

New Benefits

Key Verse:

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.”

Ephesians 1:3

Extra: What does it mean to be a slave of sin?

Level 5 lesson 1

Read: Ephesians 1:1-8

Further: Acts 19:1-8

Hi there! Welcome to another year’s studies. If you had the choice of anything in the world, what would you choose? King Solomon chose wisdom, and we know that God blessed him with incredible riches as well. In fact, his kingdom was probably richer than any other, before or since. Did you know that as Christians, we have been blessed with incredible blessings too, much greater than anything money can buy? Let’s look in Ephesians at some of the benefits a Christian enjoys through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

NEW BLESSINGS (Ephesians 1:3)

Do you realise just what Paul said to the Ephesians, when he wrote that, “God has blessed us with ALL spiritual blessings in Christ?” You cannot get more than all of anything; all means nothing held back, no exceptions, no limitations. There is not one good, great or glorious thing that God has not given us as Christians! When the Bible speaks of Christians as ‘joint heirs’ with Christ, it doesn’t mean they share things ‘50-50’ with Him. It means that everything belonging to Him - belongs to His followers as well!

NEW FAMILY (Ephesians 1:4,5)

When Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, they became sinners and forfeited their right to fellowship with God. They became enemies of God. So, all their descendants, though creatures of God, are born sinners, excluded from God’s family. So how do I ever become part of God’s family again? By adoption! [v5]. Adoption means a child born into one family is legally made a member of another family. And that is what happens to everyone who puts their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. We are ‘adopted’ into the family of God - with all the rights, privileges and responsibilities of sons in God’s family. In Roman culture, sons enjoyed greater privileges than daughters and Paul makes it clear that we are adopted as ‘sons’ - whether we are male or female!

NEW FATHER (Ephesians 1:6)

We all know to some degree, how bad it feels to not be ‘accepted.’ It is reassuring to know that because of

Jesus Christ, and what HE has done, we have been accepted by God! God is holy, and could not accept us as we were; but when we believe in Christ, God accepts us for the sake of His Son. Not only that, He treats us as sons! We gain a new Father.

NEW MASTER (Ephesians 1:7a)

In Roman times, slavery was common. On very rare occasions, a very kind owner would purchase a slave and then set him free. This was called ‘redemption.’ In the same way, God paid the price and bought back His possession which had been forfeited. (v7) God, of course, was not responsible for our going out of His possession. We brought that on ourselves. But through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, His dearly beloved Son, God has bought you back. Once you were a slave to sin, but now He has made you His own possession.

NEW FORGIVENESS (Ephesians 1:7b,8)

“Forgiveness of sin,” Paul reminded the Ephesians,[v7b] “is one of the most glorious benefits of believing in the Son of God.” Sometimes it is hard for us to really understand just what an amazing thing it is. We often think that we haven’t sinned too badly - surely God can overlook the few wrong things we’ve done? After all, we may have tried really hard to be good and nice.

However, we only think this way because we don’t appreciate how holy and righteous God is. God will not tolerate ANY sin in His presence! That means NONE! You’ll never find anyone who will tell you they have never done anything wrong. That’s why our situation as sinners before God is so desperate. In fact - it’s hopeless! We can never be good enough on our own. The Bible even describes our attempts at self-righteousness as being like ‘filthy rags’ in God’s holy sight! Don’t ever treat the forgiveness of God lightly; it is one of the most tremendous facts in the whole universe. It means all of the sins recorded against you - the sins from yesterday, the past week, the past year, and your whole life - have all been dealt with!

On the final judgement day, when God ‘checks the books’, against your name He will find written; ‘PAID IN FULL.’ Because Jesus Christ was willing to take your place, your punishment, and shed His life’s blood on Calvary’s Cross; God is willing to forgive and wipe out every one of your sins. No wonder many people describe the moment of their salvation as being like a heavy burden rolling from their hearts!

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. Who does God bless with ‘Spiritual blessings’?	.....
2. How do we become members of God’s family?	.....
3. What does the word ‘redemption’ mean?	.....
4. How is it possible for God to forgive sin?	.....
5. Name one of the greatest benefits which come from believing in Jesus Christ?	.....

My Name is Age

A New Outlook

Key Verse:

“Put off...your old self... to be made new in the attitude of your mind.”

Ephesians 4:23

Extra: Compare the life of a Christian and non-Christian.

Level 5 lesson 2

Read Ephesians 1:9-14; 4:17-32

Further reading: Acts 19:11-22

This lesson we continue looking at some of the blessings given to all Christians.

