

Blessed!

Ephesians 1:3

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“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.” – Ephesians 1:3

Introduction: Bless

The word “bless” can be used in many ways:

1. When someone sneezes, we might say, “Bless you!” or “God bless you!” This originally was intended as a wish that God would protect the sneezing person from serious disease and keep them in good health. Now it’s just good manners.
2. We might refer to a prayer before a meal as “the blessing” or as “asking the blessing,” and during such a prayer, we might ask God to “bless the food.”
3. In the South, someone might say, “Bless his heart,” or might say to you, “Well, bless your heart!” or “Oh, honey, bless your heart!” This is the Southern equivalent of calling someone an idiot, by the way.

The Bible uses the word “bless” in four different ways:

1. We “bless the Lord,” which is another way of referring to praising God. (“Bless the LORD, O my soul” – Psalm 103:1)
2. The Lord blesses His people with good, pouring out His blessings.
3. Men and women bless each other by prayer, praying for each other.
4. The priests in the Old Testament spoke a blessing over the people, invoking God’s covenant blessings for His people. (“May the Lord bless you and keep you . . .” – Numbers 6:24)

Here, we have the word “bless” in three different forms in one verse: *“**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.”*

Each of these three words has the same Greek root, which means to speak well of –

1. We “speak well” of God because He is worthy of being spoken well of, in part because
2. He has “spoken well” toward us, blessing us
3. With every spiritual blessing, that is everything which can be “spoken well” of, given by the Spirit

Of course, while the same word is used in both directions – when we speak of God and when God speaks of us – our speaking and God’s speaking are fundamentally different. When we speak well of God, we are simply describing Him for who He is and for what He has done. Our words don’t change God, Our blessing God, in other words, does not have power to make Him blessed. He already is. But when God speaks well of us, He blesses us, He changes us because His words have power to create and shape reality, whereas ours only have power to describe reality.

I. **Blessed be . . .**

And so when Paul says, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,” we should not imagine that he is stating something he wishes were true about God. Oh, that God might be blessed! No, it’s more accurate to see that Paul is stating that God is blessed; in other words, that God is, in fact, worthy of being very well spoken of. Paul is expressing praise to God for who God is and what He has done, and in doing so is calling his readers – us – to join him in his praise!

Paul’s praise which erupts in verse 3 continues on in one, long sentence of exultation through verse 14. In the original Greek, it’s a 202-word sentence that some Bible scholars have compared to a hymn. It’s an extended proclamation of joy for the incredible blessings of God poured out in the Gospel.

- a. **The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ**
- b. **God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, v. 2**

In the opening of this proclamation of praise, Paul calls God “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” In the previous sentence, in verse 2, Paul has referred to “God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” It is a tremendous blessing and grounds for the highest praise to think of the reality that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is, in fact, our Father, because of Jesus Christ and what He has done for us and who we are in Him.

After the resurrection, Jesus said to Mary Magdalene: *“Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”* (John 20:17) This is the first time Jesus had called the disciples “my brothers” and the first time He had used this specific language of “my Father and your Father.” He had accomplished redemption. He had won the victory.

Now, the spoils of His conquest of sin and death is that we who believe in Him and belong to Him are His brothers and, in Him, God is our Father, just as He is the Father of the Lord Jesus Himself.

II. **Who has blessed us**

The astounding good news of the Gospel is that God Almighty – who is blessed forever- has chosen in love to bless us. He who is the true fulfillment of everything good that can be said of anyone – loving, wise, holy, righteous, just, powerful, patient, kind – has chosen to speak well of us – to call us His children, loved and adopted, to call us saints, redeemed and set apart for Him. He did not need to bless us, but He has chosen to bless us beyond our comprehension.

a. **in Christ**

All of God's rich spiritual blessings come to us in Christ. "In Christ" is one of the key phrases in Paul's theology. In fact, it is so central to Paul's thinking that this idea appears in different forms about 217 times in Paul's 13 letters. What Paul wants us to know is this: Everything good that comes to us comes to us "in Christ" because we are "in Christ."

The fact that God's blessings come to us in Christ is a reminder of what Jesus took on and endured in order to become our Savior and how we benefit from His willing obedience and sacrifice.

