



Chosen and Grateful

LESSON 1

Topic

Salvation

Theme

God wants us to respond to the gift of salvation with thanksgiving and holy living.

Desired Response

The learners will examine their lives and renew their focus on Bible intake and holy living.

Materials

- Visuals 1–7.

Scripture Focus

Ephesians 1:1–5

Summary

This lesson focuses on the apostle Paul's greeting in his letter to the Christians at Ephesus. His greeting identifies believers as those whom God has chosen to lead holy, blameless lives.

Outline

I. Ephesians' Setting and Purpose

- A. Paul's history with Ephesus
- B. Ephesus' obsession with Diana
- C. Paul's emphasis on life "in Christ"

II. Paul's Personal Greeting (Eph. 1:1, 2)

III. Introduction to Life in Christ (Eph. 1:3–5)

- A. God bestowed us with blessings (1:3)
- B. God chose us to salvation (1:4)
- C. God predestinated us to adoption (1:5)

Memory Verse

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

GETTING STARTED

Identity in America

ASK: How has being an American changed recently? What is now the major focus: being part of the United States or being part of a group within the United States?

ASK: What effects has this changed focus had on unity within the United States?

ASK: What do you see as the most important identifying factor in your life?

The believers in Ephesus struggled with their identity. Some were Jews, some were Gentiles, and all were from Ephesus, a proud and pagan city. They wondered how life as a believer affected them ethnically and culturally. Paul gave the Ephesian believers a simple answer: they were unified “in Christ.” In his letter to Ephesus, he emphasized the doctrinal basis and practice of life “in Christ.” His timeless teaching helps us with our identity in a confused and volatile world.

Identifying Me

ASK: What three words might an observant person use to identify you? (Q1)

ASK: What three words would you use to identify yourself? (Q2)

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SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

I. Ephesians’ Setting and Purpose

A. Paul’s history with Ephesus

The apostle Paul wrote his epistle to the Ephesians during his first imprisonment in Rome between AD 60 and 63 (Eph. 1:1; 3:1; Acts 28:16–31). While awaiting trial before Emperor Nero, Paul lived under house arrest in a rented place.

DISPLAY: Visual 1—First Century Asia Minor. Point out Ephesus and other places mentioned.

Paul visited Ephesus briefly when he was returning home from his second



journey (about AD 51). Priscilla and Aquila accompanied him when he entered Ephesus. Although his visit was brief, it was effective. Many Ephesians trusted in Christ and abandoned their pagan practices (Acts 19:18–20). When Paul left Ephesus, Priscilla and Aquila stayed behind to minister in the newborn church.

On his third missionary journey, Paul visited Ephesus again (about AD 54). This time he ministered there three years (Acts 20:31). The gospel spread across throughout Asia.

Later Paul held a brief conference with the elders of the Ephesian church at Miletus, about thirty miles south of Ephesus on the coast of Asia. It was the elders' last glimpse of Paul, but Paul's care for them continued.

B. Ephesus' obsession with Diana

Because some of the early manuscripts do not include the words “in Ephesus,” some scholars believe Paul wrote Ephesians not only to the church in Ephesus but also to neighboring churches in the province of Asia. The richest and most peaceful province of the Roman Empire, Asia was so populous that it was called the province of five hundred cities. It stretched along the entire western coast of Asia Minor (modern Turkey) and boasted many important and heavily populated commercial and manufacturing cities.

Athenians founded Ephesus as a port city on a plain near the mouth of the Cayster River. The impressive city reflected the oriental influence of its large Asian population. Because it was a free city, it enjoyed self-governance with authority vested in a senate and an assembly of the citizens.

Worship of the goddess Diana permeated the life of the city. The Ephesians believed she gave and protected physical life. They lived as if they owed their lives to her. In their minds, they lived “in Diana.”

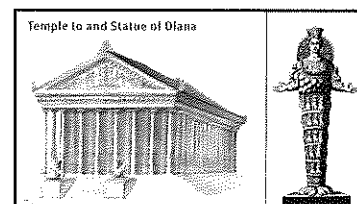
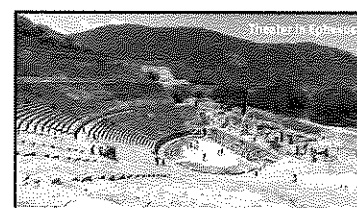
The Ephesian silversmiths found a lucrative trade in making and selling miniature silver images of Diana. People bought the images to gain favor with Diana and ensure her blessing on their lives. When the gospel began to spread in Asia, belief in Diana waned. Consequently, the silversmiths lost money and feared the worship of Diana might cease altogether.

