

Blessings in Christ - Prayer (Part 1)

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[0 : 00] Ephesians 1 I'm going to read the entire section that we're on now, starting tonight.

We'll finish it up next Wednesday. But it would be verses 15 through 23. Let me go ahead and read it. And if you have a Bible there, you can follow along in your Bibles.

Therefore, I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that you may know what is the hope of his calling, what are the riches of his glory, of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in that which is to come.

And he put all things under his feet and gave him to be head over all things in the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

All right, I think you would agree with me that there's some pretty powerful stuff contained in the passage that I just read.

[2 : 15] In fact, really from the get-go, in this letter, letter to the Ephesian church, it's been packed full of deep stuff, deep stuff, very deep.

And I've tried to take my time and to delve as deeply as I think we can. And we're going to do that with this section as well.

And I want to remind you that we're kind of looking at several emphases that Paul is presenting to us in this passage.

It really runs from chapter 1, verse 3. We started it several weeks ago. It runs all the way through chapter 2, verse 10. Now, that's not the end of the deep stuff.

It goes on from there. But we just kind of put, group these verses together and see a kind of theme that really Paul introduces in verse 3.

[3 : 22] In verse 3 where he says, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus. Christ who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. That's kind of an introduction to all that he's going to write to us.

Well, to the Ephesian believers first, but by extension all of us. What are you going to write? All the way through verse 10. And it all kind of fits in a unit there.

That would be the larger passage. And remember I said the first emphasis, and I've put this in your notes again just to keep us reminded because it's important as we study this portion of the book that we kind of keep before us the scheme, kind of Paul's scheme as he's writing.

And so I've given that to you again. The first emphasis is praise. Praise. Praise. And as it is related to these blessings that God has blessed us with.

Praise. Chapter 1, verses 3 through 14 is the text where Paul emphasizes praise. Blessed be God.

[4 : 32] Praises be to God. And by the way, verses 3 through 14, one continuous sentence. That's pretty incredible, isn't it?

We don't write that way today. In fact, if we try to in school, in college, whatever level, we're highly criticized. That would be a run-on sentence. I mean, of the highest magnitude.

You know, all those verses, one long sentence. And so the emphasis is praise. Paul praises God for his blessings in Christ Jesus.

Not only his, but the blessings that belong to all born-again believers, every single one of us. The second emphasis, which is going to be our focus tonight and next Wednesday night, is prayer.

Prayer. And chapter 1, verses 3, excuse me, 15 through 23, the rest of this chapter, that's what I just read a moment ago.

[5 : 32] And here, clearly, Paul is, well, in a sense, he's praying, but he's really kind of giving the details of his prayer life for the Ephesian believers.

But he is letting them know that he has been praying that their eyes would be open to the fullness of God's blessings in Christ Jesus. And this gives us a model for how we should pray.

Now, Paul didn't know anything about us. Now, we could say that the Holy Spirit, of course, includes us in here as readers of this letter. And so in that sense, Paul's prayer life included us. But Paul specifically is praying for the Ephesian believers. But he gives us a model for how we ought to pray for ourselves and how we ought to pray for others.

And, of course, the prayer is attached to, it's directly connected to all of these wonderful blessings that we have in Christ that Paul has just mentioned and we've already studied.

[6 : 41] So, and what are we praying for? We're praying their eyes will be open to the fullness of it. That we would understand it. That we would comprehend these great blessings and understand the meaning of them, the gravity of them, and on and on we could go.

The third emphasis, which we'll get to, you know, maybe three weeks out, will be getting us on into chapter 2 and that would be purpose.

Purpose. And in chapters 2, 1 through 10, verses 1 through 10, Paul is going to detail for us God's sovereign purpose in blessing us in Christ Jesus.

His purpose for this. So this kind of outlines this section of the book of Ephesians. All right, so we've finished the section where Paul emphasizes praising, our praising God for his spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus.

And so now we want to focus on the substance of Paul's prayers for his readers, which, again, I think clearly would include us. Number one, and that is number one in your notes.

[7 : 57] Paul opens this section with the words, therefore I also. Now that's the New King James Version, which some of you might have, probably most of you do not have, but that's the one I'm reading from.

And so he opens this section with therefore I also. That tells you there's a transition here. He's moving from one thing now to another. All right, so it's a conjunction in a sense.

And it's intended, though, to act as a transition from one emphasis to another emphasis. But these emphases are not detached.