Why do we need to be "in Christ" and why must we receive all of God's blessings "in Christ"? Well, Romans 5 explains the significance of Christ's coming by contrasting Christ with Adam. What God tells us in this chapter is this: When Adam sinned, he brought sin into the human race; our very human nature was corrupted. When Adam sinned, he fell from a state of innocence into a state of sin and rebellion, and he passed on his newly corrupted sinful nature to everyone after him.

All human beings, being descendants of Adam, are thus born sinful and corrupt. We know this is true from life experience: We naturally know how to lie, how to steal, how to covet, how to fight, how to hurt. These things are easy. We need to be taught how to tell the truth, how to share, how to be thankful and content and how to make peace, how to love. Still, even after we're taught what is right and how to do it, we feel the inward pull toward selfishness, rebellion and ugly behavior. We are a bent and broken people.

So, by nature, we're all born "in Adam" and are all, by nature, born "in sin." To be freed from this natural state, we need a new founder of a new humanity. We need to be redeemed from our fallen, sinful state and brought into a new state, a new standing, given a new nature under a new head. Jesus agreed to do this for us, so He took on full humanity, leaving heaven and glory to be born of a virgin as the first truly and purely innocent human being since the Garden of Eden.

Jesus was put to the test, just like Adam was, only more severely and for a longer period of time. He had an intense time of trial in the Judean desert wilderness, fasting for forty days and then being tempted by Satan three times in His weakened condition. Unlike Adam and Eve, Jesus resisted Satan's temptations and remained faithful to the will of His Heavenly Father.

In fact, throughout His life, Jesus always pleased His Father, always obeyed His will and fulfilled all righteousness as a perfect, complete, tried-and-tested and never-failing human being. This active obedience under trial qualified Him to be the new Adam, a second Adam, the head of a new humanity.

The only problem was that we had to be forgiven of our sins and set free from our bondage to sin and death which held us under the first Adam. So Jesus went to the cross and took all of our sins upon Himself, paying the ransom price for our redemption. He then rose again on the third day, conquering death and breaking the chains of bondage forever.

So, we must be "in Christ," because Christ is the head of a new humanity, redeemed from the curse. He is the perfect head of the new humanity, and so He is the One through whom all of God's blessings come. This is why Paul repeatedly – 217 times in 13 letters – emphasizes the important of being "in Christ."

b. with every spiritual blessing

And in many ways, Ephesians 1:3 is the summary statement of Paul's "in Christ" theology, for Paul tells us that God has not just chosen to bless us or that He has chosen to bless us in Christ, but that God has indeed blessed us "with every spiritual blessing" in Christ.

These blessings are spiritual in two senses:

1. They are spiritual in nature, as opposed to material blessings. God does not give us every material blessing, and it's according to His wisdom and love that He withholds these, for material blessings can sometimes be a stumbling block to faith and salvation. But He does not withhold any spiritual blessing, which are the blessings which truly enrich us.
2. These blessings are also spiritual in the sense of being applied to us by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity, and He is the One who applies to us all of the benefits of Christ's redemption. This verse is, in fact, a brilliant and concise statement of the roles of the members of the Trinity in our salvation and blessing. God the Father pours out every spiritual blessing in Christ, and those blessings are applied to us by the Holy Spirit.

In Scripture, God the Father is consistently the fountainhead and source of all divine activity. God the Son is the One who accomplishes the divine plan or decrees, while God the Holy Spirit is the One who actually brings the work of God to its desired end or effect.

In Creation, we read this (listen for the work of the Three Persons of the Trinity and remember that God the Son is called “the Word” in John 1):

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. (Gen. 1:1-3, ESV)

When Genesis 1 says that “the Spirit of God was hovering,” the word “hovering” means “brooding,” like a mother hen over her eggs. The Spirit was brooding over the face of creation and God was speaking His Word, by which the ordered universe came into being.

In redemption, Hebrews 9:14 tells us that Christ offered Himself to God the Father through the eternal Spirit. So, Christ was the sacrifice to satisfy divine justice and bring us to God, but it was through the Holy Spirit that the sacrifice of Christ was presented to God the Father and accepted by Him.

So in our salvation, God the Father chooses to bless us with every blessing in the heavenly places. He does so in Christ, but it is the Spirit who applies these blessings to us, who seals them to us and makes them ours. If this is still a bit confusing, relax. We’re going to walk through verses 4-14 over the next three weeks and we’ll get an even clearer picture of this:

1. Next week, the choosing and ordaining activity of God the Father will be in primary view, as we examine verses 4-6.
2. Then the redeeming activity of God the Son will be in primary view when we examine verses 7-12.
3. Finally, we’ll see more clearly the sealing activity of God the Holy Spirit when we look at verses 13-14.

