

# Blessings in Christ (part 1)

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[ 0 : 00 ] Ephesians is a tremendous book in the New Testament.

! We're both, like I said last week, both rich in doctrine, theology, very important theology. We're going to be talking about some of that tonight. It's also very, very full and plentiful when it comes to a practical theology, how we're to live out our lives as believers, practically speaking. And so there's just a lot in the book of Ephesians. And I mentioned also last week that even though we have right there in our Bibles, you know, usually the letter of the Apostle Paul to the Ephesians or something to that effect, and also in most versions of the Bible, in fact, all that I have checked, the very first verse, verse 1, speaks of those who are, like the letter is written to those who are in Ephesus.

And I mentioned last week that, not to, you know, to trouble you with this, you'll get alarmed, but in most of the older and more reliable manuscripts of this letter, the words who are in Ephesus do not appear there.

[ 1 : 42 ] And so it's caused scholars to think about this letter in a little different light, that it wasn't necessarily written just to one group of people, but it most likely was what we would call a circular letter.

That is a letter that was written by Paul, perhaps even sent first to Ephesus, because it was principal key city in Asia Minor, but it was meant to be passed around to all the churches in Asia Minor, and it certainly was.

And so they read that, and so that could very well be that that was the intent here, and not necessarily just a letter written to Ephesians. And I mentioned last week that there's some things that are missing in the letter that you would normally, and do normally find in many of the other New Testament letters, and that is kind of a personal touch.

I mean, you'll have Paul writing and mentioning certain people in the church, and addressing certain issues in the specific church, and yet you don't have any of that in Ephesians.

It's more general, and so probably meant to be read by all the churches. But regardless of where we fall on that, clearly the book of Ephesus, the letter to the Ephesians, as it's entitled, was written to all of us, just like the entire Bible was written for all of God's people to read.

[ 3 : 15 ] And so it's addressed to the church, and that's us here today. Verse 1 specifically addresses it to the saints in Christ Jesus.

And remember now, saints, not the name of the football team. He's not talking about that. He's not talking about some super-duper Christian that has reached a certain level of holiness.

He's not talking about that either. He's talking about all born-again believers who are saints in Christ. That is, separated unto Christ. All right, so this letter was written to all the saints in Christ, and then he also adds to that the faithful, the faithful in Christ.

So this is a letter written to the faithful saints who are faithful in Christ. And so, then, it is for us. This letter is. I didn't have to say all of that to help you come to that conclusion.

You already know that, don't you? It's written to all of us to read. Not just to read, but to learn. And learn the truths that are taught in this great epistle of Paul's.

[ 4 : 25 ] And not just to learn these truths, but to apply them to our lives. So, if that part doesn't happen, then the rest of it's meaningless.

We don't want to just simply increase our fund of knowledge in our brains. What we want to do is apply these truths to our lives, and by the grace of God, and through our faithfulness, to live these truths out.

Now, that will be true not only, of course, of the doctrinal aspects of the first part of the letter, but especially to the practical aspects of the letter as we look at that a little bit later, weeks on down the

road.

All right, so tonight, we're going to be focusing on verses 3 through 14. And you have that printed there in front of you. That's the New King James Version.

You have another version, probably, that you're looking at, many of you. And so I just went ahead and printed it as it appears in the New King James. And I want to go ahead and read it.

[ 5 : 31 ] And so, here is what Paul says. He says, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world.

That we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace, which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times, He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth in Him.

In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit, a promise who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession to the praise of His glory.

[ 7 : 16 ] Now that's just a whole bunch there, isn't it? Now I'll just go ahead and warn you, and if you've looked ahead in your handout, we're not going to get that far tonight. There's a lot here.

And even when you get to the end of this block of text or verses in the chapter, you go on from there, and it just gets deeper and deeper and deeper in a good way.

I mean, this is rich with doctrine that is important for us to know and also important for us to respond to in the right way.

Now, then, after his salutation, that's what we focused on last week, the salutation, verses 1 through 2. 1 and 2. Paul then, and this is what we just read, or at least a portion of it, Paul then launches out into what I would say is an incredible description of the spiritual blessings we as believers have been given in Christ.