He says it's not a new subject. Paul's still on the same subject. And we know that by these actually two words in the Greek text that in my version, New King James, translated, therefore I also, which is a little bit, I mean, it says the same thing, but it's not as literal as a more literal rendering, which would be for this reason.

For this reason. What reason? Reason is pointing back to all of these great blessings that we have been given in Christ Jesus and heavenly places. All of these things.

[9 : 22] He says, I'm telling you all this for this reason I am, and then he's going to go on from there. And I gave you a little Greek there just so you know that I learned it once upon a time.

And, you know, the Greeks would use words and place them in a sentence.

Placing words in a sentence is very important in Greek grammar. And combining two words together that separately might mean something different, but when you put them together they mean to convey a certain idea, and that's the idea behind these first two words in the sentence, *diata*, through, which is a preposition, this, through this.

Now that doesn't make any sense if he said there in verse 15, through this, after I heard, well, that doesn't make any sense. Well, it doesn't mean that. You don't take the words individually.

When they're put together, they're put together, they mean a certain thing to convey a certain idea, and in this sense, the best way is to understand it for this reason, and then he's going to tell us what he's going to do.

[10 : 43] For this reason, all of these wonderful truths, for this reason, I pray for you so that you'll understand it. That's basically what he means. All right, so you see, Paul wants to help his readers to know, understand, comprehend the truths he wrote about in the previous section.

That's the whole idea here. And again, what are these truths? Well, I've given them to you again. They're without explanation, and so you can read those for yourself. But that kind of puts it all together.

And remember, we looked at all the key verbs and verb phrases in verses 3 through 14 that punctuate, continually punctuate these wonderful truths or blessings that God has given to us in Christ Jesus.

And these truths, I would say, represent the Mount Everest of Christian doctrines. When you think about it, I mean, it's very doctrinal, very deep theological.

These are deeply theological truths in verses 3 through 14. And, would you agree with me, they're difficult to understand. They're difficult to understand.

[11:58] Probably not as difficult as we think they are and want to make them. But they, to most of us, all of us, to some degree or another, have difficulty really getting a hold on all these great truths that are conveyed to us in verses 3 through 14.

Now, Paul knows that. See, that's the point. Paul knows that. He knew that about his Ephesian brethren and sisters. He knew it was difficult for them to get a hold of these things.

And that's why he says, I'm praying for you. I'm praying for you. And so, he knew also that it's going to take more than just teaching, the teaching of these truths.

And, you know, teaching is not enough. And so, he wants them to know that he is praying for them. Praying that they would understand these things.

Comprehend these things. Understand the meaning of them. The gravity of them. you know, the implication of these things. Upon their lives and eternity. And so, in verses 16 and 17, making mention of you my prayers, that.

[13:10] And that is an indicator that we're going to go forward here. In, in Paul giving us the substance of his prayers.

That's what's going to follow here. And as we shall see, the substance of his prayers are also deeply theological. So, you know, we look at all these great truths, these blessings, you know, chose us and all of these things.

And, and they're tremendous truths and they're deeply theological. And then he's going to say, that's why I'm praying for you that. And then, the things he has in his prayer life are also difficult to understand.

And that's why we're going to spend some time looking at them. Before Paul reveals the substance of his prayers for the Ephesian believers, he's going to give a word of thanks.

Now, he's giving thanks to God, but he's also, to some degree, he is praising the Ephesian believers for some of these things.

[14:18] Actually, specifically, two things. But, he is specifically giving thanks to God. Verse 16, I do not cease to give thanks to you, for you, making mention of you in my prayers.

He's thanking God for the Ephesian believers for, because of two things. First of all, he thanks God for their profession of faith.

Their profession of faith. In fact, it might even be better to say possession of faith. True faith. And here, he's not talking about the faith that every believer must have day in, day out, faith in God.

He's not talking about that aspect of faith. He's talking about faith that begins the journey of salvation. He's talking about faith unto salvation.

That's the kind of faith he's talking about. Or their belief, their saving faith, their belief in the gospel. So he's thanking God that they're believers, true believers.

[15:28] That they have put their faith in Christ, faith in the gospel. And what is the gospel exactly? You know, that's a big, big question. You say, well, there's nothing complicated about that.

What the gospel is, it's just all the word of God. Well, in a sense, that's true. And so, in that sense, that no matter where someone picks to teach or what passage I might preach from, I'm always preaching the gospel.

