

Spiritual Blessings in Christ

Ephesians 1:1-14

Key Verse: 1:3

“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.”

Regarding Ephesians, John Mackay, a former president of Princeton Seminary (1936-60), said, “To this book I owe my life.” It led him, at age 14, in boyish rapture to passionately confess Christ “among the rocks in the starlight.” He said, “I saw a new world...Everything was new...I had a new outlook, new experiences, new attitudes to other people. I loved God. Jesus Christ became the center of everything...I had been ‘quicken’d’; I was really alive.” This experience can be ours. Ephesians tells us of our glorious new life in Christ and describes his church; it is the heavenly realm on earth. It is a new society created by God through Christ. It is characterized by life instead of death, unity and harmony instead of division and isolation, righteousness instead of corruption, love and peace instead of hatred and discord. Through this study I pray that we may learn our identity in Christ, gain a spiritual understanding of his church, and be equipped to do good work for his glory.

In today’s passage Paul praises God for the spiritual blessings he has given us through Christ. Everyone wants blessings. God has poured out his abundant spiritual blessings on us through Jesus Christ. But many Christians are not aware of it. They live as though they had never received blessings. So they blindly ask God to bless them. We have to realize how much God has blessed us. Let's think about his blessings one by one so that we may not live in spiritual poverty, but enjoy the rich spiritual blessings God has given us.

I. Praise be to God (1-3)

Verses 1-2 are Paul’s opening greetings. His greeting is short and concise. He identified himself as an apostle of Christ Jesus. He became an apostle, not by his own decision, but by the will of God. Paul addressed the Ephesians as **“God’s holy people, the faithful in Christ Jesus.”** From a human point of view, they were not perfect, they were still vulnerable to the greed and immorality of typical Gentiles. But from God’s point of view they were holy, set apart for the Lord, and very special people. Paul prayed for them to have grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace and peace are God’s gifts to those who put

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their faith in Jesus. Those who have grace and peace in their hearts do not falter in any situation.

After his short greeting, Paul begins to pour out his heart in praise to the Triune God: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. It is the Triune God who initiates and accomplishes cosmic reconciliation. This Triune God is so transcendent that he is hard to understand with our human reason. So Augustine said, “Don’t try to understand the Trinity, just believe.”

In verse 3 Paul begins to praise God: **“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.”** In the original Greek text, verses 3-14 are all one long, eloquent sentence. It was an outpouring of praise from Paul. He could not stop in the middle, but was compelled to praise God to the end of his breath. Those who are full of complaints tend to breathe out complaints from their hearts in one full breath without stopping. This hurts others and spreads poison. In the past, Paul breathed out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples (Ac 9:1). But when he was changed after meeting the Risen Christ, he breathed out praise and thanks to God with all his strength. When we think about his situation in prison, his praise to God is amazing. Usually we praise God when everything goes well. But Paul praised God in the midst of hardship. His body was in prison, but his soul was in heaven.

Why did he praise the Lord like this? Verse 3 says it was because God has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. Here the verb tense is important. The words, **“has blessed,”** means that God has already given his blessing in full; he did not wait for us to improve before giving us more. We were not aware of this blessing. But God already gave it to us when we believed in Jesus. In the past, we were cursed in Adam. But now, we are blessed abundantly in Christ. We are rich; not just like a millionaire, but like a trillionaire. However, sometimes we behave like beggars, or stingy people, who think they have no blessing from God. There was a woman named Hetty Green, who lived in the 20th century. Her fortune exceeded \$4 billion in modern equivalence. But she lived as though she was very poor. She never turned on the heat or used hot water. She ate only oat meal. To save money on soap, she washed only the dirtiest parts of her dresses. When her son Ned broke his leg, she tried to have him admitted to a free clinic for the poor. Like this woman, many Christians who have been abundantly blessed by Christ live as though they are very poor. They have the

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mentality of stingy beggars. We need to realize how much God has blessed us and live happy, generous lives like spiritual trillionaires.

In verse 3 Paul talks about **“every spiritual blessing.”** In the midst of mystery religions and human philosophies, many were tempted to seek something in addition to Christ. But Paul emphasizes that every spiritual blessing has been given in Christ; they need nothing more. When we feel that something is lacking, we should not look elsewhere; we should realize more deeply that God has already given us every spiritual blessing in Christ. This indicates that there may be spiritual blessings and material blessings. People usually praise God when receiving material blessings. Yet these are temporal; though we may need them, they cannot give lasting satisfaction. However spiritual blessings truly satisfy our souls. They are most valuable. God has given us every spiritual blessing in Christ. So we have abundant reasons to praise God. Let’s think about these blessings one by one.

