

Ephesians 1 • Our Possessions in Christ

Introduction

In a day when the false doctrine of the Faith-Prosperity Movement has taken hold among so many, a teaching promising material blessings in the here-and-now, Paul's teaching on the wealth of blessings we have as Christians – spiritual blessings that are ours in Christ – stands out as quite a contrast. In the first part (v.1-14), Paul informs us that each Person of the Godhead has blessed us, and follows up in the second part (v.15-23) with his personal prayer that we might properly understand those blessings and the power they may become in our lives.

¹Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,

To the saints who are at Ephesus and who are faithful in Christ Jesus:

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

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, ⁴just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him.

In love ⁵He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, ⁶to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

[Read v.1-2]

Observation: Paul's introduction that he is an apostle "by the will of God" will take on additional meaning in this chapter as the will of God is specifically mentioned further in v.5, 9, and 11.

Q: What are the two basic but very important aspects of Christianity briefly touched upon in the way Paul addresses this letter?

A: "Saints" can literally be translated "holy ones", a reference to God's work of sanctification followed by calling them "faithful", the application of man's faith. Thus is presented the twofold aspect of salvation, God's grace in the first instance sanctifying us (that is, setting us apart for His eternal purposes as holy unto Himself), and our faith, by God's gift, which lays hold of salvation. Paul will further elaborate on both.

But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.

2 Thessalonians 2:13

[Read v.3-6]

Q: From which person of the Godhead are these blessings coming from?

A: God the Father.

Q: According to v.4, what is the very first of these blessings?

A: "He chose us".

Q: For what purpose were we chosen?

A: To "be holy and blameless before Him". (v.4)

Application: When we think of our destiny, it's often defined by things like profession, marriage, where to live, and the like. How well do you consider that it really consists of nothing more than living according to His Word and ways regardless of how those other things turn out?

Q: According to v.5, what is the second of the Father's blessings?

A: He adopted us.

Q: What did adoption mean to people in the 1st Century church?

A: Adoption was the official act of a father bestowing the status of full adulthood on a son of minor status. It was not the taking of an outsider as we think of adoption today, but the placing of a family member into the privileges and blessings of adulthood. The greater teaching is that even the youngest Christian has everything that Christ has and is rich in grace, and that all Christians have been so elevated to spiritual adulthood.

Q: According to v.6, what is the Father's third blessing?

A: By His grace through Christ He has accepted us.

Point: He chose us, He adopted us, He accepted us. Our blessings from God the Father are the foundation for all that is to follow in our doing the very same thing when it comes to His Son – we choose Him, adopt Him, and accept Him to complete the cycle of salvation.

Observation: Some people don't understand how free will can coexist with predestination. In the Hebrew mind of the Bible, these two things were not considered contrary, but held in equal tension so as not to come down on one side or the other. For instance, when Jesus speaks of Judas, He says, "The Son of Man is to go, just as it is written of Him" – that is, it's predestined; "but woe to that man by who the Son of Man is betrayed!" – that is, a free-will choice was made. One does not trump the other, but actually compliments each other.

⁷In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace ⁸which He lavished on us.

In all wisdom and insight ⁹He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him ¹⁰with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth.

In Him ¹¹also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, ¹²to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory.

[Read v.7-12]

Q: From which person of the Godhead are these blessings coming from?

A: Christ the Son.

Q: What is the first blessing listed in v.7?

A: He has redeemed us – "we have redemption through His blood".

Because of His work on the cross, we have a present redemption in that He has delivered us from the penalty and power of sin. But note further down in v.14 that we also have a future redemption when Christ delivers us from the presence of sin at His return.

Q: What is the second blessing listed in v.7?

A: He has forgiven us – "the forgiveness of our trespasses".

Q: What does the word "forgiveness" literally mean? How is this represented in the Bible?

A: It literally means "to send away". Where sin is concerned it is pictured by the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement where sin is placed upon the head of the animal and it is sent away into the wilderness. (Lev. 16:20-22).

Q: What is Christ's third blessing in v.8-10?

A: He has revealed God's will to us.

Q: In biblical parlance, what exactly is a "mystery"?

A: It is divine truth known only by God's people through revelation.

Q: What is the specific mystery herein revealed to us?

A: That in Christ we are a part of God's eternal purpose to ultimately gather "all things in Christ", which will unite both "things in heaven" and "things on the earth".

Application: In the blessings from God Paul revealed that God's purpose for us is to be "holy and blameless before Him", that is walking according to His Word and ways alone. Here it is further expanded on so that we can see that the purpose of spiritual faithfulness is to unite all things together in Christ.

