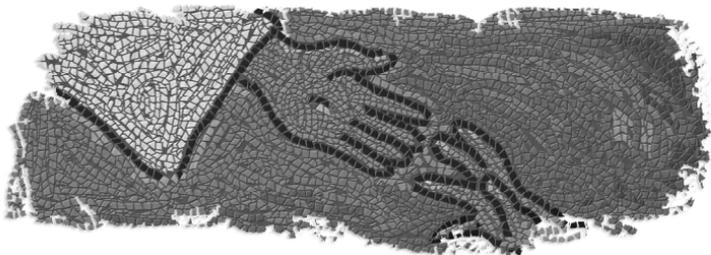


What God Has Done



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rom. 8:15, 16; 1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 1:3-14; 1 Pet. 1:20; Rev. 13:8.*

Memory Text: “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace” (*Ephesians 1:7, NKJV*).

Praise and petition. In the original Greek, Ephesians 1:3-14 is one long sentence through which the apostle introduces major aspects of Christian theology, including the idea that the Godhead was involved in the formation of the church—God’s family on earth. God the Father “chose us in Him [in Christ] before the foundation of the world” (*vs. 4, NKJV*). It is in Christ that “we have redemption through His blood” (*vs. 7, NKJV*). Meanwhile, the Holy Spirit provides us security and guarantees our eternal inheritance (*vs. 13, 14*).

Paul recognizes that while God acts in history and time, He dwells in “heavenly places.” The phrase occurs five times in Ephesians in connection with where our blessings come from (*vs. 3*), where the risen Christ is seated (*vs. 20*), where we, too, will be seated (*2:6*), where God’s purposes will be made known because of the church (*3:10*), and where originated the powers of darkness with which we must struggle (*6:12*).

The Week at a Glance: What does the Bible mean by the idea of predestination? According to Ephesians, what has God done for us in Christ? What does Paul mean by “adoption”? How has Christ redeemed us?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 15.

The Chosen

“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” (Eph. 1:4).

Paul traces the origin of the church in the mind of God (*Eph. 1:4, 5*). God’s plan of redemption and His plan for the redeemed are not accidental; they were conceived before creation, before time began. God formed a purpose in His mind: to choose us in Christ. Even before we existed, God saw us through a relationship with Christ, and because of that He could make us His children. Hence, we are not saved by anything we are or do. We did not influence God; we could not work our way to God. In fact, when we were not in existence, He already purposed our salvation, so that when we came around, all we would need to do is accept what Christ offers.

How do the following texts help us understand this idea of predestination? *1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 1:4, 5; 3:11; 1 Pet. 1:20; Rev. 13:8.*

A lot of people get confused over the idea that God chose us beforehand to be saved, because it implies that some people were chosen beforehand to be lost. But that’s not the biblical teaching. Instead, God prepared beforehand the plan of salvation, according to His eternal purpose, in order that everyone would be saved (*1 Tim. 2:6, 2 Pet. 3:9*). The plan of salvation itself, which included every human being, was determined before the world began; what was not determined beforehand was what our individual responses to that plan would be. That God knows beforehand that our eternal destiny is not the same as saying He predetermined that destiny. Salvation has been offered to us because of what Christ has done for us, a plan worked out for us even before we were created. The only question is, How do we respond?

God chose beforehand that you should be saved; that is, His original plan was for you to be with Him forever in a new heaven and a new earth. Write out a prayer of thanksgiving and praise for this wonderful hope and what it means to you. Share it with the class on Sabbath.

Praise God for Adopting Us (*Eph. 1:4-6*)

Read Ephesians 1:4-6. What are the three things God does for us as depicted in these verses?

● *Verse 4*

● *Verse 5*

● *Verse 6*

The church had its roots in the mind of God when He conceived the plan of salvation before the creation of the world. But who would form the church? Who would be participants of the family of God? Paul has already given a partial answer in Ephesians 1:4—those who were chosen in Christ to be “holy and without blame” and walk in love. “Chosen in Christ” does not indicate any arbitrary choice on the part of God but an acknowledgment of the divine provision, which provided salvation for the whole world but made it effective only to those who claimed it for themselves.

Salvation and eternal life are made available to all as a gift of God in Jesus (*John 3:16; Eph. 2:8, 9*), but only “whoever believes in Him” shall be saved. The universal nature of the gift is predestined. The contingent nature of the gift is determined by the choice of “whoever.”

Paul adds an additional thought: Those who accept God’s redemptive provision in Jesus are “predestined to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ” (*Eph. 2:5, NKJV*). Again, it’s not that God chose some and rejected others; instead, it’s that those who have accepted what Christ has done for them have simply fulfilled what was originally planned for them from the start.

Notice the emphasis on the idea of adoption (*vs. 5*). Why would Paul use such a term to describe what God has done for us? See also *Rom. 8:15, 16; Gal. 3:26-29; 4:5*.

