

03. Ephesians 1:6-14



Ephesians 1:6

‘Let us praise God for God’s glorious grace that God freely bestowed on us in the Beloved!’

The goal of our adoption is that we will be able to praise the radiant beauty (the ‘glory’) of God for all that God has **graciously** bestowed upon us. This is not because God is in need of our praise. God is love and God’s gifts are an outpouring of love. It is we who find our fulfilment and our greatest happiness in praising God.

As Irenaeus says: ‘The glory of God is a person who is fully alive; and fulness of life is found in the vision of God’ (Against the Heresies IV. 20.7).

In referring to Jesus as ‘**the Beloved**’, Paul uses the perfect passive participle (ἀγαπημενος), thus stressing the continuous love which God is always showering on his Son. At the Baptism, at the Transfiguration, and in the parable of the vineyard, Jesus is called ‘the Beloved’ (ἀγαπητος). In Colossians (1:13), he is called the Son of God’s love (ἀγαπη). The description of Jesus here in this hymn, while obviously related to these others, is unique. While rejoicing in the wonder of God’s design that we are invited to share this love, we recognise that this is a special favour, a gracious gift of a Father who adopts us as his own and invites us, man and woman alike, to relate to God as God’s ‘**sons**’. His **Beloved Son** is the one through whom God’s gift comes to us, and the gift consists in sharing Jesus’ communion of love with his Father. This is, indeed, a ‘**spiritual blessing**’ (1:3), because it is through the gift of his Spirit that we are able us to call Jesus’ Father our Father.

Ephesians 1:7

In God's Son we have redemption through his blood

The language is traditional, going back to the action of God redeeming his people from slavery in Egypt.

‘I am the Lord, and I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians and deliver you from slavery to them. I will **redeem** you’ (Exodus 6:6).

Hosea uses the same word for redeeming from death: ‘Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol? Shall I **redeem** them from Death?’ (Hosea 13:14).

It is language that we find throughout the New Testament: ‘The Son of Man to give his life a ransom (λύτρον) for many’ (Matthew 20:28).

‘You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of a human master’ (1 Corinthians 7:23).

‘Through His Beloved Son God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things by making peace through the blood of his cross’ (Colossians 1:20).

‘They are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in the Messiah Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood’ (Romans 3:24-25).

‘You have been brought near by the blood of the Messiah ... through the cross’ (Ephesians 2:13,16).

Paul writes: ‘He it is who gave himself for us that he might **redeem** (λυτρωω) us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds’ (Titus 2:14).

‘He gave himself a **ransom** (ἀντίλυτρον) for all’ (1 Timothy 2:6).

And Peter: ‘You know that you were **ransomed** (λυτρωω) from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors’ (1 Peter 1:18).

Ephesians 1:7

In God's Son we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses.

The psalmist speaks of redemption from sin: 'The Lord will **redeem** Israel from all its iniquities' (Psalm 130:8).

'God has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of God's beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins' (Colossians 1:13-14).

Let us spend time contemplating Jesus, watching him forgive and daring to think that what he said to the paralysed man he can say to me: 'Take heart, your sins are forgiven' (Matthew 9:3);

that what he said to the woman who was a public sinner he can say to me: 'her sins, which were many, must have been forgiven or she could not have shown such great love ... your faith has saved you; go in peace' (Luke 7: 47,50).

Let us make our own his words to Peter: 'I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned back, strengthen your brothers' (Luke 22:31-32; see John 21: 15-18)

or to the thief on the cross: 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise' (Luke 23:43).

Watching Jesus loving the sinner, I might dare to believe that God is still offering me his love, in spite of my sin.

Of course forgiveness cannot happen without a change on my part. But I can get the courage to change only when I believe I am loved and am therefore loveable. Let us pray to listen to the invitation of God who is calling us to repentance and to the joy of experiencing forgiveness and the life of his Spirit welling up inside us (John 4:14). To know that is to want everyone to know it. It is to want to be reconciled and to have others know the peace of restored communion. We all need to know that our broken lives have meaning, that we are loved in our weakness and that healing is possible.

Paul learned this, as he learned everything else that was important to him, from Jesus, the Son of God, the one who, knowing our weakness, 'breathed on them and said: Receive the Holy Spirit. For those whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven' (John 20:22) . This was the first gift from the heart of the risen Christ.

Ephesians: 1:7-8

This shows how rich is God's grace which God lavished on us.