DISPLAY: Visuals 2 and 3—Theater in Ephesus.

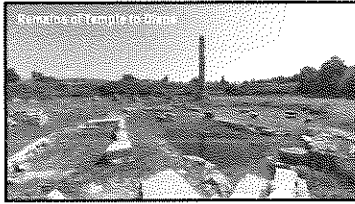
The city's theater, then the largest in the Greek world, boasted a seating capacity of twenty-five thousand. During Paul's third missionary journey, an angry mob, incited against Paul's disruption of their pagan-based economy, stormed into this theater, dragging with them Gaius and Aristarchus, two of Paul's missionary companions. The town clerk addressed the mob, however, and successfully quelled the riot by reminding them of the “fact” that the image of Diana fell from the sky so Ephesus could be her temple guardian. The crowd's anger quickly turned to pride. The clerk also warned that continuing the riot might give Rome a reason to take away their city's freedom to govern themselves (Acts 19:23–41).

DISPLAY: Visual 4—Temple to and Statue of Diana.

The Ephesians took their role of defending and worshiping Diana seriously. They built a magnificent temple to her around 700 BC. The temple was subsequently



destroyed and rebuilt twice with the last version being the most magnificent. The temple is deservedly recognized as one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. The superb structure of shining white marble stood outside the city walls and faced east. It is said to have been over 450 feet long and around 225 feet wide. By comparison, a football field is 360 feet long and 160 feet wide. More than 127 marble columns supported the 60-foot-high temple. Numerous statues and paintings adorned the temple, and within its inner shrine stood an image of the goddess Diana.



DISPLAY: Visual 5—Remains of temple of Diana.

Invading Goths destroyed the third temple to Diana in AD 262. Over the centuries that followed, the location of the temple became unknown. Not until the nineteenth century did archaeologists identify the temple's remains. There wasn't much left.

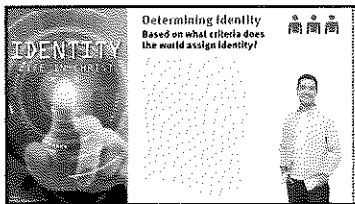
Diana proved to be false. There are no magnificent temples to her today and relatively few people seriously worship her. The gospel, by contrast, has continued to grow, moving beyond ancient Asia Minor to reach countless people around the world

ASK: How would you describe the gratefulness the Ephesians showed to Diana, the one they believed protected life and provided for needs? (Q3)

ASK: How might we show our gratefulness to God, the one true provider of our needs, including our need for salvation? (Q4) *By serving Him sacrificially, thanking Him publicly, introducing people to Him.*

C. Paul's emphasis on life "in Christ"

The typical Ephesian found identity in Diana and took pride in living in a free city. Being "in Diana" and in Ephesus affected every aspect of the Ephesians' lives. Paul directed the Jewish and Gentile believers in Ephesus to consider their unity and identity "in Christ" (Eph. 1:3). In chapters 1–3, the apostle laid out the doctrinal basis for believers' unity in Christ. In chapters 4–6, Paul communicated what life in Christ looks like personally as well as interpersonally in the church, workplace, and home. His doctrinal and practical teachings will help us learn why and how we can live in Christ to the praise and glory of God's grace.



DISPLAY: Visual 6—Determining Identity. **ASK:** Based on what criteria does the world assign identity? (Q5) *Physical traits, "race," economic status, sexuality, generational group, political affiliation, religion, level of awakeness.*

ASK: How has the world's method of assigning identity influenced how you approach and interact with people? (Q6)

II. Paul's Personal Greeting (Eph. 1:1, 2)

READ: Ephesians 1:1.

Paul recognized both his apostleship and subsequent imprisonment as God's will for his life. He was okay with how God had led him. What a contrast to the

superstitious Ephesians who expected only pleasant circumstances to come from their devotion to Diana.

ASK: What might the pagan Ephesians conclude about the prospects of living devoted to God? (Q7) *That such a choice seemed foolish and troublesome.*

Paul understood his riches in Christ were neither material nor earthbound. He had abundantly more than the pagan Ephesians ever realized. He detailed some of the blessings in Christ immediately after finishing his personal greeting. This lesson will begin to cover those blessings.

