

Living a Life of Blessings Part 2

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Lord's Day Evening

Ephesians 1:3

"Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath *blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ*"

edv yeo krtbum uru lqym lqth n vdr vt

Introduction: Open your Bibles to Paul's letter to the Ephesians. This morning we saw the Strategist, the Scope, and the Supplier of our blessings. We need to see God's sovereignty in every gift we have, we need to see that He has given us everything we need for godliness *already*. And then we need to live a life dominated by the Holy Spirit.

Let's look again at verse 3

"Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath *blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ*"

IV. We need to see the Substance of the blessings "blessings" –what exactly are the?

- A. These blessings are not primarily material in nature. That is, the agenda God has behind His gifts have to do with another world altogether. So, the gospel does not promise material blessings as its primary benefit,¹ but points us those things of a more lasting nature. Do God's blessings sometimes result in material benefits? Well, sure! He's promised that we will never see "the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread" (Psalm 37:25). He has promised to "supply all [our] needs according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:19). So yes, while they are not material in nature, we can be sure that God will take care of us.

And yet we have to be very careful that we not equate material success with God's blessings. There may be someone here, and you are praying for the financial security of a good job. You may have a job offer that comes along. And this job means greater financial blessing, but it also means that you're out of church on the Lord's Day much of the time. So you take the job, and as time goes on you begin to neglect your walk with God. Before you know it you are having some serious spiritual problems in your life. Obviously now you don't have the financial hardships you used to have, but your spiritual life has grown cold. You might be tempted to say, "Well, I know God blessed me with that job," but would be making a serious error. God would never bless you with something that takes you away from Him. That would not be a blessing at all, but a curse. Listen, there are things more valuable than money; things more valuable than houses and cars and clothes! And the greatest thing you'll ever give to

¹ Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Let's Study Ephesians*, Banner of Truth (East Peoria, IL: 2005), 8.

your children are not material and financial in nature. Don't cash in your family for a job that takes you away from God. What do we live for anyway? So you have less money—what is more valuable than a Dad who loves God and is an example of humble obedience to God? Do you see that all we need is in Christ? All we need is given by the Holy Spirit of God? So these blessings are not primarily material in nature.

- B. We also see that these blessings are always in accordance with our further sanctification. What God gives will not lead us away from God, it will lead us to God. These blessings will not lead us into disobedience, but will equip us for a life of obedience—they will not lead us to wickedness, but will pave the way for holiness. These are the kinds of gifts that God gives. They come right from the place where God dwells. These are *spiritual* blessings. And everything we need to be drawn to holiness and righteousness and obedience—that's what we are given in these spiritual blessings. God does not give us wicked things. God does not give us things that violate His Word. God does not give us things that lead us into spiritual coldness and compromise.

It is sad, but there are people who call themselves Christians who become dissatisfied in their marriage, and they begin coveting someone who is not their spouse who they think might be better to them, and they end up getting a divorce and committing adultery by marrying another. And they want to say that God has blessed their marriage and pretend like God is in favor of something like that. That is not the case. God is not in favor of you leaving your spouse. That is wickedness. God would never bless something like that. God's blessings always lead us to further sanctification!

- C. These blessings are given to the child of God at his spiritual birth. At the moment of salvation we are "sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession" (Ephesians 1:13-14). We are sons of God, and we get a bit of our inheritance early! And "because [we] are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father" (Galatians 4:6). So everything you need to fulfill the responsibilities of your job everyday—you have it in Christ Jesus. Everything you need to raise your children in godliness, and to love your spouse to the glory of God—you have it in these spiritual blessings! These blessings are not obtained by going to college, or by being raised in a Christian home, or by being saved ten or twenty or thirty years. No, you have them now because they were given to you at the time of your spiritual birth into God's family. These blessings arrive when the child of God is born again, and "baptized into the Spirit." At that moment the believer is "blessed" with "all spiritual blessings."

So we have seen the Sovereign, the Scope, the Supplier, and the Substance of our blessings.

