

Lesson 1

Ephesians

The Praise of His Glory



Early World	Patriarchs	Egypt & Exodus	Desert Wanderings	Conquest & Judges	Royal Kingdom	Divided Kingdom	Exile	Return	Maccabean Revolt	Messianic Fulfillment	The Church

Introduction

The first half of the Letter to the Ephesians is essentially a prayer and extended meditation on the mystery of Jesus Christ as revealed through his body, the Church. The second half of is a set of practical instructions for Christians. The gist of the last three chapters is, “Now that we are living in the mystical reality described in the first three chapters, what do we do as parents, workers, children, and citizens of the wide and fallen world?” Many modern readers dislike dealing with the “theological stuff” of the first three chapters and tend to demand that St. Paul hurry on to the “practical matters.” St. Paul, however, insists that men and women cannot be truly practical apart from contemplation. And he insists that contemplation cannot be cut short merely because the subject matter is lofty. God has made the human mind, not to be forever open (that’s a false ideal of a relativistic age), but to bite down upon truth as the open mouth is meant to bite down on food. Men and women feed upon truth and are nourished and strengthened by God’s revelation in Christ and through his Church. Practical actions flow from a well-ordered soul, and a well-ordered soul depends upon being firmly rooted in the life of the Blessed Trinity. St. Paul bids his readers to stop and gaze for a while upon the beauty of Jesus Christ in the Blessed Trinity and in Christ’s mystical body, the Church. St. Paul begins his Letter to the Ephesians by reflecting upon doctrinal truths: the mystery of Jesus Christ, the fruit of the Incarnation, and the graces that come through salvation. He uses such words as “election,” “sonship,” “grace,” “redemption,” “forgiveness,” “revelation,” “unity,” and “inheritance.” His goal is to show how the life of the Blessed Trinity is poured out to the world through Christ and even displayed before the heavenly powers, not merely through the person of Jesus Christ, but “through the Church.”

Ephesians 1:1-14

1 ¹Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are also faithful in Christ Jesus:

²Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

³**Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,** ⁴even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and

Ephesians 1:1-14

blameless before him. ⁵He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, ⁶to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. ⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace ⁸which he lavished upon us. ⁹For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰as a plan for the fulness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

¹¹In him, according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will, ¹²we who first hoped in Christ have been destined and appointed to live for the praise of his glory. ¹³In him you also, who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

[Please Note: One of the best ways to meditate on God's Word is through memorization. A suggested memory verse is always highlighted in the Scripture text, or you may choose a verse of your own.]

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Study Questions

It's best to read all of Ephesians 1:1-14 and *Points to Ponder* before responding to the study questions. To aid in discussion, please note Scripture verses where you find your responses.

Opening Greeting

Ephesians 1:1-2

1. The Acts of the Apostles introduces readers to a man named Saul, who became St. Paul, a passionate servant of God. What else do readers learn about the St. Paul in Acts 22:3-16?

2. What were the qualifications for the apostle chosen to replace Judas, and how was he chosen (see *Acts* 1:21-22)? By whose will is St. Paul called to be an apostle? How does St. Paul meet the qualifications of an apostle (see *1 Cor* 15:3-11)?

3. St. Paul often begins his letters with a blessing of grace and peace (*Rom* 1:7 and *1 Cor* 1:3). In *Ephesians* 1:2, what does St. Paul mean by “grace” (see *Jn* 1:12-13 and paragraphs 1996 and 2000 in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church [CCC]*)? What does he mean by “peace,” and how is St. Paul’s blessing of “peace” related to Jesus Christ (see *Isa* 9:6 and *Rom* 5:1)?

Benediction in Praise of the Father

Ephesians 1:3-6

4. For what specifically does St. Paul praise God the Father in *Ephesians* 1:3? How is it that Christians are “in “the heavenly places”?”

