

## OUR RICHES IN CHRIST

**PLEASE do not read these comments until you have read the Scripture for this lesson. First let the Holy Spirit teach you directly from His Word.**

### Summary and Historical Background

Ephesus was the leading city of Asia Minor in Paul's time. Though Pergamum was the official capitol, Ephesus was the first port of call for every Roman governor who entered the province of Asia. Mithridates ordered the massacre of Romans from Ephesus. Marc Antony spent much of his time at Ephesus. The city was also an important commercial center. It was the most accessible city in all Asia, with a large harbor capable of holding the largest ships, and with many highways ending there, including the western end of the overland route to the Euphrates. Food — goods (wine, figs, olive oil, oysters, wool) and manufactured goods (especially textiles) were shipped from Ephesus to all parts of the Roman Empire. The temple of Diana (or Artemis) served as a bank - the most secure in all Asia. It was as important in commerce as some of our national banks are today.

The temple of Artemis was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Not without reason did Demetrius say that all Asia and the world worshipped there (Acts 19:38). Alexander the Great had offered to rebuild it; Roman emperors graced it with gifts; Roman Emperors drafted wills and gave gifts in the name of Artemis as the overseer and witness to the document. Associated with the temple were two of the darker aspects of paganism: magic and religious prostitution. Its magic included astrology, sorcery, incantations, amulets, exorcisms, in fact, every form of magical deception. Forms of magic were so common in Ephesus that when new believers destroyed their magical books (actually magical devices), it amounted to 50,000 denarii and each denarius was worth one day's wage (Acts. 19:19). Furthermore, its religious prostitution was represented by a grotesque (many-breasted) statue of Artemis, a representation of fertility.

In the darkness of this great political, commercial, and religious center, Paul had built a strong church at Ephesus. Later, when he wrote a letter to the church at Ephesus from his house-prison in Rome, he wrote out of a heart full of wonder, worship and thanksgiving. This letter has much in common with the one sent to Colosse because they were written at the same time.

The theme of Ephesians is the glory of the church. The first three chapters discuss the glorious basis of the church; the last three examine the glorious business of the church. The glorious basis of the church is threefold. Chapter one discusses God's glorious plan for the church. Chapter two discusses the glorious redemption of the church. Chapter three examines the glorious revelation of the church through Paul.

### I. Paul's Salutation — 1:1- 2

**1:1** — "Saints...faithful" - Paul addresses the Christians at Ephesus and characterizes them by two words: (1) "saints" (holy ones), a term which describes their positional standing and points out their practical goal; and (2) "faithful" (believing ones), a term which indicates their personal faith in Christ.

"At Ephesus" — Some believe the Ephesian letter was actually an encyclical letter to several churches because some of the earliest manuscripts omit "at Ephesus," because there are no personal greetings in the letter, and because certain expressions seem to imply that Paul did not know his readers (1:15; 3:2). However, it seems best to consider it as a letter to the Ephesian church because the vast majority of manuscripts do include "at Ephesus," because Paul included extensive greetings to individuals only at places where he had not labored (Rome and Colosse). Paul omits all greetings in 2 Corinthians, Galatians, and 1 and 2 Thessalonians. Furthermore, the expression in 1:15 and 3:2 can be explained in a way that indicates he knew the people to whom he was writing at Ephesus.

1:2 — "Grace...peace" - Paul desires two great blessings for the Ephesians: grace and peace. "Grace" speaks of God's undeserved generosity, unexcelled beauty, and unconquerable power. "Peace" suggests the wholeness, well-being and welfare produced by the reconciliation of one's enemies. Much more than the absence of war, it is the presence of every positive good which makes for well-being.

## II. Paul's Thanksgiving — 1:3-14

1:3 — "Blessed" - Paul begins his letter with a note of praise. "Blessed" carries with it the idea of the right to be blessed.

"Of our Lord Jesus Christ" — This phrase can modify "Father," or "God and Father." If it only modifies "Father," it describes the Father's eternal relationship with the Son. If it modifies both "God and Father," then Paul is saying the Father is also the God of Jesus (cf. Jn. 20:17), that is, the Father is God of Jesus' human nature.

