

# The Letter Of Paul To The Ephesians

*<sup>7</sup>In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, <sup>8</sup>which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight <sup>9</sup>making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ <sup>10</sup>as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.  
(Ephesians 1:7-10. ESV)*

## Message 2

### **Worship We Can Learn From**

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Ephesians 1:3

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### **Introduction:**

Open your Bibles to Ephesians 1:3. Last week we introduced Paul's Letter to the Ephesians by looking at verses 1-2; if you weren't here for that message you will want to pick up a copy at the Welcome Centre in the lobby or in Guest Central or download an audio version on the website, because that introduction set out the agenda for this entire study. Paul tipped his hand in verses 1-2 and told us that he means to speak to us about the will of God whereby he has extended grace and made peace through the person of his Son Jesus Christ. Here in verse 3 Paul attempts to offer a traditional eulogy – it was very common in public worship services – and remember that this letter was going to be read in the public worship services of all the churches around and in Ephesus – to begin with a brief eulogy. A eulogy or in Hebrew a *berakah*, was generally a single sentence in which an individual responded joyfully to God's grace and provision with suitable words of praise and thanksgiving. These sorts of liturgical elements can be found all over the Bible. They are an example of the many Old Testament liturgical traditions that over sometimes with slight changes into the Christian liturgical tradition. Think of our standard benediction at the end of the worship service. That benediction is actually known as the priestly benediction and you probably read it last week in your RMM readings on Monday from the Book of Numbers. It has been around, unchanged for a very long time. Well, the eulogy has also been around for a long time. Look up on the screen quickly at 1 Kings 8:56. The Bible says that at the conclusion of the service to open the Temple Solomon spoke a eulogy:

<sup>56</sup>“Blessed be the LORD who has given rest to his people Israel, according to all that he promised. Not one word has failed of all his good promise, which he spoke by Moses his servant. (1 Kings 8:56. ESV)

That’s a really good eulogy – it praises God on the basis of something he has done with respect to their redemption. That is a classic example of a liturgical eulogy. What Paul does here in Ephesians 1:3ff however is not a classic example of a liturgical eulogy. Liturgical eulogies are supposed to be short – one sentence long. Solomon’s eulogy is 35 words in English and only 23 words in Hebrew – that’s how you do it! Paul’s eulogy seems to have gotten away from him – it is 202 words in Greek and 242 words in English. It runs all the way from verse 3 through to verse 14 and it really bothers scholars that Paul goes so long. Scholars like it when the writers of the New Testament follow the conventional rules because it makes analysis of their letters so much easier and here Paul is breaking all the rules. He says in verse 3:

<sup>3</sup>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. ESV)

Now technically speaking, that is where he should have stopped but it appears that Paul gets excited – just the mere mention of these spiritual blessings that we have in Christ sets him off and he begins to name them. The next word in Paul’s letter is *kath-ocē* which means “just as” or “accordingly” or we might say “here’s what I mean by that” and then he begins to itemize the blessings in explicit detail in a very extended eulogy. Paul was one of those preachers who just could not stick to the time frame that he had been given. Those guys really drive me crazy, you know? Paul begins to shoot out these golden nuggets of theological reflection on the glorious aspects of redemption like beads on a string. Scholars often notice that they do not appear to be organized in any sort of sequence or chronology they are just the spontaneous eruption of an inspired mind in contemplation of the glorious grace of God. It’s a mini-sermon before the sermon and in it Paul appears to offer a 7 point definition of what he means by “every spiritual blessing.” We’ll look at each of those 7 little nuggets, God willing, over the next 7 weeks. But this morning I want to look just at this first little snippet – the snippet that set off the torrent of spontaneous explication. Let’s look again at verse 3 and use it perhaps, to inspire our own worship and response. Here now from God’s holy, inspired and inerrant word:

<sup>3</sup>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. ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

It is quite obvious to us that Paul begins his letter with worship. The ESV has the most precise translation here with “Blessed be” but the NIV is just as good when it renders this as “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Both are fine. Paul is praising God – that is where the letter begins. He will get to a more systematic statement of the Gospel in chapter 2. Chapter 2:1ff begins to lay out the Gospel in very organized and recognizable ways. He begins with the depravity of man, he moves on to unwarranted grace and from there to our union with Christ and the privileges of our adoption and so forth. But before that there is praise. But what manner of praise! This is not some sort of sentimental, mindless exuberance – this is the spontaneous worship of a man who has reflected DEEPLY upon the glory of God revealed in Jesus Christ. This is worship we can learn from. I want to draw to your attention three lessons about worship that we can take from this passage. First of all I want us to notice that:

### **1. Worship properly flows out of and is amplified by earnest theological reflection**

You can see this in the English by the repeated use of the word “blessed” or “blessing” – three times in verse 3. In the Greek these are all variations on the word *yoo-log-ee-ah*. Paul is saying that there is a clear connection between what we say or sing in our praise to God and what he has done for us climactically in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Remember that a traditional eulogy praises God for something he has done generally with respect to our redemption. Here Paul says: “When I think of what God has given me IN CHRIST – that is through his incarnation, life, perfect obedience, sacrificial death, glorious resurrection, ascension and eternal mediation – when I think of that I cannot restrain myself from praise and adoration!” That’s what he’s saying. Good worship – passionate, intelligent, Biblical, exuberant, mind-on, spontaneous, overflowing, authentic worship – flows out of serious contemplation of God’s self disclosure in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Theology gives birth to worship. Think of it this way – the task of theology – the contemplation of who God is and how he has acted towards us in Jesus Christ – is like the source or spring out of which flows a river - an entire lifestyle of response and adoration and all of that – spring and river, source and flow – all of that is properly understood as Christian worship.

Too often we divide those things and then we decide which one we prefer based on our personality. We divide theology – Bible reading, preaching etc. – from response – which we tend to narrow down to one thing: singing. So, certain geeky types over here they like “theology” – they carry around yellow highlighters and they like to quote the Greek and they like to talk ad nauseum about this or that – that is fine for THOSE types; and then over here you have the creative, emotional, perceptive, intuitive and interesting people. They like to dance and wave banners and ribbons and write poetry and sing choruses and if they’re men they have a soul patch and they wear tight fitting black clothing all the time and probably have a small tattoo somewhere on their body – those people are over here in a different place than those geeky highlighter people. That’s a bit extreme maybe, but that is generally what we do. We separate theology from response and I love the fact that the Apostle Paul puts them right back together again! His theology is doxological and his doxologies are altogether and mindblowingly theological! That’s how it needs to be!

Bad things happen when theology is taken out of the church and put in some ivory tower and it becomes the job for “smart people” in a room somewhere separate from the worshipping church. That’s how places like Harvard and Princeton and Yale which began as bastions of the Gospel ended up as fortresses of secularism in less than 100 years. Bad things happen when you take theology out of the context of the worshipping church. And equally bad things happen when you un-tether worship and the practical mechanisms of praise in the church from deep, faithful, intentional theological contemplation. When hip musicians and cultural surfers start writing the worship music of the church disconnected – uninformed by – theology really bad things happen because chances are you will remember more of what you sing today than of what you hear me say today. And so the church tends to take on the theology of its song list as much or more so than it takes on the theology of its preacher. Think about that. I spent all last week singing: “Grace to you and peace. From God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” That song rang in my brain all day long for 7 days. Did anything I said last week stay with you in your minds that long? I suspect not. Music is powerful and so these things have to go together. Our song writers need to listen really well to the voice of the Bible and to the theological discourse that is going on under the leadership of the Holy Spirit inside the church. And we as a worshipping people need to apply our minds as an act of worship to participating in that dialogue and then when we find something – when we spot a nugget of God’s grace and glory we need to BURST FORTH in praise and adoration and response – that’s how this is supposed to go. Our doxology – that is a

big word that just means worship – our doxology needs to be theological and our theology needs to be doxological; that’s what Paul is modelling for us here.

Secondly, I want you to notice that for Paul, ...

## **2. Worship is maintained by an intentionally “heavenward” perspective**

Paul says:

<sup>3</sup>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. ESV)

The Apostle uses that phrase 5 times in the epistle and he uses it consistently in a local sense – meaning that he is thinking of “the heavenly places” as an actual PLACE, not a “mystical realm”. He is not saying that our blessings are symbolic – no he is saying that we have been given real things and they are kept on deposit in a real place and that place is the presence of Almighty God. Paul is lifting up his face in worship and he is contemplating his heavenly treasures and he is responding with exuberant praise. In fact this is the point where Paul’s traditional eulogy hops over the rails and begins to explode in spontaneous exuberance and extrapolation. In the contemplation of his blessings IN THE HEAVENLY PLACES Paul begins to overflow the restraint of traditional liturgy and he has a decidedly charismatic moment. He is quite literally carried away in his rejoicing. Now why is that? What is so great about having blessings in the heavenly places? I mean, many of us might actually prefer blessings in the earthly places. We might rather that God had given us superhuman strength, or perfect health or an unlimited bank account – if God gave us those things we would definitely praise him! But here Paul is all stoked up because of heavenly blessings. What is so wonderful about blessings in the heavenly places? Well three things come to my mind:

- i. Heavenly blessings never tarnish, diminish or fade.