Paul went on to address the Ephesian believers as “saints,” a term identifying them as set apart for God. He wished the Ephesian saints a twofold blessing of “grace” and “peace” (1:2). Grace includes all of God’s unmerited favor, and peace means the presence of calm, confidence, and contentment even during trying or troubling circumstances.

“Grace” was a common greeting among Greeks. “Peace” was a common greeting among Jews. Paul combined the words to show early on that both saved Gentiles and saved Jews were one “in Christ Jesus.”

Being a saint in Christ supersedes all our physical or cultural differences. Nothing about our physical makeup or cultural background will ever be as important as being together in Christ.

ASK: When has your shared faith helped you connect with a believer from a different culture? (Q8)

III. Introduction to Life in Christ (Eph. 1:3–5)

A. God bestowed us with blessings (1:3)

Paul introduced life in Christ by thanking God for bestowing believers with the many spiritual blessings that come from being “in Christ” (1:3). The blessings flow from God through Christ to us, and they operate “in heavenly places,” meaning they are of a spiritual nature rather than physical. Paul enjoyed rich blessings in Christ even as he lived under house arrest with very few earthly goods.

By contract, the Ephesians and visitors from around the world filled the temple to Diana with tremendous wealth and priceless works of art to gain Diana’s attention and attempt to earn her blessings. Teachers and preaches today who claim God always enriches faithful believers with physical health and wealth teach a similar perverted and damaging doctrine. Their teachings demean the spiritual blessings we have in Christ, redefining them as things that appeal to our fleshly desires and pride.

ASK: How do the blessings of Christ compare to the Ephesian wealth? To what might you compare your blessings in Christ? (Q9) *The blessings of Christ are priceless and worth more than all the world’s wealth. Nothing could adequately compare to the blessings in Christ.*

B. God chose us to salvation (1:4)

Paul ascribed praise to God for blessing us “according as he hath chosen us in

him before the foundation of the world” (1:4). Election, God’s act of choosing us to be saved, is entirely the work of the Father. Jesus announced, “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him” (John 6:44).

Election is not a harsh act in which God simply secured the salvation of some and the perdition of the rest; it is, rather, a kind and loving act designed to prevent the ruin of all. If God had not chosen any, then none would be saved. Left to ourselves, we would continue down the slope to eternal judgment.

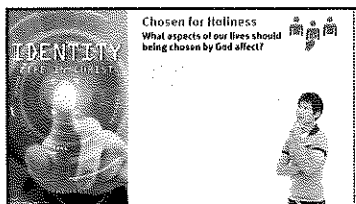
God chose us in Christ “before the foundation of the world.” Before He spoke the world into existence or created Adam, He planned us and determined that we would know Him and share the glories of Heaven with Him. God’s choosing, however, did not make our salvation decision mechanical. A person must personally trust in Jesus as Savior to be saved (Acts 16:30, 31; Rom. 10:8–11).

The doctrine of election spurs sharp debate. Some Christians believe election is based on foreknowledge. Others think foreknowledge is based on election. We may have varied convictions about this subject, but we can all agree on three things: (1) as sinners, we can do nothing to earn our salvation; (2) by grace, God saves all who trust in His Son as Savior; and (3) believers are obligated to “preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15).

ASK: Why should the doctrine of election motivate us to share the gospel? (Q10) *Since God elected some to be saved, we know He will draw some to Himself through our witness.*

ASK: What difference will our witnessing make in eternity? (Q11) *Since God commanded us to witness, He will reward us for sharing our faith regardless of the result. Our rewards will help us praise God for all eternity. They will be eternal evidence of God’s gracious work through us.*

God chose us so that “we should be holy and without blame before him.” Ultimately, when we see Christ in person, we will be like Him—completely holy and free from sin (1 John 3:2). Romans 8:29 announces, “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son.” Obviously, we cannot resemble Christ perfectly until we reach Heaven, but we ought to be developing a likeness to Christ now through the ministry of the Spirit and the power of God’s Word. Our lives ought to reflect Christ’s presence so clearly that no one would call us hypocrites. Despite the world’s persistent effort to sell us on the perceived thrills of an unholy lifestyle, a holy life is the best life a believer can live.



