

IN HIM

The blessings God gives us through Jesus, *Ephesians 1:3-14*

The in-crowd offers a standard narrative and cinematic motif. Even though it usually finds employment in predictable ways, the idea of insiders and outsiders remains compelling because it resonates with everyone's experiences. Paul opened his letter to the Christians in Ephesus by describing an in-crowd and the privileges that attend belonging to that group. But the in-crowd he wrote about avoids the usual, negative things we tend to associate with such groups because it is a group created by God and shaped by Jesus. Therefore, we will consider the blessings and responsibilities God gives to that group as a way of helping us better understand His plans and expectations for our lives.

God's plan

Even though he begins by commenting that God blesses Christians "with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places"¹ (*Ephesians 1:3*), Paul has a precise and very narrow understanding of God's blessings. Consider:

- God inseparably ties His blessings to Jesus; He gives them "even as he chose us in [Christ]" (*Ephesians 1:3-4*).
- The blessings God gives through Jesus fall into four connected areas: **election**, **adoption**, **redemption**, and **mission**
 - **Election** – The biblical idea of "election" has become clouded by religious beliefs developed long after Paul and others composed their writings. Rather than guaranteeing people blessings independent from their identity, election requires people to learn how to be "holy and blameless" (*Ephesians 1:4*; cf. *Romans 8:28-29*). Paul outlines aspects of the holy and blameless life that attends God's election; it involves intentionally:
 - Cultivating the characteristics of humility, gentleness, patience, tolerant love, and unity in one's life (*Ephesians 4:1-3*).
 - Putting on a "new self, created after the likeness of God" (*Ephesians 4:17-24*).
 - "Walking in love as Christ loved" (*Ephesians 5:2*).
 - Practicing submission to one another (*Ephesians 5:21-6:9*).
 - **Adoption** - God's choice, and the responsibility that attends it, leads to our "adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ" (*Ephesians 1:5*).
 - In the biblical world, people expected sons to act like their fathers. That expectation explains Paul's comment that the Ephesians should "be imitators of God, as beloved children" (*Ephesians 5:1*; cf. *1 Peter 13-16*).

¹ All quotes from the Bible come from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV Permanent Text Edition, Crossway, 2016) unless otherwise noted.



- That common expectation for the relationship between a son and his father amplifies in Paul's letter – God's adopted children do not just imitate Him, they are remade into a new humanity that bears His image in the world (*Ephesians 5:1; 4:24; Genesis 1:26-28*).
- Faithfulness to their Father guarantees an inheritance to those adopted by God – He gives them the right to share in His rule (*Ephesians 1:11-14; cf. Ephesians 1:21-22; 2:6-7; Revelation 22:1-5*).
- **Redemption** - God enables our holiness and blamelessness by lavishing redemption and forgiveness on us through Jesus (*Ephesians 1:7-8*).
 - God grants forgiveness to His children in a way that considers their limitations and overwhelms their sin (*Ephesians 1:7-8; Psalm 103:6-14; Romans 8:26-27*).
 - An agenda motivates God's forgiveness – it establishes the relationship He wants to have with us (*Ephesians 1:4-5; Romans 5:6-11*).
- **Mission** - our adoption as God's family allows us to participate in His mission "to unite all things in [Christ], things in heaven and things on earth" (*Ephesians 1:8-10*).
 - Paul's statement that God plans to unite heaven and earth under His rule indicates that He did not intend for humanity nor the creation to be separated from Him (*Ephesians 1:8-10; Colossians 1:19-20*).
 - While God enacted a plan to reconcile heaven and earth to Himself "before the foundation of the earth" (*Ephesians 1:4; 1 Peter 1:20*), His strategy hinges on the involvement of the people for whom He enacted it – God's plan involves Him working through those whom He adopts (*Ephesians 1:3-10; 2:11-22; 3:10-11*).

Applications

The blessings God gives people through Jesus seek to cultivate a different way of thinking about oneself and the world. Consider some features of that mindset:

- God's plan always revolved around humans despite knowing the difficulties and costs associated with our involvement. Therefore, **we all possess immeasurable and intrinsic worth.**
- Our ideal state is not the one we experience in this world. Instead, **God redeems us to our planned identity as holy and blameless people.**
- Even though the mission God gives to us goes back to the creation, it inseparably connects to Jesus. **Just as God's plans revolve around Jesus, so should our lives revolve around him.**
- God's plans do not ignore His creation. His plan "to unite...things in heaven and things on earth" (*Ephesians 1:10*) reminds us that **we should not disregard our responsibility to manage His world correctly.**