Jesus said that in Matthew 6:19-20:

<sup>19</sup>“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust<sup>f</sup> destroy and where thieves break in and steal,  
<sup>20</sup>but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. (Matthew 6:19-20. ESV)

Jesus said that good things kept for you in heaven are better than good things kept by you down on earth because down here people can steal from you and down here every good thing eventually goes bad. I always find it interesting when they put a story in the newspaper or online somewhere about past lottery winners. I understand there is a show now on TV about this but I have never seen it. But the story is well known. Someone wins 25 million dollars and lives really high on the hog for 3 years or 10 years and then divorce happens, money is squandered and lost and eventually that lottery winner is bankrupt and living back again in his mother’s basement and we think “how in the world did that happen?” Well of course it happens! That’s what happens! Every good thing you get on this earth will be stolen or lost because of your sin or someone else’s whether fast or slow, now or later, it will happen. If you’re really good at guarding your stuff, you will still eventually die and you can’t take it with you. After 10 years in the grave everybody is naked inside that box. Moth and rust destroy. But if you have treasure in heaven then you have a treasure that will last forever. It will never diminish, it will never run out, it will never be lost. That, according to the Apostle Paul, is cause for rejoicing.

ii. Heavenly blessings are kept secure by Almighty God

Elsewhere Paul says:

for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day. (2 Timothy 1:12. KJV)

You can sleep at night when you understand that God Almighty watches over your treasure. Heavenly blessings are kept for us by God himself. They are not going anywhere.

Now I want you to remember that when we get into the itemization of all these blessings. Understand that part of why Paul is so excited about these blessings, part of why he hopped over the curb of convention and started enumerating these blessings at length is because he understands them to be ETERNAL and SECURE. So when he talks about things like election and adoption and the gift of the Holy Spirit he understands those as gifts given without repentance. They are things God gives that cannot be taken away.

Let me tell you, I can't understand how anyone could stay a Roman Catholic after reading Paul's Letter to the Ephesians. For so many reasons, but not the least of which is because of this point right here. Our poor Catholic friends are taught that justification is given to them at their baptism as infants. They are saved. BUT. They live their whole lives in fear of losing their salvation and it is impossible for a Catholic to die with assurance of salvation. Catholics teach that you can lose your salvation by committing a mortal sin and that because you can never really know whether your sin actually qualifies as such you can never know for sure whether you are saved. The Catholic church vehemently opposes any notion that you can be assured of your salvation. They want you to live in constant fear that you have lost it so they can keep feeding you little bits here and there and stringing you along your whole life. It is a system from the pit of hell and it robs men and women of joy and it robs God of worship. The Apostle Paul was obviously not a Roman Catholic because he looks into heaven through Christ and he says: "I see all my blessings right there under the guard of God! I see election, adoption – my status as a son – I see my inheritance – I see it all and I know I can never lose it and I know it can never be taken from therefore I give praise to God!" Paul is filled with joy and God is given glory – any attempt to interfere with that has to be understood as coming from the devil. The blessings we receive in Christ are secure. You can take that to the bank.

Thirdly, I think Paul is filled with joy at the contemplation of these blessings in the heavenly places because:

iii. Heavenly blessings are the only blessings that endure unto eternity

According to the Biblical worldview that Paul is speaking from here there are really just two ages. This present age and the age to come. The age to come is the age when God rules over the restored earth through the person of his Anointed King – the Messiah. That age has begun – it began with the life, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus. The Kingdom of God is the Reign of God and that has begun in the hearts of Christ's followers and in heaven right now. Jesus Christ has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God and he REIGNS. That's why we sing songs that talk about how our God Reigns because he does. Jesus Christ is reigning from heaven right now. And yet. His reign has not been fully realized here on earth. It is here and coming. Now and not yet. All of the blessings that we have in Christ are caught up in that

kingdom dynamic. They are here and not yet. We have the down payment of the Holy Spirit but are not yet moving in the fullness of the Holy Spirit. We have first fruits, signs and anticipations but we anticipate and long for the fullness. So Paul realizes that his deposit of blessing is really in the right place. Anything that belongs to the kingdom of God is available now in part and each day increasingly until one day the kingdom of God will be here in all its fullness and will fill all things and so anything that belongs to that kingdom is safe and enduring and increasing. Anything belonging to the kingdom of this passing world is fading and diminishing and dying. You don't want to have stock in a sinking ship, you don't want to be the proud owner of a house that is already on fire. You want to have blessings in the heavenly kingdom. That's where Paul's riches are and that's why he's so happy.