"In heavenly places" — Paul adds the fact that God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the celestial plane. Every spiritual need has been met and is stored for us in heaven. The remaining verses in this section can be divided in two ways. One, Paul describes the work of each of the members of the Trinity (the Father, 1:4-6; the Son, 1:7-12; the Spirit 1:13-14). Two, Paul describes the purpose of God in eternity (1:4-6) and the outworking of that purpose in time (1:7-14).

1:4-6 — The Father's plan and work in salvation are described in these verses.

"According as" — expands and explains the nature of God's blessing in salvation.

"He hath chosen us" — the Greek verb suggests the translation, "He chose us for Himself." The concept is not a difference between being chosen and not chosen, but a special relationship between the chosen and the One choosing.

"In Him" — The method of choice was done in Jesus Christ, the new Head of spiritual humanity.

"Before the foundation of the world" — the time of God's choice was before the earth was created.

"Holy . . . without blame...in love" — the purpose of God's choice was threefold. (1) We should be "holy," totally separated to God. (2) We should be "without blame," spotless, unblemished, totally separated from sin, morally blameless. Old Testament sacrificial animals had to be without blemish, that is, they had to be clear of any physical defect. Jesus Christ was without blemish too, but His perfection was deeper. He was without moral defect. He was morally unblemished (1 Pet. 1:18, 19; Heb. 9:14). Since Christians are in union with Him, they share His perfection and also are morally unblemished - without blame. (3) We should be "in love," letting Christian love govern our relationships with other men.

"Having predestinated us" — God's predestination work is to place us as His adopted sons and to conform us to the image of His Son (Rom 8:29).

"The adoption of children" — it is God's definite plan that we receive the "adoption of children," literally "son-placing." The term "son" implies the full privileges and standing of an adult son. This is done "according to the good pleasure of God's will." God planned our adoption and it was due to His goodness, not man's.

"Glory of His grace" — the result of God's activity brings praise to His grace, which is glorious.

"Hath made us accepted" — literally this phrase is translated "has freely given us". This grace comes to us freely by Jesus Christ, God's beloved Son.

"Beloved" — this term is applied to Christ. Christ was called "beloved" by His Father while on earth (Mt 3:17; Mk 9:7) and continues to be His "beloved" in His exaltation to heaven.

1:7 — "In Whom" - here Paul begins his description of the work of Christ.

"We have" — the continuous tense of the verb describes these privileges clearly: "we have and are ever having."

"Redemption through His blood" — the first gift of Christ is redemption. This strong word speaks of ransom from the power of Satan, sin, and death. The price paid is the blood of Christ in His sacrificial death.

"Forgiveness of sins" — Christ's death also gives us the forgiveness of sin (literally the forgiveness of trespasses). The term, "forgiveness," has the basic idea of release. Here the release is the cancellation of an obligation, the removal of guilt. "Trespasses" refers to sins that are a violation of God's rights (a treacherous breaking of a covenant obligation). Jesus Christ paid God the debt we owe Him - a demonstration of His rich grace.

1:8-10 — "Wisdom...prudence" - God has not only given us the means of redemption and forgiveness in Christ, but He has also abundantly given us the ability to understand it and appropriate it through wisdom and prudence. Wisdom is the intellectual ability to understand spiritual truth. Prudence is the discernment to appropriate that spiritual truth.

"Mystery of His will" — a mystery is not something mysterious, but it is truth that has been hidden, but now is made known. Here God is revealing His will to us concerning redemption in Jesus Christ.

"Dispensation" — Christ's redemptive work will lead to the dispensation administration of the fullness of times (i.e. Christ's Millennial Kingdom, the focal point of much revelation of previous ages).

"Gather together" — in the millennial reign of Christ, God will sum up all things (this is the idea of "gather together"). This summing up describes the regaining of the lost unity of the world, caused by sin, and the regathering of all things into a final perfect unity.