In a sense, all of this is the good news. It's the good word of God. It's all good news. It's meant to be good news. And it unfolds for us, reveals to us, God's redemptive plan from eternity past, and it allows us to see how that plan has been working out throughout the ages.

And then we get to the New Testament and good news. This one that the Old Testament has been revealing to us gradually, He has finally come.

You know, so, in a sense, and then, you know, we go on through the New Testament and it's all gospel. It's all gospel truth. You know, and we kind of use that word gospel in so many different ways.

[16 : 44] And even the secular world likes to use the word gospel. That's the gospel truth. Well, it means I'm not lying to you. But that's not what gospel means. Gospel is everything in this book.

But more specifically, the gospel of Jesus Christ, I think, is maybe best articulated by a couple of verses. 1 Corinthians 15, verses 3 through 4.

And you're familiar with this passage. Really, chapter 15 is intended to make a case for the resurrection. But Paul begins with a kind of a designation or definition of the gospel.

Actually giving us the basic elements of the gospel. The good news of Jesus Christ said, For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received. What is he delivering? The gospel.

He also received it and now he's delivering it. How that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures. And that he was buried and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.

[17 : 48] That is the what the technical term, the kerygma. It's the gospel facts. Christ died for our sins.

Was buried because that's what you do with dead people. He really did die. And he was raised from the dead on the third day just like the scriptures said. That's the gospel kind of in a nutshell.

Romans 4.25 says something very similar. Jesus was delivered for our offenses. The same way same way of saying died for our sins.

For our sins. For our offenses. That is in our place. And was raised again for our justification. There are some other very important theological terms in the Romans 4.25 passage.

It's still the same kind of same definition or description of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And so what's Paul doing?

[18 : 50] He's thankful that the Ephesian believers the people of the Ephesian church believe this. They believe the gospel. They put their faith in the truth of the gospel which is Jesus Christ.

Alright. So believing the gospel concerning Jesus Christ is the only way a person can be saved. There's no other way.

You can't work your way there. Can't be a good person good enough to earn it or deserve it. You know, we hear that all the time and yet some people still try to.

In fact, we even have a every one of us have a tinge of that belief. We have a hard time totally getting away from the idea that it's all God's grace when it comes to salvation.

We think we've got to earn it. If we don't think we have to earn it, we think we have to keep it by good works. But either way, that's an assault upon God's grace.

[19 : 53] And so believing in the gospel is the only way a person is, say, Romans 10.9 that if you will confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Nothing in there about works or righteousness, self-righteousness, or speaking in tongues first, or being baptized first. Nothing in there about any of that.

It is believing, confessing with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead. That's the gospel. Then you shall be saved. Acts 16.30-31 Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.

Not hope to be. Will be. Will be saved in your house. Of course, he was speaking directly to a house. So if the whole house believes, they'll be saved too. John 6.47 Truly, truly, I say to you, he that believes on me has eternal life.

Has it. By the way, that's another very important part of the verse. It's not hope to have it or one day will have it, but has it. Has it now. You're looking at a person right now who has eternal life right now.

[21 : 05] It's not when I get to heaven that I get eternal life. I have it right now. And I can never lose it. Alright, so then salvation, as Paul identified it here in Ephesians and many other places in the New Testament, is really simply put, faith in the Lord Jesus.

That's it in a nutshell. That is our salvation comes through faith in the Lord Jesus. And you just pick those words apart.

Faith. Pistis in the Greek. It's an incredible word. Sometimes translated trust. Sometimes translated believe. Many times translated faith.

faith. But the very word means to have a sure conviction of the truth. A sure, no uncertain conviction in the truth.

This thing's falling off my ear. And then you add to that word, or that to, you add the simple word in. Faith in.

[22 : 14] Faith in. You think, well that's not important. Of course, faith in Jesus Christ. Well, the preposition there means a fixed position.

It's a fixed position. Faith, it's unwavering faith, is a sure conviction in that faith is fixed. It's a fixed thing.

And where is it fixed? It's fixed upon Jesus. Jesus, the Lord. The Lord. Kurios. And, you know, obviously, admittedly, the word kurios is just a, just a common word in the Greek language. Anyway, but the word Lord, or kurios, is the general word, but when it's used in Scripture, its meaning is supreme master.

Alright, so faith in the supreme master, and who is he? Jesus. Jesus. And, of course, Jesus, as you well know, the word, very name, which is the Greek equivalent of Joshua in the Old Testament, or Yeshua.