Worship is maintained and amplified by a consistent, determined heavenward perspective. It was this heavenward perspective that fuelled Paul's praise and also informed Paul's prayers. On Monday of this past week we brought in a friend of mine to do some staff and Board training and in the course of his training on Monday night he said something that hit me like a ton of bricks. He said: "Have you ever noticed that the Apostle Paul never prayed for physical blessings for any of the people in the churches he wrote to?" He never did that. Not once. That's amazing. I had never noticed that. I've read those prayers, memorized pieces of them and I have never noticed that before. Paul never says: "I pray that God would heal you of your arthritis, help you get over that nasty rash and secure that promotion at work" – he never prays anything like that. Now, it isn't that the people in his churches didn't have physical needs. They all got sick and they all died of something. That's one of the few things we know for sure from church history – everyone addressed in Paul's letters died. Everyone. Not a single living original recipient of Paul's original letters. They all got sick and died and Paul never prayed about that in any of his letters. Have you ever thought of that? He did pray for them and maybe they sent him requests. Maybe he got a letter that said: "Dear Pastor Paul would you pray for my arthritis" and maybe he went to prayer for them but by the time he had thanked God for all of their blessings in the heavenly places – for the fact that God chose them out of their sin and unto holiness and adopted them as sons and forgave their sins and cut the chords of addiction and slavery unto sin and gave them an eternal inheritance among the saints of light – by the time he thanked God for all of that it doesn't appear that he could remember much about their wonky hips or their arthritic joints. Now I'm not saying we shouldn't pray about that, I think I'm just saying that our praise and our prayer needs to be informed more by the upward glance than the downward glance.



Thirdly and lastly, I want you to notice that in Paul's letters:

### **3. Worship is properly addressed to a God who is Trinitarian in essence and economy**

Look carefully at what he says:

<sup>3</sup>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. ESV)

In English you have to be paying attention to see that but in Greek it is pretty obvious. The key word there is *pneu-ma-tic-eh* which means “things pertaining to the Spirit”. It is literally “blessings of the Spirit”. So you have blessings from the Father, in the Son, of the Spirit. That's Trinitarian worship. Paul is considering his redemption and he is seeing it as the work of the entire person of God. That's why I used the word “economy” in the heading – that word is actually in the Greek text down in verse 10:

<sup>10</sup>as **a plan** for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. (1:10. ESV)

That phrase “a plan” is the Greek word *oikonomian* from which we get our “economy”. Paul is saying that the plan of redemption – the working of it, the manner of its accomplishment and application – the economy of saving grace – is the work of the entire God-head. The Father is the source. It was his idea. He is the fount of peace and God of grace. He chose us before the foundation of the world. The Son is the agent of accomplishment and the sphere of blessing. The Father sent the Son to do for us what we could not do – to keep the law and to live a righteous life under the will of the Father – and to pay for what we did do in his body on the cross. He paid for our sins and he accumulated saving merit which we can now access. Think of Christ now as the SPHERE OF BLESSING. By way of crude analogy, think of Christ now as a giant tank full of merit and reward. It is all there – IN CHRIST. The Spirit, Paul says is the agent of our access to that merit. The Spirit seals all of the benefits to us that are found IN CHRIST, he says that explicitly in verse 13. So think of Christ as a giant tank of merit and reward and the Holy Spirit as being like the tube that is connected to Christ and that now connects to our heart such that merit and blessing and grace pass from the sphere of Christ into us. In this sense they are “Spiritual blessings” because they are blessings we access and enjoy

through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit activates all that we receive in Christ. So when Paul talks about adoption as one aspect of this blessing he can say in Romans:

you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”<sup>16</sup>The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God (Romans 8:15-16. ESV)

Think about this. Paul is saying that one of the things earned for us by Christ is a relationship of sonship with the Father. That implies intimate access. The Spirit floods into our heart like through a tube and then pops up in our heart as the Spirit of adoption – the blessing that was earned by Christ is made available to us and active in us by the Holy Spirit – he opens in us an intimate dialogue with God the Father! Every member of the Trinity is active in the economy of redemption and is therefore the object of praise and adoration by the Apostle Paul. So should it be with us. If our worship is not explicitly Trinitarian than it hardly qualifies as Christian worship. All of who God is is active in our redemption and so must be honoured in our worship.

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 is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Let’s give him praise.