For the fourth time the word 'grace' is used. As we contemplate the blessings which God lavishes upon us, we are being constantly reminded that this is not something that we can earn. It is all an outpouring of God's abundant love.

Ephesians 1:9

God has made known to us in all wisdom and insight God's mysterious design in accordance with God's loving purpose in Christ.

As in the letter to the Colossians, so here, God's plan is referred to as a '**mystery**' (μυστήριον). In Colossians 1:26-27 Paul speaks of the mystery as 'The Messiah in you, the hope of glory'. It is a 'mystery' because it is only in Jesus that it has been revealed. It is the realisation of God's predetermined [προτιθημι] plan to be realised in the '**fullness of time**' [πληρωμα]. It involves '**all things, things in heaven and things on earth**' (compare Colossians 1:16) – no one and nothing is excluded. God's eternal design which has been made known '**to us**' is '**to gather up all things in Christ**'. We are invited to contemplate God embracing the whole of the created universe in embracing Jesus.

‘**With all wisdom and insight**’ refers to the wisdom and insight that God gives us as part of the abundant outpouring of his grace. This echoes Paul’s prayer that the Colossians would be ‘filled with spiritual wisdom and understanding’ (Colossians 1:9).

‘Wisdom was created before all other things,
and prudent understanding from eternity’ (Sirach 1:4).

‘Before the ages, in the beginning, God created me,
and for all the ages I shall not cease to be’ (Sirach 24:9).

‘With you is Wisdom, who knows your works
and was present when you made the world’ (Wisdom 9:9).

‘The Lord by wisdom founded the earth;
by understanding he established the heavens’ (Proverbs 3:19).

Ephesians 1:10

God determined as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up **all things in the Messiah, things in heaven and things on earth**

‘In the Beloved Son all things in heaven and on earth were created ... all things have been created through him and for him’ (Colossians 1:16).

‘Through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven’ (Colossians 1:20).

When Paul summarised his gospel as being about ‘The Messiah in you, the hope of glory’ (Colossians 1:27), he was giving expression to the central insight of his own conversion experience and to a conviction that motivated his missionary apostolate. The same conviction is expressed here. We are invited to join Paul in adoration as we recall what God has done and is doing for us **‘in the Messiah’**.

Ephesians 1:11

In him **we** also have obtained an inheritance

Up to this point, the Gentile readers of Ephesians would have known that they were included whenever the text read 'we'. It embraced all who are 'in the Messiah'. Now comes a change, subtle at first, but reinforced by the 'you also' in verse thirteen, which refers to Gentile Christians. The focus of '**we**' moves to Jewish Christians and to privileges which were traditionally claimed by Jews. It will become clear that the aim is not to suggest that Jewish Christians are a more privileged group in the church. Quite the contrary. Their privileges are highlighted only in order to reinforce all the more strongly that now, in Christ, these privileges are shared equally by Gentiles.

Jewish Christians **‘have obtained an inheritance’** (κληροω), the inheritance promised them long ago as Jews and now experienced in the Messiah.

Paul has spoken of this in other letters in reference to all Christians: ‘If you a son, you are also an heir’ (Galatians 4:7); ‘If sons, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with the Messiah’ (Romans 8:17). ‘If you belong to the Messiah, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise’ (Galatians 3:29). ‘Give thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light’ (Colossians 1:12).

‘We have obtained an inheritance’ is open to another interpretation: **‘In him we have been chosen as a special possession.’**

They are the people of your very own possession (κληρος)’ (Deut 9:29).

‘The Lord has anointed you [David] ruler over his heritage (κληρονομια).’
(1 Samuel 10:1)

Ephesians 1:11-12

We have been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, so that **we**, who were the first to set our hope on the Messiah, might live for the praise of God's glory

The Jews were the first to put their hope in the promised Messiah, and the Jewish Christians were the first to recognise Jesus as the one in whom God has fulfilled his promises, the '**first to set our hope on the Messiah**'.

The refrain '**for the praise of God's glory**' repeats verse 6, and it will be repeated again at the conclusion of the hymn. Paul wants us to live in such a way that people will be drawn to praise the wonder and beauty of God, manifested in Jesus and in those who are living Jesus' life.

When Jesus is born ‘a multitude of the heavenly host praised God saying: Glory to God in the highest heaven’ (Luke 2:13-14). God’s glory (God’s radiant beauty) is revealed on earth in everything Jesus was, everything he said and everything he did.