God’s church is made up of adopted children. Natural children are orphans and prodigals—outside the family of God because of their sin and by their own choice to be in rebellion against God. But when they accept God’s predestined provision, they are adopted into God’s family. The relationship now becomes a family relationship, a relationship founded on love.

Think of someone you love. How does that relationship help you understand what your relationship with God, your adopted Father, should be?

Redemption in Christ *(Eph. 1:7, 8)*

According to Ephesians 1:7, 8, through what do we have redemption?

Can there be salvation for any of us without blood? See *Heb. 9:22*.

Redemption means deliverance of a slave through payment of a price. In the Scriptures, redemption means God's provision in Christ to save us from the bondage of sin. The shedding of Christ's blood on the cross for our sins has made possible not only the forgiveness of sin but also redemption and adoption into the family of God (*Gal. 4:4-6; Eph. 1:7, 8*). Without Christ, none of these would have been possible.

Forgiveness of sin is free for us; indeed, we cannot put a price on it or pay for it. But forgiveness on the part of God cost Him much: the blood of Jesus. Sin by its very nature brings death; where a sinner ought to die, a substitutionary death was necessary. In the Old Testament sanctuary system God provided forgiveness on the basis of shedding an animal's blood. The whole sacrificial system anticipated the day when Christ, "the lamb of God," would take away the sins of the world (*John 1:29*). Jesus on the cross paid the penalty for our sins. His shed blood makes forgiveness of sins possible (*Rom. 5:8, 9; Eph. 2:13; Col. 1:20*).

Our redemption and adoption are made possible by the Cross, which was "in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us" (*Eph. 1:7, 8, NIV*). Paul uses the word *riches* six times in Ephesians (*1:7, 18; 2:4, 7; 3:8, 16*). We may be poor and destitute in many ways, but we are bountifully rich in God's grace. We are free from the guilt of sin.

Someone asked a wealthy industrialist how much more would satisfy him. "Always a little more," the multimillionaire replied. Ask a Christian, and the answer will be: "My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (*Phil. 4:19, NKJV*).

"Grace is unmerited favor, and the believer is justified without any merit of his own, without any claim to offer to God. He is justified through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, who stands in the courts of heaven as the sinner's substitute and surety."—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 398. Memorize this Ellen White quote; it will come in handy, especially when you feel discouraged or in doubt about your salvation.

The Mystery (*Eph. 1:9-12*)

Read Ephesians 1:9-12. Notice how many times in these few verses Paul talks about God’s will or purpose being fulfilled. Add them with how many times that same idea is found in the first eight verses of the chapter. How does this idea, that of God’s purposes being fulfilled for us, help you learn to trust Him?

God’s people have much to praise Him for: election, adoption, redemption, forgiveness, and acceptance. Today’s lesson adds one more: a great mystery that God has “made known to us . . . according to His good pleasure” (*vs. 9, NKJV*).

Paul uses the word *mystery* six times in Ephesians. The Greek term has two meanings: first, something secret and known only to a select few; second, something formerly hidden but now revealed by God. It is in the second sense Paul uses the word.

What is this “mystery” of the will of God that Paul talks about in Ephesians 1:9-12?

Ephesians 3 identifies it as God’s plan to bring Jews and Gentiles into one fellowship; that is, to create a common humanity without any divisions: a church without walls. But there is another dimension to this mystery. What Christ has accomplished through the Cross by bringing the Jew and Gentile into one body is only a foretaste of what God has “set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (*Eph. 1:9, 10, RSV*). Just as in “the fullness of the time” (*Gal. 4:4, NKJV*) God sent His Son to redeem and unite the Jew and the Gentile, so He has a plan to unite “all things in [Him]” (*Eph. 1:10, NKJV*) in the fullness of time—that is, when Christ comes the second time.

“This is the divine purpose—the restoration of a lost unity. It must necessarily be in Christ, because He is the center of all things. . . . The unity of God’s universe had been broken by sin. The mystery of God’s will was His plan to restore this unity when the occasion was ready, a restoration to be accomplished through Christ. That mystery will find its culmination at the end of the great controversy, when all things in heaven and on earth will be united in Christ, and the character of the Godhead will have been vindicated.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1000.

Jews and Gentiles (*Eph. 1:11-14*)

In Ephesians 1:11-13, Paul presents an example of the new unity Christ brings between Jews and Gentiles. He uses the words *we* and *you*—“we have obtained an inheritance” (*vs. 11, NKJV*); “we who first trusted in Christ” (*vs. 12, NKJV*); “you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth” (*vs. 13, NKJV*). The “we” refers to Jewish Christians with whom Paul identifies himself, and “you” refers to Gentile Christians.

In what sense were Jews first? God chose them first to be His inheritance (*Deut. 4:20, 9:29, Zech. 2:12*). To them were given “the oracles of God” (*Rom. 3:2, NKJV*). To them the gospel was preached first (*Rom. 1:16*), and, hence, the first to believe in the gospel were the Jews (*John 1:11, 8:31, Acts 1:8, 3:26*).