If I can risk a very loose and potentially irreverent illustration, perhaps it will help: In football, usually three people are directly involved in scoring touchdowns: The coach, the quarterback and the wide receiver or running back. The coach calls the play, the quarterback executes the play and the wide receiver or running back take the ball into the end zone for the touchdown. In a similar way, God the Father is like the coach, calling all of the plays, while God the Son is

like the quarterback, perfectly executing the designed plays. God the Holy Spirit is the One who actually puts the ball in the end zone.

c. **in the heavenly places**

The blessings God pours out in Christ and which the Holy Spirit applies to us are blessings in the heavenly places. In Ephesians 2, Paul returns to the phrase “in the heavenly places” in another “in Christ” statement. He says:

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. – Eph. 2:4-7

We’ll dig into this rich, wonderful sentence in a few weeks, but for now, perhaps we can just say that our blessings in Christ are in the heavenly places because that’s where we have been seated with Christ. This is central to being “in Christ.” Christ has been raised and is seated at the right hand of God the Father in heaven. We are “in Christ,” which means that – spiritually and positionally – we are seated there, too. We have access there, we belong there, our real home and eternal destiny is there.

In Philippians 3:20-21, Paul tells us, “*But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.*”

In Colossians 3, Paul gives us the application of these truths when he tells us:

“If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.” (Col. 3:1-4, ESV)

Some people scoff at the idea that we should see ourselves as citizens of heaven, that we should see our true life as being in heaven, “hidden with Christ in God.” They dismiss all such thinking as “pie in the sky” nonsense and scoff at being “so heavenly minded as to be of no earthly good.”

But I personally agree with Paul and I think C.S. Lewis had it right in *Mere Christianity*, when he said:

"If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. The Apostles themselves, who set on foot the conversion of the Roman Empire, the great men who built up the Middle Ages, the English Evangelicals who abolished the Slave Trade, all left their mark on Earth, precisely because their minds were occupied with Heaven. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this.

Aim at Heaven and you will get earth 'thrown in': aim at earth and you will get neither. It seems a strange rule, but something like it can be seen at work in other matters. Health is a great blessing, but the moment you make health one of your main, direct objects you start becoming a crank and imagining there is something wrong with you. You are likely to get health provided you want other things more--food, games, work, fun, open air. In the same way, we shall never save civilisation as long as civilisation is our main object. We must learn to want something else even more."

But if the Apostle Paul and C.S. Lewis are not high enough authorities for you, remember what Jesus Himself said, *"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."* (Matthew 6:19-21, ESV)

We must learn to prize the spiritual blessings in the heavenly places, for they are of real, eternal value and when we treasure what really matters, our hearts end up where they belong, too.

III. **Connections: Praise and Blessing**

You may never have thought to break out in spontaneous praise to God for His great spiritual blessings in the heavenly places. What's obvious is that, for Paul, the truths of the Gospel motivate him to exult in the greatness and goodness of God and the richness of His blessings to His children.

a. **Doctrine and Doxology**

Many Bible scholars have observed that Ephesians divides neatly into two halves. The first half, Chapters 1-3, is primarily doctrine, where Paul describes what God has done for us in Christ. The second half, Chapters 4-6, is application, the working out of the Gospel in our lives.

But if Chapters 1-3 are doctrine, then it's worth noting chapter 1 begins with an extended section of praise of 202 words, verses 3-14, and Chapter 3 ends with a doxology, "To him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask of imagine." For Paul, then, the

appropriate response to doctrine is doxology – In other words, before he gets to application, the truth of the Gospel stirs his heart to praise.

Is that our first response?

b. **Grace and Gratitude**

Another way to say this is that Paul's response to God's grace is an overflowing gratitude that is effusive, spontaneous, heart-felt and life-changing. Grace leads to gratitude, as doctrine leads to doxology.

c. **Cherishing and Commending**

And all of this has tremendous impact on our testimony. John Piper says, "You can't commend what you don't cherish." The reverse of this is also true, "You can't help but commend what you do truly cherish."

And so our witness of Christ to a watching world is found not in a technique or a program but in a deep cherishing of the treasures of the Gospel that overflows into truly commending Christ to those we love.