God is present among his people, but necessarily veiled. Hence the longing of the people to see the face of God and the promise that one day ‘you shall see and be radiant’ (Isaiah 60:5).

We long to see ‘the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God ... For it is the God who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus the Messiah’ (2 Corinthians 4:4,6).

Ephesians 1:13

You also were included in the Messiah when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation.

The inheritance which encompasses all God's promises is the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit that binds the risen Messiah to God in a perfect communion of love. This is the gift, poured out upon all who are in Jesus, Jew and Gentile alike. The Gentile Christians to whom Paul is writing have heard the gospel, '**the word of truth**' (compare Galatians 2:5,14; Colossians 1:5).

They have heard who God really is and how God has chosen to reveal God's Self and God's will in Jesus.

In the Jewish tradition, God's word as found in their sacred writings was a living word through which a living God continued to speak to his people. The interpreters of the Torah expressed their attempts to explore this ongoing revelation in developing the narrative sections of the sacred writings in what they called the haggadah. They sought to apply the legal sections through what they called the halakah.

Teaching that claims to be Christian must be checked against the 'proclamation with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Saviour' (Titus 1:3).

Ephesians 1:13

the gospel of your salvation

The term 'salvation' [σωτηρια] had a special significance for the peoples of Asia. The temple to Artemis (Roman Diana) in Ephesus was one of the wonders of the ancient world. Its central shrine was an ancient tree-sanctuary, where fugitives from the law were able to seek and find asylum [σωτηρια]. The Gentile Christians have found true salvation, true asylum, in sharing the Spirit of Jesus.

Final salvation is still to come. We still can fall from grace. Heaven is assured from the point of view of God's grace, but we are still able to reject the call and not be saved at the final judgment. We still have to make this salvation our own.

Paul wants to emphasise God's magnificent eternal design that is above and beyond time. From the eternal perspective it has all already happened. It is all there waiting to be fully enjoyed, and we are already experiencing the first-fruits of this salvation in the life we are living in Jesus.

Ephesians 1:13

Believing in him, you were marked with the seal
of the promised Holy Spirit

They have not only heard, they are ‘believing in him’. They are listening to the gospel, they are accepting it into their lives, and they are allowing the Spirit of the risen Messiah to transform them.

Slaves were marked with a seal that identified their master. The Spirit identifies them as belonging to the Messiah, their lord.

Ephesians 1:14

the promised Holy Spirit the pledge of our inheritance
toward redemption

The Spirit is 'our' inheritance, Jew and Gentile together.

Paul wrote: 'It is God who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us, by putting his seal on us and giving us his Spirit in our hearts as a first instalment' (2 Corinthians 1:21-22). Our present experience of the Spirit is a 'pledge'. We have been liberated from all that might enslave us and prevent us from living to the full the divine life. For complete 'redemption', the fulness of salvation and a perfect sharing in the love-communion of God's Son we must await the resurrection. We are reminded of Paul's words where he speaks of 'the first fruits of the Spirit of us who groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies' (Romans 8:23).

Ephesians 1:14

as those who are God's possession to the praise of God's glory. (1:6; 1:12)

The hymn concludes with the refrain 'to the praise of God's glory' (see 1:6 and 1:12). God can say of us: these are those 'whom I formed for myself so that they might declare my praise' (Isaiah 43:21).

The unity of all mankind, Jew and Gentile together, and the shared experience of the Spirit, is all in order to reveal the radiant beauty of God's love, so that the whole of creation which is yearning for the liberation which this will bring about (see Romans 8:22) will unite in one cosmic hymn of praise.

Ephesians 1:3-8

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus the Messiah,
blessing us in the Messiah
with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,
for he chose us in the Messiah before the foundation of the world
to be holy and blameless in his presence, in love,
destining us for adoption as sons for God through Jesus the Messiah,
according to the good pleasure of his will,
to the praise of his glorious grace
that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved
in whom we have redemption through his blood,
the forgiveness of our trespasses,
according to the riches of his grace
that he lavished on us
with all wisdom and insight

Ephesians 1:9-14

making known to us the mystery of his will,
according to his good pleasure that he determined in himself
as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in the Messiah,
things in heaven and things on earth,
in him in whom we have also obtained an inheritance,
having been destined according to the purpose of him
who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will,
so that *we*, who were the first to set our hope on the Messiah,
might live for the praise of his glory
in whom *you* also, hearing the word of truth,
the gospel of your salvation, and believing in him,
were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit,
who is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption
as those who are God's possession, to the praise of his glory.