NEW UNDERSTANDING (Ephesians 1:9-12)

Christians know and understand things that everyone else on earth knows nothing about! In the first two chapters of 1 Corinthians, Paul also speaks a lot about this. Make sure you read it! There, Paul described the “message of the Cross” as... “foolishness to those who are perishing.” [ch1:18] I’m sure we’ve all met people who think like that! Paul goes on to describe in Ch2:7, ‘God’s secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden’ but which ‘God destined for our glory before time began.’ This ‘secret wisdom’- the ‘mystery of His will’- has been made known, or revealed to us, by the Holy Spirit. He ‘opens our eyes’ to understand things from God’s viewpoint - not our own. Only those who come to God through Christ can hope to learn the will of God for the world and for their individual lives.

NEW GUARANTEE (Ephesians 1:13,14)

Sadly, many a person who thinks they have inherited a ‘fortune,’ ends up with much less than they were expecting. Not so a Christian! The Holy Spirit has been sent to dwell in the heart of each believer, as God’s stamp of approval; a guarantee that the Christian has been forgiven and accepted (v13). The Spirit is like ‘legal title’ to our inheritance until the time when we are ready to receive it. (v14) While we are here on earth, we are not able to enjoy all the blessings God has put aside for us - but we have the presence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, as a guarantee that one day, we will!

A TRANSFORMED LIFE

Anyone whose sins are forgiven; who has been adopted into the family of God, and been made aware of the spiritual blessings that are his ‘in Christ’- will find his life tremendously changed from what it was before. In the last chapter of Ephesians, Paul discusses the kinds of attitudes and practices that should typify a Christian’s life.

OUT WITH THE ‘OLD MAN’ [Ephesians 4:17-22]

Paul wanted the new Christians to see the terrific contrast between what they had been and what they

had become, by the grace of God. And because they were still surrounded by so many corrupting influences and temptations, [Ephesus was a wicked city, full of people who lived and practiced every kind of sinful, idolatrous, lifestyle imaginable], Paul wrote to them about their conduct, and how they should behave. (v22-32)

What he wrote in about AD60, hasn’t become mouldy with age! Christians, he said, must not behave the way unbelievers do. We have been ‘redeemed’ - bought out of the slave market of sin and freed from the bondage of our ‘Old Man’- our old sinful nature.

Our lives are now to be characterised by Christ-like behavior; in keeping with our new position ‘in Christ,’ our new state as ‘children of God’ and our new nature, imparted by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Tragically, many people today are still enslaved, insensitive to sin’s dangers, and willingly involved in sinful practices. [v19] All Paul said about those ‘Gentiles’ [non-Jewish people] is true today of those who don’t know Christ as Saviour.

So how does your life compare? Is there a difference between your life and that of your non-Christian friends? There should be!

IN WITH THE ‘NEW MAN’ (Ephesians 4:23,24) While we cannot expect to ever reach perfection in this life – [that will only happen when our redemption is totally completed and we stand in Heaven] – we are to live a life which reflects our new nature. This ‘new man’ that God has made of you by adopting you into His family, is created Paul says, ‘in righteousness and true holiness. (v24) Just as we once lived lives controlled by our ‘Old Man’, so now, we are to live lives controlled by our ‘New Man.’

This means we need to be ‘renewed in the spirit of your mind’ – not just once, but continually. Jesus wants us to obey Him all the time and He’s disappointed when we sin. But He knows us and the temptations that Satan sets in our way. He made us - remember? So He doesn’t give us up when we fail Him more than once.

If you have let the Lord down, don’t give up, thinking, “it’s no use going on.” If you suffer a defeat through your disobedience or weakness, trust in God’s promise of forgiveness, [1 John 1:9] and in the power of the Holy Spirit become a better Christian than you were before. Read the last two chapters of Ephesians; you will find lots more to encourage you. The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write it down, so that you, as well as the Ephesian Christians, might profit by it - for the glory of Christ.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. Why do Christians know and understand things that others don’t?	.....
2. How can we know the Will of God for the world and for ourselves?	.....
3. Give one reason why the Holy Spirit indwells the heart of each believer?	.....
4. Give some examples from Ephesians 4:20-32 of Christian conduct and behavior.	.....
5. If Satan trips you up, what two things should you do?	.....

A New Creation

Key Verse:
**“For we are
 God’s
 workmanship,
 created in Christ
 Jesus to do
 good works.”**
 Ephesians 2:10

Extra: What does it mean to have a
 responsibility toward God?