That's the subject here. Spiritual blessings. Blessed is what Paul said in verse 3. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing.

[ 8 : 38 ] Now, that's an incredible statement, and it needs some explanation. Paul's going to kind of flesh that out, and we're going to look at some of that here tonight. All right, so this section then, in the letter, which again, clearly deals with the spiritual blessings, the blessings of Christ that we have.

This section, this theme rather, actually extends all the way to chapter 2, verse 10. So we're going to kind of be on the subject of spiritual blessings in Christ for several weeks.

We can divide the section into three emphases, okay? And so I've given this to you there. You can fill in the blank. The first emphasis is praise.

That's what we've started to look at here. That's what we have here in this passage that I read a moment ago. Praise. So in chapter 1, verses 3 through 14, which is what I read a moment ago, Paul, what's he doing?

He's praising God for His blessings in Christ Jesus. That's what he's doing. So this is all about praise. Second, the second section would be prayer.

[ 9 : 54 ] Prayer. Prayer. In chapter 1, verses 15 through 23, which takes us all the way to the end of the chapter, chapter 1, Paul is praying. He's praying.

He prays that, really, he's praying that our eyes would be open to the fullness of God's blessings in Christ Jesus. It's not just that we would hear what they are and maybe even come to a place of understanding what they mean, what they're saying, but to have our eyes fully open to just how incredible these things are.

What a blessing these things are in Christ. So, praise, then prayer, and then third, purpose. Purpose.

And that gets us into chapter 2, verses 1 through 10. And in those verses, we're going to see, and I don't know when, it's going to be a little while, but in those verses, Paul details God's sovereign purpose in blessing us in Christ Jesus.

He has a purpose for this. And that's what those verses are primarily about. Okay, then, our focus tonight is Paul's and our praise to God for His marvelous, incomparable, almost indescribable, certainly infinite blessings in Christ Jesus.

[ 11 : 23 ] And we'll just kind of get into the first part of this tonight. Again, and I'll quote what he says in verse 3. Paul says, blessed. Blessed.

It's eulogitas. It means praise. So, many translations, I think the NIV may use the word praise. And that really is what the word means. It's praise. Paul's praising. He says, praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, to help us look at this section, and really, I kind of default to this approach in Bible study and Bible interpretation nearly all the time, and that is to look at the verbs.

Listen, people, when you're studying the Bible for yourself, and I hope you do that, you should look, when you read through a text, you should look at the verbs.

[ 12 : 24 ] Now, that's not all you need to look at. Nouns are important, too. So are prepositions. So are adjectives and all those other things. All the parts of speech are important because those communicate.

And so, best you can, you ought to pay attention. That's why I think it's a good idea to read through a passage that you're studying or about to study. Read through it very slowly.

And notice the words and phrases and specifically, and this is going to be our approach tonight, the verbs.

Verbs are so important. Can you imagine language without verbs? Well, what could you communicate without verbs? You know, someone, I think, has said that verbs are the powerhouse of the English language.

But really, verbs are the powerhouse in any human language. whether it's English, which is our language, of course, or Greek, or Hebrew.

[ 13 : 26 ] Though it's a whole lot harder to figure out the Hebrew, I can assure you. Or it's Chinese. They have verbs in Chinese, too. In fact, when I, well, obviously, but when I was teaching the group this past July, we, you know, I'm teaching a manual, what did teach a manual on biblical interpretation, how to study the Bible, how to find the meaning of Scripture.

Big word is hermeneutics. And we got to one part of the instruction manual, and we're talking about parts of speech. So we're talking about verbs and nouns and adjectives and prepositions and all these things.

And I was curious and pronouns, personal pronouns, those are important, too. And I was curious to find out if they had all those things in their language. And for the most part, they do, though they function somewhat a little differently than they do in our language.

But it's still, you know, important to study Scripture this way, no matter what language your particular Bible is translated into. So verbs are important.