II. Every spiritual blessing in Christ (4-14)

First, he chose and predestined us for adoption to sonship (4-6,11,14). Look at verses 4-5. **“For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will....”** These verses show that God’s salvation plan was rooted in God himself, and conceived in eternity. Before anything was made God had already chosen his church, and, I believe, each of his children, and predestined us for sonship through Jesus Christ. God did not do this with reluctance, but rather in love. It was God’s plan, decision, and pleasing will, conceived before creation. Salvation originates with God, not us. Salvation comes from the Lord!

To some, predestination seems to nullify man’s freedom of choice. So someone may think, “If I am predestined to be saved, God will do so no matter what I do. So I can sin freely.” On the other hand, one may think, “If I am predestined to be condemned, I will perish no matter how much I struggle. So I should sin freely.” Or one could think, “Since God already decided who will be saved, I don’t need to preach the gospel.” In fact, these thoughts stem from human reason which cannot penetrate the mystery of predestination. Rather, they lead to determinism, which is a perversion of God’s truth. Sometimes we Christians think we chose God. That’s true. But we chose God because he first chose us (Jn 15:16). There is mystery here; we cannot fully understand it. But the point is that our salvation does not originate with us, but with God. If our salvation depended on us,

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we would always be nervous, uncertain and fearful. But our salvation originated with God, and is accomplished by God. So we can have assurance of our salvation in God. This brings great comfort to our souls and gives us true rest.

For what did God choose and predestine us? It was for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ. In Roman law, whenever someone was adopted, that person inherited the full rights of a son, such as his father's good name, all the wealth of his estate, and the right to reign over the household. When someone was adopted, their big question would be, "Who is adopting me?" If it was a good family, an orphan who was abandoned, lonely and needy could suddenly change in status to a son who was loved and cared for. For example, a young African American boy from Tennessee was abandoned at age seven. He was traumatized. He was put into various foster homes, but always ran away because he was not loved. He was even homeless for a while. When he entered high school, a classmate's mother had compassion on him. She was a wealthy white woman from a good family with many social connections. Eventually, she persuaded her husband and natural children to agree to adopting the boy. Suddenly his status changed to be a dearly loved son in a good family. He became stable and his grades improved. He had an unusual ability to protect loved ones. He developed this talent as a football player who protected his quarterback. He became a star at the U. Mississippi, and went on to play professional football. The boy in this story is Michael Oher, and the adoptive mother is Leigh Anne Tuohy. Their story was recently told in the popular movie, "Blind Side."

This story illustrates what it means to be adopted as a son by God. Before God adopted us we were miserable, like Michael. We were lonely, abandoned slaves of sin, and tormented by evil spirits. We had no hope, meaning or direction. We were spiritually dead. But God had mercy on us and adopted us as his children.

Who is this God? Verse 2 says God is our Father. Our Father God is loving (4b). His love is deeper than the ocean, higher than the mountains and wider than the horizon. It is unfathomable. God demonstrated his love by sending his one and only Son Jesus Christ to save us from our sins. God is generous, lavishing his blessings on us, giving freely, and he is rich in mercy (6,8; 2:4). Our Father God is full of wisdom and imparts wisdom and understanding to his children (8b). Furthermore, he is the almighty Creator of the universe, eternal and infinite. We cannot describe all of his attributes here; but this God adopted us as his children. Now we have an intimate love relationship with this God. So we should understand that predestination for adoption to sonship is not just some systematic guarantee of

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going to heaven. It is entering into a relationship with God. In this relationship, God helps us to grow, sometimes through divine discipline as an expression of love, until we become holy and blameless in his sight (4).

When we are adopted as his children, we become heirs. In verse 11, the footnote says that we “were made heirs.” And verse 14 says that we have an inheritance. This inheritance is a living hope in the kingdom of God which never perishes, spoils or fades away (1Pe 1:3-4). This living hope revives our souls and strengthens us in times of hardship. Thank God for adopting us as his children through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Second, redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins (7-8a). How was our adoption made possible? Look at verses 7-8a. **“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us.”** Redemption means to buy back, especially out of slavery. When we are free, we do not appreciate how precious our freedom is. But when we lose it, we really appreciate it. When I went to North Korea last year, I sometimes felt like a prisoner who was always watched and told where to go and what to do. I was happy to return to the United States and experience freedom. The Bible says we were slaves of sin. We did not do what we wanted to do, but we did what we hated to do. Even though we hated it, we could not stop doing it. Many young people are addicted to video games. Even though they fail in their school studies, they cannot stop playing video games. Others are slaves of lustful desires, alcohol or drugs. Some are slaves of anger, bitterness or hatred. Some have a chronic habit of holding grudges, and this imprisons them.

How can we get out of these bondages which ruin our lives? To be redeemed requires a price. The price is not money or community service, but life. The wages of sin is death. So we have to die in order to pay the price of sin. People think that sin is enjoyable. They think they can enjoy sin as they please and then escape from it. But when we try to escape from it, we find that we are trapped by Satan. The famous German theologian Karl Heim said, “We have a key to the door of sin. But once we enter the door, we are trapped, for we do not have a key to get out.” But God has the key to get out of it. This key is Jesus, God's one and only Son.

