

# Blessings in Christ

Ephesians 1:3-14

May 22, 2016

This morning we continue our adventure through the New Testament book of Ephesians. Last week, we only made it through the first 2 verses. Today, we'll spend our time on just 1 sentence. But, it's actually a really long sentence...in the Greek it's 202 words.<sup>1</sup> In our English translations, this one sentence in Greek requires 12 verses to contain it.

Please turn in your Bibles to **Ephesians 1:3-14**. "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. 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—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. 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. 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 reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ. In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory."

One of the first things I like to do with a passage that I'm preaching on is to make a good outline. I begin by laying out the basic sentence structure. And so, I look for the subjects, verbs, and the various modifiers.<sup>2</sup> 202 words in one sentence makes this hard to do, to say the least.

But, we can either look at this passage as a grammar teacher's worst nightmare or we can see it for what it truly is: a beautiful expression of praise and worship. Based on his understanding of our spiritual blessings in Christ, Paul pours out his eulogy, his doxology of praise to God. **This morning, let's try to increase our understanding of the blessings we have in Christ that it might lead us to the same response of praise to God.**

**Ephesians 1:3** declares that **every spiritual blessing comes in Christ**. This is how Paul opens his long 202-word sentence. It's all about the blessings we have in Christ and how those blessings call forth a heart that wants to bless and praise God.<sup>3</sup> **Ephesians 1:3** introduces the entire section of verses **3-14**. Right from the get go, it points to the idea of "in Christ." The purpose of our church is to **promote the supremacy of Christ**. And, all of the blessings for which Paul is giving God praise come in, through, and under Christ. This concept of "in Christ" is littered throughout these **12 verses 11 different times**:

- v. 3 We receive these spiritual blessings **"in Christ."**
- v. 4 God chose us **"in Him"** before the creation of the world.
- v. 5 We are adopted **"through Jesus Christ"**
- v. 6 grace is freely given **"in the One"** God loves
- v. 7 **"In Him"** we have redemption
- v. 9 God purposed **"in Christ"**
- v. 10 to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth **"under Christ."**
- v. 11 **"In Him"** we were also chosen
- v. 12 we put our hope **"in Christ"**
- v. 13 we were included **"in Christ"**

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<sup>1</sup> O'Brien, p. 90.

<sup>2</sup> This passage contains 7 relative clauses, 7 participial and infinitival constructions, a large collection of over 15 prepositional expressions, and as well as various genitival constructions. Best quoted in O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, p. 90.

<sup>3</sup> The ESV is helpful here. It translates Eph 1:3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places." This helps us to see that blessing is clearly what is on Paul's mind as he begins writing verses 3-14. The Jewish people used the word "bless" to express both God's kindness to us and our thanks or praise to him." (See *NIV Study Bible*, p. 1985) And so, we are blessed by God's kindness to us AND we bless God giving Him our thanks and praise. It sounds a little awkward in English to say that we are blessing God, as though we are doing Him some kind of a favor. But, this is not about us being a blessing to God but rather about us blessing His Name because of what He has given to us in Christ. We tend to say it this way: "Blessed be the Name of the LORD!"

v. 13 we were marked “in Him”

“All that God has done for his people, and for which he is praised, has been effected in and through Christ.”<sup>4</sup> Jesus is Supreme!

**Ephesians 1:4-6** shows us that all of our **spiritual blessings are part of God’s purpose and pleasure**. **Eph. 1:4** tells us that God chose us with purpose. He provided a way for us to be holy and blameless in his sight. But we’ve already talked about the saints in Ephesus. We learned last week how God’s holy people, the **saints, in v. 1** had messy spiritual lives; that they struggled with sin.

But in v. 4 we see that from **before the creation of the world** God’s purpose in Christ was that we could be made holy and blameless. You and I are so important to God, that He laid out plans well in advance. He was looking out for us because He saw what was coming.

**Ephesians 1:5** illustrates God’s purpose even further; He is a planner. He works with purpose and foresight for our best interests. God the Father planned in advance to bring us into a personal relationship with Himself. This sounds almost **narcissistic** to our ears. What would make us as mere mortals think that the God of the entire universe would want to be in a close, personal relationship with us? Well, frankly, Ephesians 1:5 would. This predestined plan of **adoption through Christ** was entirely in accordance with God’s pleasure and will.