DISPLAY: Visual 7—Chosen for Holiness. **ASK:** What aspects of our lives should be affected by being chosen by God? (Q12) *Our speech, thoughts, motives, desires, actions, relationships, entertainment choices, finances, goals.*

C. God predestinated us to adoption (1:5)

The Greek New Testament combines all the statements in Ephesians 1:3–14 into one sentence. When translators divided the Bible into chapters and verses, they placed the words “in love” at the end of verse 4. However, many Bible scholars prefer to link those two words to verse 5 and read, “In love having predestinated us.” Either way,

God's love is foundational to all He has done, is doing, and will do in our lives.

The word “predestination” relates to God’s purpose and plan for His elect. Suppose a wealthy couple select a child for adoption. Then, as they drive home from the adoption agency, they discuss their plans for the child’s future. Their choice of a child illustrates what election means. Their planning illustrates predestination. Similarly, before God created the world, He devised a plan for His chosen children. He predestinated us to enjoy the blessings of salvation now and in eternity. As we will learn in lesson 2, God ultimately planned for our adoption so we might praise His glorious grace (1:6).

God predestinated us “unto the adoption of children” (1:5). Because He has adopted us into His family, we enjoy all His benevolent care and the privilege of being called His children (1 John 3:1). He treats us as His own.

ASK: Why should God’s adoption of us give us a deep sense of God’s love for us? (Q13) *Love motivated God to adopt us as His children. No one forced God to adopt us. He did so according to the good pleasure of His will.*

Since God has chosen us and predestinated us “according to the good pleasure of his will,” we cannot boast that He saved us based on our special qualities that attracted His attention. He saved us when we were helpless, lost, unworthy, and unprofitable (Rom. 3:10–23; 5:6–8; Eph. 2:1–3). Nor can we assume that people are not accountable for their responses to the gospel. The gospel invites sinners to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved (Acts 16:31). All who believe on Christ receive salvation, whereas all who reject Christ live under God’s wrath (John 3:36).

MAKING IT PERSONAL

Becoming Blameless

DISPLAY: Visual 7—Chosen for Holiness. Review the list of aspects of our lives that should be affected by being chosen by God.

ASK: Does your life show that God chose you to holiness? Explain. (Q14)

Remind your learners that becoming holy in mind and practice takes dependence on the Holy Spirit and the ministry of the Word (John 17:17). Challenge them to give themselves to reading and studying God’s Word on their own. (Q15)

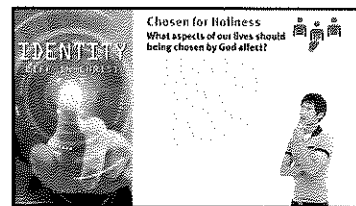
Saying Thanks

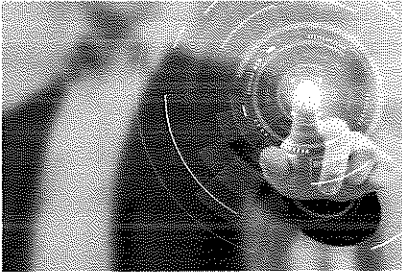
The Ephesians built were so grateful for Diana that they built a magnificent temple to reflect her greatness.

ASK: What could you do to show your gratefulness for the blessings the one true God bestowed on you? (Q16)

Memory Verse

Encourage your learners to memorize Ephesians 1:3. Give them an opportunity to say the verse in class next week.





Guaranteed Inheritance

Topic

Believer's redemption and inheritance

Theme

God redeems believers and gives them a sure inheritance.

Desired Response

The learner will share with others the joy of redemption and the hope of a bright future.

Materials

- Visuals 8, 9.

Scripture Focus

Ephesians 1:6–14

Summary

Paul taught that believers, whether Jews or Gentiles, have been redeemed by the blood of God's Son. Together they are in Christ and share in God's inheritance. The indwelling Holy Spirit guarantees they will receive the full benefits of their inheritance in Christ.

Outline

I. Why God Blessed Us (Eph. 1:6)

II. How God Blessed Us (Eph. 1:7–14)

A. Redemption (1:7–10)

1. Its means (1:7b)
2. Its meaning (1:7c)
3. Its measure (1:7d–10)

B. Inheritance (1:11–14)

1. For the Jews (1:11, 12)
2. For the Gentiles (1:13, 14)

Memory Verses

"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, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory" (Ephesians 1:13, 14).