5. St. Paul writes that God the Father “destined us in love.” Why does he emphasize “love” (see *1 Jn* 4:8)? How do Christians become sons and daughters of God the Father (see *Jn* 3:5 and *CCC* 1262 and *CCC* 1265)?

Benediction in Praise of the Son

Ephesians 1:7-12

6. What is redemption (see *Col* 1:13-14 and *CCC* 571 and 601)? How do Christians gain redemption (see *Rom* 3:24 and *Heb* 9:12)?

Ephesians Lesson 1 Study Questions

7. A “mystery” in the New Testament is something that’s been hidden and now is revealed. What is the mystery of God’s will (see CCC 51)?
8. Ephesians 1:12 mentions those who first hoped in Christ. What exactly is hope, CCC for definition and of what does hope in Jesus Christ consist (see *Rom* 5:2; *Gal* 5:5; *Titus* 1:2; 2:13; 3:7; and *Heb* 6:18-20)?

Benediction in Praise of the Holy Spirit Ephesians 1:13-14

9. What is the “word of truth”? With what are we “sealed” (see *2 Cor* 1:22)? How are we sealed (see CCC 698)?
10. What is our inheritance (*1 Pet* 1:3-5)? How is the Holy Spirit the “guarantee” or first down payment of that (see CCC 1107)?

Questions for Reflection

The following questions are designed to help you reflect further about how ideas in Ephesians 1:1-14 might apply to your own life:

1. St. Paul’s life was changed forever after he met Christ on the road to Damascus. Have you ever had a “Damascus Road experience”? What difference does it make in your understanding of the world to see God as a loving Father and not merely as a Creator or Omnipotent Power?

2. Acrostics are an interesting way to remember important words. An acrostic for the word “grace” is: God’s riches at Christ’s expense. Can you think of an acrostic for “peace”? How about “hope”?

Opportunities for Additional Study

Points to Ponder—*Ephesians 1:1-14*

Trinitarian Blessing

The opening benediction in Ephesians 1:3-14 follows a Trinitarian structure that speaks, in turn, of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. It does so because St. Paul wants to initiate us into the mysteries that are disclosed in the coming of Jesus. In the words of Pope John Paul II, “Our God in his deepest mystery is not a solitude, but a family, since he has in himself fatherhood, sonship and the essence of the family, which is love.” Ephesians is about our incorporation into and participation in the life of the ultimate family: the Trinitarian life of holy Church. Through that incorporation “all things” whether “things in heaven and things on earth” are to be united “in him.”

Ephesians 1:3-14 is the longest known sentence in Greek. But it’s not simply an elaborate, rambling stream of consciousness. Rather, the evidence points to a very carefully constructed blessing intended to link all of the key words that St. Paul will expound in the rest of his epistle. It’s a kind of literary overture to all the subsequent themes of the letter in an extremely compact form. Some scholars have even noted that the order of words in this benediction is matched by the order in which these terms appear later in the letter. In fact, many scholars suggest that St. Paul intended this passage to be sung as a hymn and that this section of the letter served a liturgical function as an extended meditation on the blessings of the sacrament of Baptism.

The Mystery of God’s Will

The summit of St. Paul’s benediction in this passage is found in Ephesians 1:9. St. Paul summarizes his reason for praising God: “For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will.” That’s why St. Paul writes. God has made the mystery known and now St. Paul makes the mystery known—as he’ll write a few verses later of “how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly” (*Eph 3:1*). St. Paul writes this in humility and makes it plain that such revelation depends not on his intelligence, but on a pure gift of grace. That’s why he speaks of it as “revelation, “which” was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit,” (*Eph 3:5*). It’s not that other generations were stupid, it’s that other generations lived before the incarnation, death, resurrection and outpouring of the Spirit of the Son of God who comes from the Father.

Ephesians Lesson 1 Points to Ponder

Moreover, the substance of the “mystery of his will”, so far from being elitist and exclusive, is expansive and joyful, for it’s this: “the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel” (*Eph 3:6*). The divine family depends, not on natural birth or on racial and ethnic ties, but on the supernatural gift of participation in the divine family life of the Blessed Trinity.