And, just to be clear, this adoption is for men and women. Even though it’s translated “adoption to sonship,” it is intended for men and women. It’s about the legal aspect of getting an inheritance. And lest this feel awkward for the women in the room because they are incorporated into sonship, I will remind all of us, that in Ephesians 5, the men in the room are incorporated into the imagery of being part of the church, the bride of Christ. So, **women are adopted into sonship and men are part of the bride of Christ**. Rather than feeling uncomfortable with these descriptions, let’s embrace the **nuances of their ramifications**.

Before we move on from verse 5, let’s make sure we pay close attention to this amazing combination: **pleasure and will**. We’ve talked some already about how all of these spiritual blessings were according to His purpose and will. But don’t miss this, they are also according to His pleasure. We have a God who takes pleasure in giving us spiritual blessings.<sup>5</sup>

**The beauty of this predestination is not just in the planning but it’s in the pleasure!** We will see this again in **Ephesians 1:9**, “[God] made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good **pleasure**, which he purposed in Christ.” The predetermined plans of God are not just something theologically significant, they are something warm and personal.<sup>6</sup> God chose us on purpose AND He did it with great pleasure.

**Ephesians 1:6** wraps up this section on these spiritual blessings by proclaiming that it’s all, “to the praise of his glorious grace.” God’s grace is truly glorious! As we understand the amazing blessings that we have in Christ, it leads us to respond in praise. To put it another way, as we discover that our Heavenly Father finds His pleasure in blessing us, then we learn to find our pleasure in glorifying Him.

**Ephesians 1:7-8a** reminds us that **God’s gracious redemption is one of our spiritual blessings**. The forgiveness of sins is probably the spiritual blessing that we are most familiar with. But familiarity doesn’t make it less important. As Paul notes, this redemption is serious because it comes “**through His blood**.” But, it is also “in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us.”

**I’m always drawn to this word “lavished.”** It’s an amazing word to contemplate; it’s right there in your Bible. This spiritual blessing of redemption was not done half-heartedly or with limited funds. God’s gracious redemption was done lavishly.

➤ Does it sound at all strange to your ears that God would be lavish?

**Lavish is defined by overflowing**, great abundance, and more than enough. Synonyms might include extravagant, wasteful, over-the-top, and unrestrained.

➤ Does it bother you a little to think that God might be a bit wasteful with His grace?

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<sup>4</sup> O’Brien, p. 90.

<sup>5</sup> Zeph. 3:17, The LORD your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing.”

<sup>6</sup> Eph. 1:11 will also repeat this idea, “In [Christ] we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.”

**Can you picture someone pouring a cup to overflowing?** Not just a nice full glass, not even filled right up to the brim, but rather, overflowing. So now you have it spilling over the edges, getting all over your hands, and making a mess on the floor. That's just silly. Something as precious as grace should not be allowed to overflow and spill over. It should be conserved and carefully controlled, made to stretch as far as possible. Just pour each of us a small amount. Don't waste it!

But, **if you are thinking that way, you are wrong.** Our God is rich with grace. He lavishes it on us. By the way, the word "lavished" here is not just an adjective defining grace; **it's a verb!** It's an action; it's describing God's behavior, His lavish behavior. We need to understand that. We need to receive it. Don't resist this idea. Did I mention that God takes pleasure in giving us spiritual blessings? It's his predetermined plan; it's His will to bless us. And, it's His delight.

**Luke 15** shares the parable of the prodigal son. Read the story again. We call the wayward son the prodigal, which means wasteful, because he wasted all his dad's inheritance. But if you look closely, **the father was even more wasteful.** After dividing his property in half and seeing his son waste all of his share, what does he do when his son returns? He forgives him, embraces him, kisses him, puts the best robe on him, a ring on his hand, shoes on his feet. They kill the fattened calf (they go out for steak – how lavish!) and celebrate his sons return with music and dancing.

This idea is in other places in Scripture as well. **Zeph. 3:17** says, "The LORD your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. **He will take great delight in you;** in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but **will rejoice over you with singing.**" Can you hear your Heavenly Father rejoicing over you with singing? Sounds pretty awesome to me. God's gracious redemption is just one of our spiritual blessings.

**Ephesians 1:8b-10** reveals the **spiritual blessing of Christ unifying all things.** The end of verse 8 may help some of us who are still feeling a little unsettled by all the lavish talk from the beginning of the verse. The phrase, "With all wisdom and understanding" helps us to see that God hasn't gotten out of control by any means. He is wise and careful in His planning. And, He has things timed out in just the right way.

All of the things going on in heaven and everywhere around the earth are under God's control. He is in the driver's seat with both hands on the wheel. He does not text and drive. We need not worry that He is distracted or has somehow forgotten one of us back at the grocery store!