Level 5 lesson 3

Read Ephesians 2:1-10; Further reading: Romans 3:21-31

NEW LIFE (Ephesians 2:4-9)

When you came into this world, you received your physical life from the physical life of both your parents. When you placed your faith in Christ as Saviour and became a child of God, He ‘quickened’ you – made you spiritually alive - by placing His Holy Spirit within you. (2 Peter 1:4) Eternal life begins the minute God does this. There is no other way to be ‘born again’ than by being joined to Christ in this way, by faith.

If you have been ‘made alive (quickened) with Christ’ (Ephesians 2:5), you have eternal life - right now! After your earthly body has died, your immortal spirit will be set free to enjoy all the glory of Heaven and God’s awesome presence forever. This destiny is so sure that Paul writes about it in the past tense: God ‘made (not will make) us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus!’

Meanwhile, His Holy Spirit within you, enables you to think as God thinks, feel as God feels, and want what God wants. Let that nature control you!

Salvation is all by grace (v5,8) and there’s nothing you can do to earn it. It is “the gift of God.” That means you and I can’t boast about being a Christian! (v9) Christ has died - HE has paid the price! On this basis, God gives us new life because He is “rich in mercy” and loves us with a “great love.” (v4) Salvation is all God’s doing. We cannot earn it or add to it in any way. We can only respond in loving obedience to Him who “first loved us.”

NEW PROSPECTS (Ephesians 2:7)

Why does God save people? Why does He make them “sit together [with Him] in heavenly places?” God does all this for us, so that “in the ages to come, He might show the exceeding riches of His grace, in His kindness towards us through Christ Jesus.” Eternity itself will not exhaust the kindness that God will pour out upon us, after He has taken us to be with Himself. This will highlight forever, “the exceeding riches of (God’s) grace.” Grace which saw Him devise His marvellous plan of redemption: that “through Christ Jesus,” rebellious sinners, such as you and I, would

one day be restored to eternal fellowship with Himself as He had originally planned. Paul says in Ch3:10 that God’s intent is to show through ‘the Church’ [all true believers in Christ], not only His grace, but also His incredible wisdom, to all the heavenly beings and authorities.

What an amazing new prospect lies before every Christian! “Through Christ” we are saved from sin’s damnation, receive forgiveness of all our sin, are made alive spiritually and begin to experience in some measure the kindness of God. And beyond the grave lies an eternity of joy in our awesome God’s presence! As the hymn-writer has so aptly written, in an old favourite of mine: “The prospects opening to the Christians view, are grander as the days go by!”

NEW RESPONSIBILITY (Ephesians 2:9,10)

Humanly speaking, you are always the child of your father and your mother. If you live in a manner that disgraces your parents, it does not alter the fact that you are their off-spring! Even if parents disown you, being in a family is a matter of relationship and is determined solely by birth; conduct has nothing to do with it.

This is also true of a believer’s relationship to God; it comes about entirely through the new birth, which in turn is brought about by faith in the Lord Jesus as Saviour. It is “not by works, so that no one can boast.” (v9) This gives us great assurance also, that once we are truly God’s child - we are His forever. It is NOT DEPENDENT on our behaviour. However, if we are truly God’s child, it will be REFLECTED in our behaviour!

Never think that as a Christian you have no responsibility toward God, or that “good works” don’t matter in God’s sight. The plain truth is that all who believe have become new creatures in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17) “to do good works.” Before you were born, God “ordained” [prepared] good works for you to do. His intention is that you should speak and act and think in a way that will glorify Him.

Any Christian whose conduct at home, in school, or in their place of business does not bring credit to the name of Jesus, is out of God’s will. The Bible repeatedly teaches that people who have believed in God should “be careful to maintain good works” (Titus 3:8). A Christian without “good works” is not doing what God saved him for.

What’s more, there is good reason to question the faith of a person whose ‘works’ deny his ‘words.’ “Faith without works is dead” we read in James 2:20-26. Real Christian faith is not merely saying that one believes in Christ [although we must do this too] - it is acting on what we believe in the strength of the Holy Spirit.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. Why can we not boast about being a Christian?	.....
2. Complete this important sentence.	Being a true child of God is not _____ on my behavior, but will be _____ in my _____.
3. What are some of the blessings we receive “through Christ”?	.....
4. What is God’s intention for every Christian?	.....
5. Describe ‘real’ Christian faith.	.....

A New Family

Key Verse:

“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.”