- V. Now let us consider the Sphere of blessings: *heavenly places*.

"God... hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ"

These abundant, unlimited blessings from God are in the heavenly places. What does that mean?

- A. These blessings are locational. They take place in the “heavenly places.” This does not mean that these blessings can only be experienced in heaven. We don’t have to wait until heaven to experience these gifts from God. Neither are these blessings for special people who have elite theological knowledge. It’s not as if these blessings are only for those who have arrived spiritually. That would make you feel pretty frustrated. God could you bring these blessings down a little lower? I’m not high and holy yet! Why’d you have to put them up so high? That’s not what this means. So you don’t need to have arrived at complete sanctification to experience them, and neither do you have to wait until you get to heaven to have them. These blessings are in “heavenly places,” but more than heaven itself is included. The heavenly places encompass the entire supernatural realm of God, His complete domain, and the full extent of His divine operation. These blessings come to us, not due to any connection we have with the natural realm, but are completely dependent on our connection with the supernatural realm. That is, these blessings are not connected to our birth, our natural talents, or our good looks. It’s not connected to our job or even to the church you’ve grown up in. These blessings come from the place where God dwells—the location is wherever God is!! In the spiritual realm that we cannot see. God is not confined to a place like Jerusalem or the Temple of old. “God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship him in Spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). The spiritual blessings we have are “in heavenly places”—they are in God’s domain—we can almost equate it in the Kingdom of Heaven. Is God reigning in your heart? Does He have the throne of your mind, thoughts, goals, and desires? These blessings are found where ever God is!
- B. Secondly, these blessings are political. Now that we are saved, our citizenship is in heaven. We are citizens of another country. Turn to Philippians 3:20.

Philippians 3:20

For our conversation (~~pleon~~ *politeuma*- [pol-i-TOO-mah] literally “our realm of governance” or citizenship”) is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ:

Dear brethren, George Bush is our president, but our King is in heaven! We have no King but Jesus. We pay our taxes, and we are responsible citizens, but King Jesus calls all the shots in our life, and he rules over all people. Our rule comes from Him. Whatever He says, that’s what we do!

This world is not our home. We are as Hebrews 11:13 calls us, “pilgrims and strangers on the earth.”

As Christians we live a “paradoxical, two-level existence—a dual citizenship. While we remain on earth, we are citizens of earth. But in Christ our primary and infinitely more important citizenship is in heaven. Christ is our Lord and King, and we are

citizens of His realm, the heavenly places."² Fix your eyes on the author and finisher of our faith. Let us live, not like we're going to be here forever, but like we're going to be *there* forever, as you live like *that* then you will experience the fullness and the richness of all the blessings that you have in Christ. But how exactly do we do that? How do we take hold of our true citizenship? Well, it will not come if you lay back and take it easy in the Christian life, that's for sure! That brings us to our next extremely vital point:

C. These blessings are volitional. Though we are citizens of heaven by birth, we have to enlist in the Lord's army by will! The Christian life is an agony! It is crucifixion! We need to fight for these blessings!
Look at Colossians 3--

Colossians 3:1-3

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. 2 Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. 3 For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.

Isaiah 26:3

Thou wilt keep *him* in perfect peace, *whose mind is stayed on thee*: because he trusteth in thee.

As you seek earthly treasure, you choke out the richness of the experience of your heavenly treasure, but as you set your mind and your thoughts on Christ and heaven, you can experience all that Christ is—the well-being that His presence gives in the midst of the storm of life! —When we cling to Christ, we then have the moral stamina in the midst of a messed up world. Evil confronts us in the workplace, the mall, the supermarket, on the radio or television. Are you caught up in this world? Then you will be caught up in its evil. But if your eyes are set on heaven, you are always telling yourself how worthless and cheap the things of this world are. Stereos and ceiling fans and microwaves break. Computers and software and technology all need to be upgraded. But the blessings of Christ never deteriorate!