God is the ultimate multi-tasker who has had a plan from the beginning. And, although some of it was kept secret, the mystery<sup>7</sup> is now being revealed as one of our spiritual blessings in Christ. The blessing is that, under Christ, everything in the cosmos will be unified. It's all under His control. The same God who, "**In the beginning**... created the heavens and the earth," is the same God who made a plan before the creation of the world that all things would be unified under Christ. That's a wonderful spiritual blessing!

Our God is sovereign, all-knowing, and all powerful. Nothing escapes His notice or goes without His loving watch care. There is no one like our God!

**Ephesians 1:10** explains that this is, "to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment..." Right now, there are still things in our world which are **fragmented**. Many things have been brought into unity under Christ, but the times have not quite yet reached their fulfillment. Sometimes the chaos in our world can be overwhelming. If we spend too much time looking at the moral decay in our society, the political directions, and the social upheaval with issues like gender disparity, it can cause us to consider giving up. But we can't give up. All of the things that are happening around us and in our personal lives have not escaped God's notice.

"When the times reach their fulfillment," all things will be brought to unity under Christ. This gives us great hope and the courage to endure. **What a great spiritual blessing to know that God's "got this!"**

**Ephesians 1:11-14** reassures us with the **spiritual blessing of a guaranteed inheritance.** **Ephesians 1:11** begins with "In him" which again points us to the blessings we have "In Christ." It also repeats this same idea of being predestined to the plans and purpose of God's will.

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<sup>7</sup> See Eph. 3:2-13

Then, in verses 12 and 13 Paul sets up an interesting contrast between “us and them” or should I say “we and you.” In **verse 12**, Paul’s “we” who were the first to hope in Christ is a reference to him and his fellow Jews who initially made up the early church. Then, Paul’s “you” in **verse 13**, is a reference to the Gentile Christians who came to Christ just a little while later in the history of the church. Paul is not setting up two different classes of Christians here though. He is simply pointing out that “you ALSO” were included in Christ by the same gospel message. This is further evidenced by Paul’s mention of these Gentile believers who were “marked in [Christ] with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.” The same Holy Spirit unites all believers in Christ on equal ground.<sup>8</sup>

**Ephesians 1:14** wraps up our passage by mentioning that the Holy Spirit is “a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance.” The idea here is of a down payment or the first instalment. There is more to come and it’s guaranteed to come at our final redemption. It’s strange to think that we don’t actually receive our full inheritance until we die. We get an earthly inheritance when someone else dies and then we can enjoy it for however long we have left on this earth. But, our full heavenly inheritance comes when WE die. But then again, when we die, it’s only our bodies that die. Our soul lives on to enjoy our inheritance forever and ever.

Some of you heard me share yesterday at Dave Heem’s funeral about a guaranteed inheritance. When it comes to the day of our death or the day of someone else’s death, we need the assurance of heaven. **The assurance of a guaranteed inheritance in Christ is an amazing spiritual blessing.**

Well, we’ve gone through Paul’s 202-word sentence kind of quickly. At the end of verse 14, he ends his doxology with the words “to the praise of his glory.” **The proper response to all of our blessings in Christ is to praise God.**

Do you ever find yourself bursting forth in song declaring the Lord’s goodness? Picture Julie Andrews in the sound of music, “the hills are alive with the sound of music!” When is the last time doxology flowed from your heart extemporaneously?

What’s keeping us from impromptu rejoicing?

- Perhaps we have forgotten how blessed we are.
- Perhaps we’ve let a bad attitude get a hold of us because we feel less blessed than others?
- Perhaps we’ve lost perspective because life has been really hard lately?
- Perhaps we’ve become accustomed to God’s blessing? It can be easy sometimes to take our spiritual blessings in Christ for granted and fall into the trap of entitlement.

When we truly get our mind and heart around all the spiritual blessings that we have in Christ, we can’t help but to respond with praise! So, let us ponder God’s goodness. **Let’s meditate on this doxology from Ephesians 1.** Turn it over in your mind and let it churn around in your heart. We are a blessed people. **Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!**

I’m not much of a singer. But I’m not so sure that Paul was either. And none of us should let that hold us back from praising God. Will you join me in singing the Doxology as our closing benediction this morning?

Praise God, from Whom all blessings flow;  
Praise Him, all creatures here below;  
Praise Him above, ye heav’nly host;  
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.  
Amen.

This sermon was preached at the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji  
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<sup>8</sup> See Eph. 4:3-6