[23 : 27] And, it means Yahweh is salvation. You put all that together and that's, that's how salvation occurs. Of course, by God's grace, that's God's side, but for our response, it's faith, that is a sure conviction of the truth, in, and that is fixed, it's a fixed position, the Lord, the supreme master, owner, and his name is Jesus.

Yahweh is salvation. And second, Paul is thankful to God for their practice of faith. Their practice of faith.

And, he mentions, verse 15, your love for the saints. Your love for the saints. So, see, Paul knows what, what we all, all of us ought to know.

And that is that the reality of a person's profession of faith, we, we, we know the reality of it by observing their practice of faith.

We know, let me say it again, Paul knows the reality of their profession of faith, which he just mentioned, their faith in Jesus Christ. He knows the reality of it by observing their practice of faith.

[24 : 47] What was the practice of their faith? Their love for the saints. That's not the only practice of the faith. But it is one that is a sure proof.

And, that's just, not just what I say about it, that's what scripture says about it. In fact, repeatedly, John, the apostle of John, emphasized that over and over and over in his writings.

And, here's four examples right here. One from the gospel of John, which actually are the very words of Jesus. In John 13, 34, to 35, new commandment I give to you, that you love one another as I have loved you, and that you also love one another.

By this will all men know that you are my disciples, that you have loved one to another. How they'll know. And, isn't it ironic that, you know, by and large, in many churches, there's almost a total lack of expression of love for one another.

In fact, there's anything but that in a lot of churches. It's like World War III in many churches.

Churches splitting apart, yelling at one another, and being ugly, and that's very public.

[26 : 08] And, what does it express? What does it reveal? Well, it certainly doesn't reveal a proof of true faith, genuine faith in their heart, because Jesus said, by this shall they know, that you are my disciples.

They have love for one another. There's, churches need to learn that truth. 1 John 3, 14, we know that we have passed from death into life, because we love the brethren.

That's pretty, that's a pretty bold statement. I mean, think about that. He said, well, we naturally put the two together. We would think, maybe some other kinds of works would be better proofs.

But, just listen to what he said. We know, and this really gets into the realm of your personal assurance of faith. we know that we have passed from death to life.

How do you know you've passed from death to life? How do you know you're saved? Well, John says, because you love the brethren, and the sister. Okay. That's just, kind of a, generic, kind of, are you understanding?

[27 : 14] That's how you know. He that loves not his brother, abides in death. I mean, you're not saved, if you don't love your brother, or sister. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer.

I mean, this is, these are strong words. And you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. I mean, I don't know how you could take this any other way.

It's black and white. John's leaving no area for gray, for any gray area. 1 John 4, 7 to 12, Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God, and everyone that loves is born of God, and knows God. He that loves not, knows not God. For God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.

Herein is love. Not that we love God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation, or the satisfaction for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. [28 : 17] No man has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwells in us, and His love is perfected in us. 1 John 4, 20, If a man says, I love God, and hates his brother, he's a liar.

Yeah, you just kind of have an appreciation for John's blunt way of putting things. I mean, there's just no doubt about how he feels about it. And, of course, he's inspired by the Holy Spirit, so there's no doubt in our hearts about what God thinks about this.

Because these are God's words. Man hates his brother, he's a liar. For he that loves not his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?

The proof is in your love for your brother, and sister, in Christ. You can say you love God until the moon turns blue. But if you don't love your brother and sister, you're a liar.

And this commandment we have from him, that he who loves God loves his brother also. Alright, now, sadly, this love the Ephesians were apparently known for in Paul's day, later disappeared, didn't it?

[29 : 33] You know everything about the letters from Christ to the seven churches in Revelation? And there's a letter addressed to the Ephesian church, right?

And in Christ's letters to the church of Ephesus, according to Revelation, he tells us that they had left their first love. They had left it. And it goes on to tell you in that letter they had a lot of works, a lot of good works, but no love.

And so, based upon Scripture, no love, no reality of faith. Because love for God, love for one another, is a proof of your salvation.

Alright, number three, Paul next tells Ephesian believers the substance of his prayers for them. and I'll go ahead and you probably looked ahead.

We're not even going to get to them tonight. I've got a few things to say about that before we actually get to them. Paul, again, just kind of thinking about the deep theological aspect of these truths.

[30 : 49] Paul has shared with these believers some of the deepest theological truths you'll ever want to find or ever could find in one place in Scripture. Now, these doctrinal truths are not just found here.

They're found in a number of other places. But I mean, all in one place to kind of compact in one spot all of these great truths, theological truths that we have here in verses 3 through 14.