Ephesians 2:13

Level 5 lesson 4

Extra: The text talks about being far off or near. What does that mean?

Read Ephesians 2:11-22.

Further reading: Galatians 3:26-29

ALIENS! (Ephesians 2:11,12)

No, we're not talking about 'little green men' from Mars! Most of the Christians to whom Paul wrote at Ephesus, were Gentiles or 'Aliens.' They were, 'without Christ . . . strangers from the covenant of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.' (v12). This refers, of course, to the fact that the Old Testament Scriptures were given to the Jews, and that Christ came to the Jews first (John 1:11; Rom.1:16b). People who were not Jews were without God's Word and without God Himself - truly with "no hope." However, merely being born a Jew, [although certainly an advantage up to and including the days of Christ,] would not in itself ensure the possession of eternal life. Real faith in Christ - not one's relationship to Abraham, or godly parents - is the vital point.

FELLOW CITIZENS (Ephesians 2:19)

Those who are without faith in Jesus Christ do not "belong" to "the household of God." There is no need, however, for anyone to remain a stranger and foreigner; an alien from God's grace. God has done everything that is needed for them to 'become one of the family.' All they must do is receive the gift of eternal life by trusting solely in Jesus Christ. When they do that, they become 'fellow citizens' with the rest of the saints; a member of the 'household of God.' Four blessings that go with being children of God are listed in this chapter, but here are five blessings that go with being 'fellow citizens' (Ephesians 2:6-8).

NEW NEARNESS (Ephesians 2:13)

As 'aliens', without Christ in the world, we are separated from God. That's much worse than being far away from loved ones! Yet Paul says, the moment we receive Christ as Saviour, we "are made near by the blood of Christ." Distance from God is not a geographical matter, for God can be everywhere. It is relational. When Adam & Eve sinned, their [and our] relationship with God was broken. When that sin was taken care of, fellowship with God is again possible - and it is only possible through "the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son" which "cleanses us from all sin." (1 John 1:7). Those who were once "far off" are "made near by the blood of Christ."

NEW PEACE (Ephesians 2:14,17)

When Paul speaks about "the middle wall of partition" being broken down, his primary meaning was the 'wall' that existed between Jews and Gentiles. This was reflected in the Old Testament Temple where a physical wall separated the Gentiles from the inner court. Jews regarded themselves as on the 'inside' and the Gentiles on the 'outside.'

That is what he meant when he says that peace is preached 'to you that were afar off (the Gentiles), and to you that were near (the Jews)'. Paul wanted both Jews and Gentiles to understand clearly, that walls of partition are broken down in Christ. Through Him all men, Jew and Gentile alike, have peace with God (Romans 5:1) - and with one another. There are no racial boundaries in the 'Body of Christ!' There is also a secondary but also very important meaning. Sin itself is a partition between man and God. By breaking down this 'wall,' Jesus made peace between man and God possible.

NEW UNITY (Ephesians 2:15,16)

The 'one body' mentioned here is the true Church, made up of all who believe in Christ, whether their background is Jewish or Gentile. In this new body, "there is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28). Family unity is a wonderful thing, sadly not enjoyed by all. However, we can all enjoy the wonderful 'oneness' which unites all true believers. It is an amazing thing to sense this unity of spirit among believers, and a real encouragement to our souls.

NEW ACCESS (Ephesians 2:18)

Another blessing of being part of God's wonderful family, is the privilege of approaching Him. He gives His Holy Spirit to all those who belong to Him, and through the Spirit we can come to God in praise and prayer.

NEW PRIVILEGE (Ephesians 2:2-22)

One of the privileges of being a child of God, is to be part of the great 'building' that God is building. Jesus is the chief Cornerstone, the apostles and prophets are the foundation, and all who believe in Christ are bricks, as it were, in the holy temple that is being 'built to become a dwelling for God.' This 'building or temple,' is another symbolic name, [like 'Church', and 'Body,'] for all true believers in Christ, those in whom the Holy Spirit lives. Through this 'building', God is doing His work in the world today. As a 'born-again' Christian, and part of this tremendous work, our responsibilities really do become joyful privileges!

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. How do we stop being an 'alien' and become part of God's family?
2. What separates people from God?
3. How does Jesus' blood bring us near to God?
4. Give one benefit of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life.
5. Name three symbolic names used in Scripture for true believers in Christ.

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Please complete and return by post to

PSSM, 1-2A (G2) 93 Dominion Rd, Mt Eden, Auckland 1024 or scan & email to info@biblediscovery.org.nz