Q: What is Christ's fourth blessing to us according to v.11-12?

A: He has provided us an inheritance.

Q: How is this inheritance qualified? What are the parameters governing its disposition?

A: First of all it's a part of God's overall will which connects His plans for us not just from before we were born, and not just as a result of this present life, but for the future; our entire past, present, and future are combined in Him. Second, just like our past and present, our future is tied together "in Christ".

Point: *God chose, adopted, and accepted us, but these things are only completed through Christ His Son who has redeemed us, forgiven us, revealed God's will, and provided an inheritance. The blessings of God can only be experienced through the blessings provided in Christ alone which combine to unite all things Christ, especially our past, present, and future.*

¹³In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.

[Read v.13-14]

Q: From which Person of the Godhead are these blessings coming from?

A: God the Spirit.

Q: According to v.13, what is the first blessing?

A: He has sealed us.

Q: What exactly was a seal in biblical times?

A: It was impressed on a document to give undoubted validity to the contract the document contained. Most often the seal was the image of the person making this contract. So this is a very powerful way of describing God's promise – His very contract with us – to accomplish all the blessings of the Godhead.

Q: What might be important about the fact that "sealed" is in the past tense?

A: It's an indication that this has already been accomplished once and for all. It's a very powerful adjunct to the previous blessings of having adopted, accepted us, and so forth in each of the blessings. From God's point of view it's a work which is already completed and finished.

Q: According to v.14, what is the second blessing?

A: He has given us a pledge. Think of this as the other half of the seal. Whereas He seals the contract as legitimate, the pledge is given to assure us from our own point of view that everything will be completed, a sort of "down payment" to assure us that we will experience total redemption and receive all these promised blessings in glory.

Point: *The blessings through the Spirit complete the entire body of work begun by God and carried out through Christ.*

Q: Why does Paul conclude with the same phrase at the end of each of the above three sections?

A: "To the praise of His glory" is basically used in v.6, 12, and 14. It's the ultimate explanation of why the Father, the Son, and the Spirit have given us these blessings. Salvation comes by God's grace **AND** God's glory!

Application: *How might we approach things differently if we strived to achieve them for His glory rather than our own? How might this be the difference between a mature and immature believer?*

¹⁵For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints, ¹⁶do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers; ¹⁷that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. ¹⁸I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might ²⁰which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. ²²And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, ²³which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

[Read v.15-23]

Observation: Paul here prays “that you will know”, and later in 3:13-21 offers a second prayer “that you might be”. His first prayer is for enlightenment, the second for enablement. Paul first prays that we might know what Christ has done for us and then prays that we might live up to these blessings and put them into practice in our daily walk.

Q: What is Paul’s first request in v.17?

A: That God may give you spiritual understanding. In other words, it all begins with being firmly grounded in the truth.

Q: How is this first request restated in v.18?

A: “...that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened”. The emotions and feelings of the heart need to be tempered and kept within the boundaries of the truth.

Q: What is Paul’s second request in v.18?

A: “...that you will know what is the hope of his calling”. The biblical definition of “hope” is not wishing for something but seeing it as “future fact”, something already delivered, as in the purposes expressed in v.4-6 above. It’s about faith taking knowledge to the next level.

Q: What is Paul’s third request also found in v.18?

A: “...what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints”. We not only **HAVE** an inheritance in Christ, but we **ARE** an inheritance **TO** Christ.

Point: Christians mature in the Lord when they learn how much they mean to Christ and begin to live in order to bring joy to His heart.

Q: What is Paul’s fourth request expounded upon in v.19-23?

A: “...what is the surpassing greatness of His power”.

Q: What is the example of His power by which we should realize is already at work in, and available to, us?

A: The very power that raised Jesus from the dead!

Point: God’s people do not fight **FOR** victory but **FROM** victory.

Overall Application

Of course, all these blessings are only available for those who meet the conditions Paul sets forth in v.1-2. Paul is writing to living saints, people who have put their faith in Christ. These saints – “set-apart ones” – have experienced God’s grace and now enjoy God’s peace. Nowhere does the Bible teach that it is the church which makes a person a saint; only God can make a saint from a sinner. And the sinner must become a saint while he is still alive, for after death comes judgment.

And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment,
Hebrews 9:27

It’s important to enjoin God’s blessings here and now by faithfulness to His Word and ways so that everything – past, present, and future – are tied together in Christ.