And so the Apostle Paul, then, is praising God for His divine actions. So if we just think about how important verbs are, and if we look at the text and try to find the key verbs in the passage, then it leads us to understand that what Paul's praising God for is not so much at this point His person, who He is, in the sense of a noun, His character, His nature, and so forth, but rather in His actions, His activity toward us, in behalf of us.

[ 15 : 07 ] Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has. That is, He's talking about what God has done. It's what He's praising Him for.

God has done some things for us. More than we know. And we need to find out about all these things. And so God has acted on our behalf.

That's what Paul is having us focus on here. So, to see that, I think it's good to note key verbs in the passage, and that's what we'll be doing here tonight.

So here's the first verb. Verse 3, God has blessed us. Blessed. That's a verb, isn't it?

It is. God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ. All right, now, what we need to do is just kind of note a few things about this first act of God or this Paul's mentioning reference to this act of God.

[16:17] What is that act? He's blessed us. Let's just note a few things about that. First of all, the verb blessed is general.

It's very general in its substance. I mean, isn't the word blessed kind of a general term? I mean, you know, blessed how?

Blessed in what way? It's not a specific term. It's a very general term. And so, the verb, this first verb we're looking at is very general in substance.

In fact, I have been critical of myself when I have thought about analyzing my prayers and my approach to prayer and have discovered how many times the word bless appears in my prayers, my conversation with God, just in general sense.

Bless me, Lord. Bless my family. Bless my church. Bless us today as we worship you. I pray that on a Sunday and I catch myself being too general. We ought to be very specific.

[17:22] But, Paul's being general in a very purposeful way. He is just giving a general kind of overarching expression of praise to God.

And so, this is kind of an introduction. Then he's going to get a lot more specific in the verses that follow. Alright, so that's the first thing we ought to note about this first verb.

It's very general in its substance. Second, the verb is past tense. Did you notice that? That's something you ought to notice about verbs, by the way, when you're studying scripture.

Is it future tense, past tense, present tense? You'll find out that quite often it makes a big difference in discovering the meaning of the passage.

And so, the word here, the verb, is past tense. God has blessed us. And so, Paul is giving, then, what he's doing here is giving a kind of a summary statement of the blessings that come to us, have come to us, as a result of an event that took place in the past.

[18:36] That's what we should understand about this being a past tense verb. He's referring to the blessings that have come as a result of a past event. What event would that be? How about the cross?

It'd have to be the cross. The cross of Christ. It is through the cross of Christ that God has blessed us with all spiritual blessings.

So, the past tense verb is important to note. Pointing back to an event, an event that made all of this possible, all of these blessings possible, that without that great historic event, the most important event that has ever occurred in all of human history, or ever will occur, that everything is tied to that. There would be no spiritual blessing apart from the cross. Third thing we ought to note about the verb is that the verb applies to spiritual blessings, not material blessings, or natural blessings, or earthly blessings.

You can just fill in the blank with whichever word you want. The point is that the blessings are spiritual. Now, you wouldn't come to that conclusion if you listen to a lot of the health and wealth and prosperity preachers of our day.

[20:05] The spiritual blessings are not material. It's not cars or houses or money in the bank, although those things are nice to have. But God has not blessed us in Christ with those things.

Now, God might allow you and in His providence allow you to have many of these things. And in America, most Americans have these things in abundance.

And compared to other nations, we are very wealthy people, even some of the poorest of us. But that's not the blessing that Paul's getting at here.

It's a spiritual blessing. He said, blessed us with every spiritual blessing. We're just kind of picking this apart and highlighting the key words, verbs, and the words that these verbs apply to.

Then fourth, the verb implies a present tense reality, but only for the redeemed, only for those who are saved. Now, you say, what?

[21:08] Pastor, you said something about past tense a while ago. Well, it's based upon an event in the past, the cross, but it carries a present tense reality.

Now, what do we mean by that? Well, in the first place, and you can just, I don't know if I included all of this in your notes, you can jot those things down you think are important. First place, the blessings of God in Christ as a result of the cross, only become a reality when a second event occurs, which is salvation.

These blessings in Christ that were accomplished, made available by way of the cross, they're only a present reality for those who are saved.