Matthew 6:19-21

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: 20 But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: 21 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Where's your treasure?

Ok, so we need to seek after the things of our heavenly kingdom. How do we do this? It is an agony and a fight!

We are going to do a word study on the Christian life. The word is:

agonizomai *ag-o-nid'-zom-ah-ee*; --It means-- to struggle, to compete for a prize, or to contend with an adversary: — fight, labor fervently, strive.

² MacArthur, 9.

1 Corinthians 9:25

And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they *do it* to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.

Colossians 1:29

Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily.

Colossians 4:12

Epaphras, who is *one* of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.

1 Timothy 6:12

Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.

We see that Christ taught this doctrine also!

Matthew 16:24

If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. 25 For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. 26 For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

John 12:24

Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.

Are you ready to agonize for these blessings? Are you ready to fight for these blessings? Are you ready to take up your cross and be crucified for these blessings? Are you ready to be as a corn of wheat and fall into the ground and die for these blessings? O, the blessings in Christ we have are worth our lives! Let us deny our selves, and let us lose our lives in Christ! Our lives are hid in Christ with God!!!

Ok, so now we know what the blessings are—we understand their Substance, and we understand their Sphere—that is, where they are and how they are gained and maintained, but how can we know that these blessings will truly last forever? How can we believe that if we give our lives in totality to cause and purpose of God, that these blessings are truly eternal and infinite in nature?

Our next point answers that question.

VI. The Surety of the blessings: *in Christ*

“Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath *blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ*”

“It is in Christ that God blesses us”³ and *never* apart from Him! Paul uses phrases like “in Christ” “of Christ” “through Him” “in Christ Jesus” constantly. In

³ Ferguson, 8.

fact, the words "In Christ" appear over 90 times in our New Testament, but it appears many more times than that if you count similar phrases like "In Him" or "In Jesus Christ" or "in the beloved." This designation is Paul's way of identifying the Christian and pointing to our identity, our union, and our security in the Lord Jesus Christ.

A. So we see first of all that the phrase "In Christ" refers to our Identity. People are searching for identity! "We hear much today about people who are having identity crises. They can't seem to figure out who they are. If you have been saved by the grace of God that ought never to be true of you. You are in 'in Christ' which in and of itself is enough to give you all the identity you could possibly need."⁴ We are called Christians, that is we are imitators of Christ. These days we want to "be like Mike" or be like whatever fad or celebrity is popular. Your identity is not found in what kind of car you drive or what club you belong to. It's really insignificant what your golf score is or your bowling average is. Neither does it really matter a whole lot where you live or who you know. What makes you who you are is Christ! I remember a Christian lady I met in an airport. She was reading a Chinese Bible. I could not even say hello to her, but I somehow communicated to her with my hands and gestures that I was a believer! You see all our claims to earthly identity pass away when we realize our identity in Christ. It didn't matter that this woman was Chinese, and I was American. We both spoke the same spiritual language, and we both were citizens of the same heavenly kingdom! Our identity is in Christ!

B. In Christ what we also have is Unity. We are in Christ, and as I Corinthians 6:17 says "he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit."

We have a marvelous *Union in Christ*—these blessings are experienced as we experience our union with Christ. Our unity as believers is more than just a common agreement. It's not just that we all believe the same thing, it is that we believe have all believe "into Christ." Christ is our life! We have that in common! "In Christ" are the two most important words in the Bible. If you are in Him, you have life. If you are outside of Him, you are lost forever.

1 John 5:12

He that hath the Son hath life; *and* he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.

Christ says that our union with Him is what brings us together in this assembly of believers here tonight. Christ said in His high priestly prayer

John 17:21

That they all may be one; as thou, Father, *art* in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one [UNITED] in us

Our union comes by "believing into Christ"

Look at this doctrine—anytime you see that we are to believe "on" the name of Christ, it has the idea of believing into Christ.

⁴ Milton E. Jones, Pastor of the Heritage Baptist Church of Frankfort, Illinois. *Who are You?* Message preached October 16, 2005.