1:11-12 — "We have obtained an inheritance" - there are several translations of one Greek word that makes up this phrase, two of which will be given here. Several translations teach that believers receive their inheritance from Christ as a result of their regeneration. Other translators believe that the Greek word should be translated, "We were made a heritage." This translation teaches that believers are the inheritance of Christ. Both thoughts are true (1 Pet 1:3-5 and Deut 32:9). Whichever interpretation is correct in this verse, God receives praise and glory. The second interpretation is clearly taught in verse 18. The work of Christ and the purpose of the Father will ultimately make His people Christ's own inheritance. This inheritance is worked out on the basis of God's purpose and power and results in praise to God.

"Predestinated" — God predestinates according to His purpose and will. Predestination has to do with the end result and certainty of an event. We are predestined as believers to be Christ's heritage which will be to the praise of His glory.

1:13, 14 — The Holy Spirit's work is now described in these two verses.

"In Whom you also" — a clear reference to Gentile believers in contrast to the "we" (Jewish believers) in 1:11, 12. Gentile believers are not second class citizens, but equal partners with the Jewish believers. All believers bring glory to God.

"Salvation" — our salvation came to us in the following order: (1) hearing the gospel, (2) believing the gospel, (3) being sealed by the Holy Spirit, which occurs when one believes.

"Sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise" — the seal suggests several things to us about the Spirit's work in us. (1) The seal was a proof of authenticity. The Spirit shows we are truly believers (Rom 8:9). (2) The seal indicated the transaction of some business was completed. The seal of the Spirit shows that the business of salvation for the individual believer is finished. The believer has come to an agreement with God. (3) The seal identified the owner of an item. The seal of the Spirit declares that we belong to God and have been accepted into His family. (4) The seal preserved articles in security. The seal of the Holy Spirit guarantees the security of our salvation. Satan cannot take it away. The Holy Spirit is

the earnest money, the down payment of our salvation. He is the guarantee that we shall be glorified with Christ.

"Redemption of the purchased possession" — the work of the Holy Spirit results in the believer's ultimate possession of all the blessings promised to him in salvation. This brings praise to the glory of God.

### III. Paul's Prayer — 1:15-23

After revealing to the Ephesians the nature of God's plan for their lives (1:1-14), Paul prays that His plan might be realized in their lives (1:15-23).

1:15-16 — "Faith...love" - Paul hears good reports of their faith in the Lord and love to the saints. Faith and love are two of the great manifestations of a divine work in a person's life (1 Cor 13:13). Paul rejoices and thanks God for their continued growth.

"Making mention of you" — Paul continually prays for them at his time of prayer.

1:17-18a — "Wisdom and revelation" - Paul begins to reveal the content of his prayer. He prays that the Spirit would give the Ephesians a deeper practical understanding and a fuller knowledge of God and His plan for them.

"Eyes of your understanding" — "understanding" is not found in most manuscripts, but rather "heart" is used. However, it must be remembered that the New Testament use of "heart" includes more than the emotions or the intellect of a person. It involved the whole inner part of a man. Paul desires the hearts of the believers to be enlightened. This enlightenment refers to an inner work of the Spirit of God, causing the believers to understand and receive spiritual reality. Such enlightenment is an understanding which produces permanent results.

1:18b-19a — "Calling . . . inheritance...power" - three results of the Spirit's enlightenment are given: (1) the hope of His calling, (2) the riches of His inheritance (cf. the notes on 1:11); and (3) the greatness of His power.

19b-21 — "His mighty power" - Paul explains the greatness of the divine power in our lives. This power is the same as the power God used in raising Christ from the dead and glorifying Him in heaven.

"Own right hand" — God's power put Christ at His own right hand: the position of acceptance, might, and authority. God's power gives every believer that same position because he is in Christ.

"Above all...and every name" — God's power exalted Christ above all offices and all names in all places and for all times (cf. Phil 2:9).

1:22-23 — "Under His feet" - Paul describes the universal sovereignty of Christ which He will experience in His Millennial Kingdom. Paul quotes Ps 8:6, showing His sovereignty over all things.

"Head over...the church" — Paul states that Christ is the Head over the church, and the church is His body. He not only is the church's authority, but He has a vital union with the church.

"The fullness of Him" — the church receives from His fullness. He fills the church with His power and grace due to His union with the church (John 1:16; Eph 3:19; Col. 2:9, 10).