

LifeWay Explore the Bible Series for September 5: God's eternal plan

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Although I love the whole Bible, one of my favorite books is the Apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesians. I came to this conclusion through a very unscientific survey. As I began my study of Ephesians for our time together, I surveyed many of my old study and preaching Bibles for margin notes I had made in the past that would be helpful. What I found in most of these Bibles was more verses underlined, comments and insights recorded and scribbled in the margins than any other Bible book.

One of the reasons Ephesians seems to speak to me is that Paul shares some of the greatest truths we find in God's word. In Ephesians 1:1-2, we are introduced to Paul who claims to be an apostle of Jesus Christ. To Paul, that meant he belonged to Christ, that he was commissioned by Christ by the will of God and any power he had came from Christ (v. 1).

Paul then identified the readers who were followers of Jesus as "in Christ." He uses this term more than 160 times in his writings and over 30 times in this letter alone. Paul is emphasizing the close relationship Christians have with the Lord Jesus. This relationship defines our identity which provides the context in which we live and the motivation for how we live. As believers, we have a close relationship with Christ as a result of this eternal plan of God that provides our salvation.

Ephesians 1:3-14 is one long sentence in the original language. It often is called a "doxology" because it recites what God has done and is Paul's expression of worship to honor him. In verses 3-6, Paul tells us we are

blessed because God has “chosen us” and “predestined us to be adopted as sons through Jesus Christ” (v. 5).

“Adoption” is one of my favorite words in the English language. Not long after my wife, Sherry, and 3-year-old daughter, Buffy, moved to our third church, a little red-headed girl climbed our back fence and introduced herself to our daughter. These two became best friends. In the five years we were in that ministry setting, Robin became a fixture in our home. We found out that both girls had the same birthday with Robin being one year older than Buffy.

Their lives became intertwined—when we had a birthday party for one, we had one for the other. One week after Buffy accepted Jesus and was baptized, Robin accepted Jesus and was baptized. When the Lord moved us to our next church, some 90 miles away, Robin, then in the fifth grade, asked if she could move with us. Her mother consented and Robin lived a semester with us before going back home.

For the next several years, Robin visited Buffy on weekends, holidays and summer vacations. At the end of her freshman year, she asked to live with us until she graduated high school. This time I became her legal guardian, and Robin was now a member of our family. Through the trials, tribulations and joys of rearing two teenage girls in the '80s, we became a family. Both girls called us Mama and Daddy.

After their graduation from high school, the Lord moved us to Texas and the girls moved with us. After a year, Robin married her high school sweetheart and moved back to Arkansas. After several years, they had a little boy and named him after me.

Several years later, Robin went through a very trying time and asked me, “Will you adopt me?” So I went to a lawyer in my church and asked him if he would help me with the adoption. I will never forget the phone call from

the attorney as he was leaving the county courthouse, to tell me I was now a proud father of a 25-year-old baby girl!

Although the adoption made everything legal, I submit to you that my love for my daughter did not increase because of the signed document. Years before that fateful day, the relationship between my daughter and me had been sealed not by a legal decree, but by a loving relationship. A relationship that grew deeper during the good times and the bad times.

In our walk together as a family, before any judge said so, Buffy already had a sister, and my wife already knew she was our daughter. However, what it did do was to give Robin the security that she was our child. In that, she found safety and hope.

As Robin found safety and security within our relationship, Paul says we have a greater security in God's plan of redemption by his adoption of us through his son Jesus Christ. Because of this, our sins are forgiven, our past is no longer an issue and our future is secure because the Father has given us an inheritance that provides safety and hope. We have been blessed in being chosen and adopted.

Paul then declares we are blessed because we are redeemed at a very high cost, "In him we have redemption through his blood" (v. 7). The first result of this redemption is forgiveness of sin which is undeserved, but free and complete. The second result of redemption is God gives us all the necessary equipment to understand him, his word and how to obey it. Paul writes, "In all wisdom and insight he made known to us the mystery of his will ..." (vv. 8-9). The third result of redemption is an inheritance. Biblical scholars have debated whether the believer receives the inheritance or the believer is the inheritance. Verse 11 can be translated either way. However it is rendered, the results of redemption brings "praise of his glory" (v. 12).

Finally, Paul tells us once we have heard the word of God and accepted the

gospel of Christ, we were sealed in the Holy Spirit. The purpose of the seal in the time of Paul was to validate ownership and security of an object or slave. Therefore, when we are sealed with the Holy Spirit of God, we are guaranteed the redemption he has promised to the praise of God's glory.

In this lesson, we learn about God's eternal plan of redemption. He has chosen us, loves us, adopted us, forgiven us and sealed us. This plan does not change because salvation comes through Jesus Christ, and we need to praise God for such a gift!