostles and prophets. The word “foundation” (Gk. *themelios*, them-**EL**-ee-os) refers to the work of the early Christian apostles and prophets who helped to grow the church. He is not only the builder; Christ is also the chief “corner stone” (Gk. *akrogoniaios*, ak-rog-o-nee-**AH**-yos). Peter also refers to Christ as the cornerstone (1 Peter 2:6), using the same Greek word. The stability of a house or building depends on its foundation. A house without a solid foundation would not stand the test of time. Christ’s parable of the soils (Matthew 13:3–8), and His identification of Peter as the rock on which His Church would develop (16:17–19), emphasize the need for a strong foundation. In Ephesians 2:20, Paul says that Jesus is the “chief (the main) corner stone” that holds together the whole building and keeps the rest of the foundation in place, while the apostles and prophets are part of the foundation.

21 In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: 22 In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

Paul goes on to elaborate on the makeup of the building and its foundation. The stability of the church is dependent upon the One who is both builder and the chief cornerstone—Christ. A building does not stop at the foundation. It needs fittings and other structures before it can be called a building. Paul refocuses his picture of the whole structure to the individual stones that are used to erect a building. Peter also uses the image of a building or temple to describe the church. In the same imagery where he refers to Christ as the “chief corner stone” (1 Peter 2:6),

he describes the individual members as “living stones ... being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood” (1 Peter 2:4–5, NIV). Paul describes the members of the church as the stones, which the master builder meticulously fits together upon the chief foundation into a magnificent edifice.

The phrase in Ephesians 2:22 “whom ye also are builded” refers to the Gentile Christians. The temple, as we know, represents the dwelling place and presence of God. As previously stated, the temple was exclusively reserved for the Jews. Gentiles were forbidden to enter the temple, even though an outside court was reserved for Gentiles. Here, Paul assures them that not only are they now admitted into the temple, having gained access to the Father, but they are also a part of the temple of God. This is based on their union in Christ Jesus, who is the cornerstone. The purpose of the temple in the Old Testament was to be a dwelling place for God. This new temple serves the same purpose, namely for God’s “habitation” (Gk. *katoiketerion*, kat-oy-kay-**TAY**-ree-on). We know from Scripture that the whole earth cannot contain God—neither Solomon’s magnificent temple nor the one rebuilt by Herod. God does not dwell in human-made houses (1 Kings 8:27; Acts 7:48–49; 17:24). He nonetheless manifested His glory and presence in the temple. He also makes His abode in the hearts of His followers.

Sources:

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 New Testament Greek Lexicon. Bible Study Tools.com. <http://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/> (accessed October 18, 2011).

Say It Correctly

Circumcision. sir-kuhm-**SIZH**-uhn.
 Enmity. **EN**-mi-tee.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Reviving the Humble and the Contrite
 (Isaiah 57:14–19)

TUESDAY

Building on the True Foundation
 (1 Corinthians 3:10–16)

WEDNESDAY

Sharing in the Promise
 (Ephesians 3:1–6)

THURSDAY

Making Known the Wisdom of God
 (Ephesians 3:7–13)

FRIDAY

Praying for Spiritual Power
 (Ephesians 3:14–21)

SATURDAY

Discovering the Gift of Salvation
 (Ephesians 2:1–10)

SUNDAY

Discovering Our Oneness in Christ
 (Ephesians 2:11–22)