John 7:31

And many of the people believed on him

Acts 16:31

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved

1 John 3:23

And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment. You see, it's not just a benefits package containing forgiveness, new life, new hope, etc.! When we believe "on" Christ, we believe "into" Him! We receive Christ Himself. We are united to Him by the Holy Spirit so that *all* that He has achieved for us becomes ours. When we believe *into* Christ...

1. My will is dominated by Christ—"not my will, but thine be done" (Luke 22:42). Christ is the "King of Kings" and "Lord of lords" and the "God of gods." He is the "Alpha and Omega," the "Beginning and the Ending," the "First and the Last," and the "Blessed and Only Potentate," that is, He's the Undisputed Ruler (Deuteronomy 10:17; Revelation 1:8, 11; 1 Timothy 6:15). All of Christ's title's demand that our wills be subordinate to Him! He is "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27)
2. My life is "hid in Christ" with God (Colossians 3:3). What are your goals and plans? Is it your life, or God's after all? Are you calling the shots, making the decisions, directing your path? Or is your life "ordered by the Lord" (Psalm 37:23)?

In a sense, we have died with Christ, were buried and raised with Him, ascended with Him, reign with Him, and will be with Him when He comes in glory (cf. Colossians 3:1ff).

C. In Christ we have Security. Turn over to John 10.

1. Christ's Sheep are Protected.

John 10:22-30

And it was at Jerusalem the feast of the dedication, and it was winter. 23 And Jesus walked in the temple in Solomon's porch. 24 Then came the Jews round about him, and said unto him, How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly. 25 Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me. 26 But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. 27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: 28 And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any *man* pluck them out of my hand. 29 My Father, which gave *them* me, is greater than all; and no *man* is able to pluck *them* out of my Father's hand. 30 I and *my* Father are one.

2. Christ's Sheep Persevere in the faith.

1 John 2:19

They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would *no doubt* have continued with us: but *they went out*, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.

We maintain that though the way is dark and though dangers lurk on every hand, the child of God shall be preserved and shall persevere until New Jerusalem descends from the heavens. Why is this? Because we have great will power? Because we are phenomenal Christians? No, not at all. We are "in Christ." We persevere because Christ holds us!

Jude 24-25

Now unto him that is able to keep [GUARD, IMPRISON, PROTECT] you from falling, and to present *you* faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, 25 To the only wise God our Saviour, *be* glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.

"In Christ" we have "all spiritual blessings in heavenly places"!

Conclusion: Are you living in the spiritual realm today? Are you living and walking in the power of the Holy Spirit? Is your life, your will, and your all given to the blessings found only in Christ? What is life without the blessing of God? The greatest men that walked the face of the earth, and yet did not know the blessings of life in Christ were truly men who were most miserable. Let's think about this in closing. Alexander the Great was not satisfied, even when he had completely subdued the nations of his time. He wept because there were no more worlds to conquer, and he died at an early age in a state of debauchery. Hannibal, who filled three bushels with the gold rings taken from the knights he had slaughtered, committed suicide by swallowing poison. Few cared about his passing, and he left this earth completely unmourned. Julius Caesar—it was said that he stained 'his garments in the blood of one million of his foes,' conquering 800 cities, only to be stabbed by his best friends at the scene of his greatest triumph on the floor of the Roman Senate. And then we see Napoleon, the feared conqueror, after being the thorn in the side of all of Europe spent his last years in banishment and in sorrow.⁵ So what do we learn from these men's lives? Go and live your dreams—go ahead and strive to be everything that you can be, you can even change the course of history, but if you live life without the blessings that only come from Christ, your dreams, your life, your all—shall come to be nothing after all! All that we need is in Christ—He is our identity, in Him we have redemption, we need nothing else but to look and long after the blessings that come in Him.

Closing Hymn: 258 There is a Fountain Filled with Blood

⁵ From 19th-century Bible scholar G. S. Bowes.