They're deep. Deep theologically. Paul has shared with them some doctrines that really the greatest theological minds for the past couple of millennia have been studying and have difficulty understanding and still today.

In fact, you'd be hard pressed to find any two theologians who would agree on any one thing in chapter 1 and chapter 2 for that matter.

So, if that's the case, then what's the answer? I mean, if these truths that Paul has kind of been unfolding for us in the first part of chapter 1, if these truths have been hotly debated and argued and disagreed about and if they're difficult to understand, then what's the answer?

[32 : 13] God wants us to understand His Word, doesn't He? And we can find the meaning of God's Word in any part of it, right? And so, what's the answer for us?

Is it study? We just have to study harder. Yeah, of course, we need to study God's Word and we need to dig deep and use as many tools that we have at our disposal and do a systematic, in-depth study, not just the passages that we have here in Ephesians 1, but all other related passages in the Bible.

And it takes hard work and takes time, but we can do that and we should study. So, is the answer then to the kind of apparent confusion between different scholars and different readers and the debates and the answer, we just have to study more.

Well, we need to study more, but that's not enough. Now, making a point here, and it's Paul's point, study's not enough. We also must pray.

We must pray. Study, yes. Study to show yourself approved of God or diligently study God's Word to rightly divide the Word of Truth.

[33 : 38] Yeah, we have to study and the Bible admonishes us to do that in many places. But, study not enough. We must pray. We must pray.

And this is the example from Paul. Right? What Paul prays, we must pray. Now, you can certainly take that Paul is praying for us as well.

We're included in these Ephesian readers. You know, when Paul prayed back when he wrote this, he didn't know it, but he was praying for me, praying for you.

And the Holy Spirit, of course, is working and answering that prayer. But this is a model, really, for the way we ought to pray for ourselves.

And so, when we look at the substance of this prayer that Paul was offering up continually for the Ephesian believers, then we ought to take that substance and pray these things for ourselves and also for one another.

[34 : 41] Let me say something else before we get to the substance of Paul's prayers for the Ephesian believers. These doctrinal truths that we've been studying in the first part of this chapter, these blessings that God has blessed us with in heavenly places, these are not blessings we need to have in Christ or hope to have someday in Christ.

You know, like as if it's some additional blessing we're hoping to have at some point. We just work for it or deserve it or pray enough for it. We're not talking about blessings that come later that we might hope we'll have one day.

These are not blessings really that we must pray for and search for. Are you following me? These are blessings we have right now. We have all of these things right now.

The problem is that we don't know it. And we don't know it and we also don't understand it, these blessings necessarily.

We have a lot of things that God has, many things that God has blessed us with in Christ Jesus. We don't even know about yet. It's not that God's keeping these things from us.

[36 : 02] He's clearly revealed them in His Word that we need to study them and know them and understand them. But, you know, we can have blessings and not know it. So these are not things, you know, all these great verbs that we've been looking at, all these blessings, they're not things we hope to have one day or need to pray for.

We have them right now. I remember reading a story about William Randolph Hearst, another buku millionaire years ago.

I think they made even a movie about his life, Citizen Kane. Remember that movie? Of course, you don't know for sure if they made it about his life, but it's pretty clear. But he was a multi, multi-millionaire and also an avid collector of rare artifacts and expensive paintings and rare paintings and sculptures and so forth, works of art.

And the story goes that one day he was reading about a particularly exquisite piece of art, a painting, and it was so rare that he was determined to acquire it for himself.

And he was not going to spare any cost to get this piece of art, this painting. And so he sent his agents out to scour the whole world to find this thing so that he could buy this thing and have it as part of his collection.

[37 : 29] And they spent hundreds of thousands of dollars looking for this painting, and they found it. They found it. But when they came back to report to Hearst about it, they told him that it was already part of his collection.

He already owned it. And they found it, yeah, but it was in one of his warehouses where he had all of his rare art. So he was searching for something he already had.

And that's so true of us. We're just searching for more. So searching for something else. And when we read God's Word, we find out it's something we already have. And if it's not something we already have, it's something God doesn't intend for us to have.

And we just need to study it and learn about it and understand it. And so that kind of gets us ready to look at the substance of Paul's prayer for the Ephesians.

And Paul is praying again that our eyes would be open to the reality of and fullness of God's blessings in Christ Jesus.

[38 : 37] Those blessings that Paul has already detailed for us in the first part of the chapter.