By saying Jews were the first, however, Paul does not attribute any superiority to Jewish Christians. Indeed, he says in Ephesians 1:13, “You [Gentile Christians] also trusted” (*NKJV*) and the Holy Spirit has become the guarantee of “our [both Jews and Gentiles] inheritance” (*vs. 14*).

In God’s kingdom, knowing Christ or coming to Christ first does not provide any special status. The point is not when we accepted the gospel but whether we remain true to its claims.

Paul reinforces the certainty of our inheritance by referring to the work of the Holy Spirit, to whom he gives three designations. *First, He is the Spirit of promise.* God promised the Spirit through Jesus to everyone who repents and believes (*Luke 24:49; Gal. 3:14, 16*). *Second, the Spirit is God’s seal.* A seal is a sign of ownership and authenticity. God makes the Spirit to dwell within us as a sign that we are His (*see also Rom. 8:14-17, 2 Cor. 1:22*). *Third, the Spirit is God’s guarantee.* The word *guarantee* is also translated “a deposit,” “a pledge.” Through the Spirit, God has made a deposit, a pledge, that He will fulfill all His promises to both Jews and Gentiles to “the praise of His glory” (*Eph. 1:14, NKJV*).

Though the exact experience of salvation varies from individual to individual, verses 13, 14 speak of three basic steps. Read through them and write down the processes as expressed there. In what ways have they reflected your own experience? In what ways was your own experience different? Is there anything you can do, or change, to deepen or enrich this experience? If so, what?

Further Study: “*Before the foundations of the world.*” “The plan for our redemption was not an afterthought, a plan formulated after the fall of Adam. It was a revelation of ‘the mystery which hath been kept in silence through times eternal.’ Rom. 16:25, R. V. It was an unfolding of the principles that from eternal ages have been the foundation of God’s throne. . . . God did not ordain that sin should exist, but He foresaw its existence, and made provision to meet the terrible emergency. So great was His love for the world, that He covenanted to give His only-begotten Son, ‘that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.’ John 3:16.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 22.

God’s predestination. “In the council of heaven, provision was made that men, though transgressors, should not perish in their disobedience, but, through faith in Christ as their substitute and surety, might become the elect of God, predestinated unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself according to the good pleasure of His will. God wills that all men should be saved. . . . Those who perish will perish because they refuse to be adopted as children of God through Christ Jesus.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1114.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Have people read aloud the prayers of thanksgiving and praise they wrote in response to Sunday’s lesson. What have you learned from each other?
- ❷ Imagine what it must be like to be an orphan who is adopted into a loving, caring family that loves that orphan as much as it would a natural family member. How does that analogy help you (a) understand God’s love for you and (b) how you should treat your brothers and sisters in the Lord?
- ❸ Discuss what you can do, as a class, to help someone in your church—maybe a new member or someone really discouraged or the young people—understand what it means to be part of God’s family.

A Mother's Prayer

by MARTA DE JESUS SANCHEZ DE GODOY

Armando had been a challenging child. He started taking drugs when he was 12 years old, and he joined a gang at 16. His mother, Marta, begged God to change him. One day, Armando announced that he was going to join the military.

Several months later, Armando returned home on leave. "Mother," he said, "I am a changed person. I met some Christians, and we are studying the Bible together."

Marta began to cry. She was glad that her son was changing, but she worried that these people would take her son away from the church to which the family belonged.

When she stated her concerns, Armando told her, "Mother, during our Bible studies I realized that what our church believes is wrong. Many things our church teaches are not in the Bible." Armando explained that he was studying the Bible with some Adventists, sincere and good people who take their beliefs from the Bible alone. Reluctantly Marta agreed that God was answering her prayer and leading her son.

One day Armando announced that he had found the Adventist church in town. "Mother," he said, "come with me to church." She went with her son, and from that day Armando and his mother worshiped together.

Marta cannot read, so Armando read the Bible to her, explaining difficult texts as they went. Marta absorbed the new truths and memorized many Bible texts. Armando and his mother were baptized together a few months later.

Because she was illiterate, Marta was timid about talking to others about her faith. God removed her fear, and she began sharing her faith with her neighbors. She has led 13 of her neighbors to the Lord and shares her faith with people in jail and in the hospital.

At first Marta's husband was not interested in her new faith. But she sometimes asked him to read the Bible to her, and soon she noticed that he was reading the Bible for himself. As he saw the changes in his wife and son, he was more willing to let them attend this strange new church.

Marta is surprised at how God changes people by His Spirit. "God has given me blessings I could never have imagined," she says with a smile. "He has given me better health than I have had in years. But the biggest blessing is the change He brought about in Armando."

MARTA DE JESUS SANCHEZ DE GODOY lives in Honduras, where she sells tamales and shares her faith.