Verse 7 says we have redemption through his blood. In order to redeem us Jesus shed his blood on the cross. Blood? Why blood? Leviticus 17:11 says, **“For the life of a creature is in the blood...the blood...makes atonement for one's life.”** Blood and life are mysteriously connected. If we shed too much blood, we

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will die. If our blood becomes contaminated, we will die. So our kidneys, which clean our blood, are very important. But our kidneys cannot clean our blood from the infestation of sin. Sin requires the shedding of blood, as Hebrews 9:22 says. That is why the Israelites sacrificed so many animals. But the effect of animal blood was just temporary. It was only a shadow of what was to come. It looked forward to Jesus' blood. Jesus was the sinless Son of God. His blood has power to satisfy God's righteousness and to cleanse our sin-stained blood. Jesus' blood brings us forgiveness of sins once for all (Heb 10:11-13). In this way, God redeemed us in order to adopt us as his children. He did this in love, and in accordance with the riches of his grace that he lavished on us (7b-8a).

Third, he revealed the mystery (8b-10). In verses 8b-10 we find another spiritual blessing in Christ. This blessing is not just personal; it is given to the Christian community, the church. Verses 8b-10 say, **“With all wisdom and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times have reached their fulfillment--to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.”** Usually Paul used the word “mystery” to refer to Christ or the gospel (6:19; Ro 16:25; 1 Cor 2:7; Col 1:26,27; 2:2; 4:3). Christ himself is the mystery of God. However, here Paul uses the word “mystery” in the context of the bigger picture of what Christ has done. God has a great plan to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ. This idea is more specifically revealed in Ephesians 3:6, which says, **“This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.”** In this world, there are so many distinctions between people which become the basis of conflict between countries, tribes, and communities. These kinds of conflicts happen even within the church. How can people be united? To human beings, it is impossible. But to God it is possible. God brings unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ. Christ is the center of spiritual gravity which draws all things together and unites them.

Fourth, God's purpose in salvation (11-14). In verses 11-14 Paul explains that God gave the same blessing and had the same purpose in salvation for both the Jews and the Gentiles. But chronologically, first it was given to the Jews and then to the Gentiles. In verses 11-12 the pronoun “we” refers to the Jews, including Paul himself. In verses 13-14 the pronoun “you” refers to the Gentile believers. Paul expounds in verses 13-14 how the Gentiles were brought into God's blessing and how they can be sure of it. In order to explain this, he talks about the role of the

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Holy Spirit. It was hard for the Gentile believers to accept that they were also God's possession, like the Jews. But Paul explains that when they believed, they were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit's presence in our lives is the guarantee that we are God's children. 2 Corinthians 1:21b-22 says, **"He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come."** Here "deposit" is like a down payment on something. This deposit validates that the purchase has been made. In the same way, the Holy Spirit confirms that all of God's blessings have been poured out upon us, and we will receive our full inheritance in the kingdom of God.

Verse 6 says, **"...to the praise of his glorious grace."** Verses 12 and 14 repeat the phrase, **"to the praise of his glory,"** referring to Jew and Gentile respectively. This tells us God's purpose in redemption. In the past we were objects of God's wrath and grieved God due to our sins. But God redeemed us through Jesus Christ to restore God's image in us so that we might be for the praise of his glory. Now when God sees us he finds pleasure in us and takes delight in us. Wow! We are redeemed to the praise of God's glory. To people we may be nobody; but to God we are very special.

By the same token, this gives us a purpose of bringing praise and glory to God. Why do we have to bring praise and glory to God, and not to ourselves? God seems to be God-centered, making everything about himself. This is right. For in fact, God is worthy of all praise, honor and glory. God is the Creator and Savior and Sovereign Ruler of all things. If we do not bring praise and glory to God, our thinking becomes futile and our foolish hearts are darkened. Then we will give praise and glory to lesser things, such as mortal human beings, birds, animals, and reptiles (Ro 1:21-23). We will become idol worshipers. Also, we become proud, corrupt and miserable. God wants us to maintain God's blessing by giving praise, glory and honor to God. When we do there is harmony in God's creation. But if each created thing wants to glorify itself most, there will be disunity and chaos. When people gather and have a conversation, if each one brags about himself, what happens? They become tired, angry and upset until they have a boxing match. But when each one brings honor and glory to God, they can be encouraged and strengthened and enjoy unity in God. That is why we have to accept God's purpose for us to bring praise and glory to God.

Today we have learned that God has given us every spiritual blessing in Christ. He chose us and predestined us to be adopted to sonship. He redeemed us through the

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blood of Christ, forgiving all our sins. He revealed the mystery of his will. He guaranteed our inheritance in heaven with the deposit of the Holy Spirit. He redeemed us to the praise of his glory. Thinking of all this, we cannot but praise God. Let's praise God.