In other words, the “mystery” of Christ upon which Ephesians focuses is not the mystery of the Incarnation. It’s not the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection. It’s not even the mystery of justification by faith. Other letters, such as Galatians or Romans, deal with these matters, not because they’re at the summit of St. Paul’s thoughts and prayers, but because they’re elementary teachings over which the Galatians and Romans are still stumbling. But in Ephesians St. Paul is talking to a community that’s extremely well-catechized and which is ready to hear “the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; that through the Church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places” (*Eph 3: 9-10*). The “mystery of Christ” in Ephesians is the Church. That’s why, for St. Paul, the oneness of the Church cannot be separated from the oneness of God. Today the Catholic Church retains both the “unity of the Spirit” and catholicity of one body with many parts. And that’s why St. Paul’s benediction begins on such a strong Trinitarian note, for St. Paul means to root everything that follows in the Trinitarian life of God.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

And so, Ephesians 1:3-6 begins with the praise of God the Father, then St. Paul moves (*Eph 1:7-12*) to the praise of God the Son in whom we have redemption and concludes (*Eph 1:13*) with the praise of God the Spirit. And the Spirit “seals” us as a kind of down payment on our inheritance which is heaven. For heaven isn’t merely a place, it’s participation in the life of the Blessed Trinity himself. In short, our salvation is a family affair. The God who saves us is not a “fear” or a “fate.” Indeed, he’s more than Creator or Lawgiver or Judge. Such terms describe what he does, but not who he is. For only in Christ is God revealed for who he is: a Father who sends us his Beloved Son to give us the Spirit of sonship making us brothers and sisters in Christ. God is only Creator and Lawgiver once he creates and gives the Law. But he’s Father, Son, and Holy Spirit from all eternity.

This is why the dogma of the Blessed Trinity isn’t a meaningless abstract theological statement with no relationship to our lives. Rather, the doctrine of the Blessed Trinity is another way of saying that God is love. And St. Paul’s insistence on rooting the Church in the reality of the Blessed Trinity is, in fact, an insistence on saying that we are called to participate in the eternal, ecstatic life and love which is God himself.

Catechism Connections

- To understand why God revealed himself, see *CCC* 51.
- To learn more about the mystery of redemption in Christ, see *CCC* 517.
- To read more about why St. Paul calls the nuptial union of Christ and the Church, “a great mystery,” see *CCC* 722.

Rome to Home

Pope John Paul II explained how the Blessed Virgin Mary experienced the “riches of God’s grace:”

Mary’s pure and immaculate conception is thus seen as the beginning of the new creation. It is a question of a personal privilege granted to the woman chosen to be Christ’s Mother, who ushers in the time of abundant grace willed by God for all humanity. This doctrine, taken up again in the eighth century by St. Germanus of Constantinople and St. John Damascene, sheds light on the value of Mary’s original holiness, presented as the beginning of the world’s Redemption. In this way the Church’s tradition assimilates and makes explicit the authentic meaning of the title “full of grace” given by the angel to the Blessed Virgin. Mary is full of sanctifying grace and is so from the first moment of her existence. This grace, according to the Letter to the Ephesians (1:6), is bestowed in Christ on all believers. Mary’s original holiness represents the unsurpassable model of the gift and the distribution of Christ’s grace in the world.

—general audience, May 15, 1996

Summary

In Ephesians 1:1-14, we observed that:

1. St. Paul is writing to express, not merely the basic teaching of justification by faith, but to explore the heights of the mystery of the Trinity as the Trinity is revealed through the Church.
2. St. Paul's opening benediction is a hymn of praise to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for his gift of salvation in Christ.
3. The "mystery of his will" is that through the Church, all Creation is being drawn into participation in the Trinitarian life of God.

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