Those who are born again. You know, that event entails regeneration, justification, conversion, many other terms we could lump into that, but it's all summed up by Paul here by the words in Christ.

In Christ. Alright, so the verb implies a present tense reality, something that's for right now, but only for those who are in Christ.

[ 22 : 29 ] In the second place though, we have these spiritual blessings and experience these blessings in this life.

Okay, in this life. That's important to note. The phrase heavenly places, there in the passage, blessed with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places.

The term heavenly places is actually a translation of just one word in the text, text, and it's not two words. In fact, if you notice in your Bibles, if you've got the passage open in your Bible, then you'll notice, and I think this is universal, it certainly is true of every version that I have checked, the word places is in italics.

Now, we understand what that means, don't we? Word was not translated from the text, it was added. It's not that the Bible translator is trying to add to scripture, so we shouldn't put the sign of the cross person.

It's just helping the English read because actually the word is an adjective and it's plural, which I think still we could just go ahead and translate it just like it's there in the original text.

[ 23 : 50 ] It's the word heavenlies. Heavenlies. And so it does not refer to a physical location.

That's why probably the word places added there is not quite right. I'm not talking about a physical location, but rather a spiritual reality. The focus is a spiritual reality.

So not heaven, the heaven of the future, but the heaven of the here and now. You say, do we have heaven here and now? Actually, yes.

You do. I'm not talking about circumstances and surroundings. It's not a reference to this place either. But it's talking about a spiritual reality that we have.

You see, in the mind of God, we are already part of heaven. Remember Philippians 3.20, for our citizenship is in where?

[ 24 : 52 ] It's in heaven. This passage says it. It's in heaven. Our citizenship is in heaven. So I thought I was a citizen of the United States. Well, you are in that earthly sense.

But in the mind of God, you're already a citizen of heaven. As if you were already there. Our citizenship is in heaven, Paul said in Philippians 3.20, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so in the eternal mind of God, our future, what is future to us, is always present tense with Him. It's present tense in the mind of God. Romans 8.29, you jot that down, it's a very familiar passage, where Paul writes, for whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

Moreover, whom He predestined, these He also called, whom He called, these He also justified, and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

[ 26 : 09 ] Let me ask you something. Foreknew, predestined, called, justified, glorified, those are all past tense, aren't they?

They're all past tense. You say, well, yeah, predestined, that's past, called, justified, called, what about glorified?

Is that past tense for us? Not for us, but to God it is. As if it were already done. And it is done. Now, we haven't experienced that yet, but in the mind of God, it's done.

So, we could really say, and you can jot it down this way, I don't think I put this in your notes, past and future events for us are always present tense with God. Are always present tense with God. God's I'm trying to have us understand the idea that's being conveyed by this adjective heavenlies, that our blessings, the spiritual blessings are in the heavenlies.

[ 27 : 17 ] Not talking about something they're waiting for us, it's something that we have right now. We have it right now. God's spiritual blessings in Christ are ours right now. We're not hoping to get them one day when we get to heaven.

and worry that maybe we might not get them, or maybe we might lose them, or something might happen to keep us from them. It's as sure as God is sure. That's why all of those great works of God that Paul lists there in Romans 8.29 are all past tense with God.

Because they're done. It's a done deal with God. Even though we have yet to realize them, but they're there for us.

Alright, so this is a very general statement. I've spent a lot of time on that one. General statement, because it's kind of the overarching point of praise for Paul, and then he's going to get much more specific.

So let's take the next two verbs very quickly, and we're not going to be able to get through all of them. The next two, let's group them together because it's, as I'll mention later, it's a little difficult to distinguish between these two.

[ 28 : 28 ] But in verses 4 and 5, God has chosen us, there's the second verb, key verb in the passage. When you say that's a key verb, as troubling as it is to many people, it's a key verb in this passage.

God has chosen us in Him, that's in Christ, before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him, in love, having, and here's the third verb, predestined us. If chosen is a big stumbling block for people, predestined certainly is. It's right here in the passage, alright? Two incredible verbs, chosen us, predestined us to the adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself according to the good pleasure of His will.

Now, that's a mouthful. Mouthful. Now, we need to take, maybe, make a few observations about these two acts of God.

They're verbs, God is the one doing the action, and we are the direct object, all these are toward us, and so, let's say a few things about these two acts of God.

[ 29 : 48 ] Number one, these verbs and their objects which follow in the text, are hard to understand in our finite earthbound minds.

That's number one. Wouldn't you agree? Hard to understand, and sometimes when we hear them explained, it causes even more trouble for us.

But it's because we have finite earthbound minds, and we can't help ourselves, and we can't help but approach a clear doctrinal teaching in Scripture, can't help but approach them with some baggage, our own thoughts, our emotions, our earthbound kind of framework in our mind, and so forth.

So these are hard. Someone has put it this way, these verses are like a walnut, hard to crack, but lots of good stuff on the inside. Maybe you don't like walnuts.

Did see a few noses turned up there. I probably would change it to pecans, although they're pretty easy to crack. So I guess we better leave it the way it is.

[ 31 : 05 ] Alright, now, let's admit this, that to the natural man, I'm talking about the unsaved, these verses I just read are repulsive. They're repulsive.

how about to the spiritual man? I'm talking about the redeemed. Well, these verses are difficult. They're difficult.

Verse 4 begins, and this is key to helping us understand the point here. Verse 4 begins with an adverb, *kathos* in the Greek, translated just as in New King James, and I think the New American Standard, translated according as in King James, and even as I think in the ESV.

But here's the idea behind it, behind the adverb, leading off with an adverb. We're just trying to explain this in a grammatical sense. To lead off in that way points us to God.

man, it points us to him, not man, not our own reasoning, our own intellect, our own ideas about things, what seems reasonable, but it points to God, and leading off that way implies that what is going to follow here is in perfect harmony with God.

[ 32 : 38 ] Perfect harmony with his perfect will. Whether we understand it all or not. This is Paul leading off here with this adverb.

He's pointing us to God and letting us know that what follows here, what he's saying is in perfect harmony with God and with his will. And so it may not make sense to us, but it makes perfect sense with God.

And by the way, Paul affirms this over and over in the chapter in verse 5, according to the good pleasure of his will. Verse 7, according to the riches of his grace. Verse 11, according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will.

Verse 19, according to the working of his mighty power. By the way, it kind of reminds me of what Paul wrote in Romans 11, at the very close of Romans 11, for of him and through him and to him are all things to whom be glory forever.

It's all about God. And so maybe some of these concepts, these doctrines that we're going to be studying, they may be troubling to us, may not seem to be right according to our own thinking and reasoning, and yet it's not about us.

[ 34 : 03 ] It's not about our thoughts or what we would do or what we might think is fair. It's about God's purposes.

And so that's why Paul leads off in that way. So here's the point. You may not understand how God could or would in eternity pass, choose some for salvation to the exclusion of others, and predestine some for adoption as sons to the exclusion of others.

You may not understand how God could do that and would do that. But Paul's point is you're not God and I'm not God. And Isaiah 55, 8, that famous passage, for my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.

For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. God is. But if you're a born-again believer here in this room here tonight, and I trust that all of you are, then it is because according to His good pleasure and will, He chose you and predestined you.

Isaiah 55, 11, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth, it shall not return to me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.

[ 35 : 35 ] And that is what we need to understand about these verbs. Let me take one more and we'll have to stop. Number two, or is it number three?

No, it's number two. It's difficult to make a clear distinction between these two verbs. Choose predestined. Their definitions kind of overlap, and so it's almost like two ways of saying the same thing, but there is a distinction.

The verb chosen, eklegomei, eklegomei rather, it basically means to pick out, to choose out for oneself, to choose one out of many.

That's what the word means, and how it is often used in scripture. to choose one or some out of many others. This is what God did when it comes to salvation.

The verb predestined basically means to predetermine, means to decide something beforehand, to foreordain, or a point beforehand.

[ 37 : 02 ] That's just simply the meaning of the words. That's important, we understand the meaning of words. And if we're going to discover what Paul is teaching us here about these spiritual blessings that we have been given in Christ, then we need to understand the meanings of these words.

Thank you.