

EVERY SPIRITUAL BLESSING
(SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 15, 2019)

Scripture Reading: Gen. 12:1-6;
Eph. 1:1-6

INTRODUCTION

Let me again present some background to our text, both historical and theological.

Paul ministered in Ephesus for about 3 years, from AD 52-55.

His ministry, although based in Ephesus, reached a much larger area, the entire province of Asia.

About two years after this ministry, Paul was arrested in Jerusalem. He finally was brought to Rome where he was under house arrest from 62-64.

During this time of house arrest, it is believed that Paul wrote Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon, the "prison epistles."

Consider, then, that some who first received this letter had been believers for maybe only 5-10 years.

It is amazing and significant that these young believers were given such a rich book in terms of doctrine.

Compare this book to most of what is written today. There really is no comparison is there?

The other background we keep in mind is God's perfect holiness and goodness and man's rebellion and hatred for God.

In Adam we all sinned.

From our mother's wombs we came forth as sinners.

Who on his own seeks after God?

No one!

Read again Romans 3:10-18 and Psalm 14.

God in His justice rightfully could send every single person to hell.

There would be no injustice in God doing this.

And without contradicting at all His justice, God determined to save a vast number of men in and through the work of the Son of God.

And this determination had nothing to do with how much some deserved to be saved.

This choice was made before time began.

God determined to love the totally unlovable and express the riches of His grace to the completely undeserving!

We begin today focusing on perhaps the richest single sentence ever written. In Greek, Ephesians 1:3-14 compose one sentence.

I feel like in preaching this text, we are entering a gold mine so deep and dense, that we will never mine all of it.

May God be pleased to encourage us in our Sunday gatherings and in our own study of this text.

What praise and total dedication of life our eternal, sovereign, holy, and gracious God deserves!

We will look at Eph 1:3-6 in two parts:

- 1) Blessing and praise to the triune God for all the spiritual, heavenly blessings we have in Christ, vv. 3 and 6.
- 2) God's sovereign and gracious choice, vv. 4 and 5.

1) BLESSING AND PRAISE TO THE TRIUNE GOD FOR ALL THE SPIRITUAL, HEAVENLY BLESSINGS WE HAVE IN CHRIST, VV. 3 AND 6.

One commentator I have been reading states that Paul is leading the Ephesians in worship through this letter.¹

There is so much theological depth and richness in this text, but the goal of this text is to give blessing and praise to God.

If we don't end in praise, we have missed the heart of this text and Paul's purpose.

Various commentators also point out how this text praises Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.²

¹ Klyne Snodgrass, *NIV Application Commentary*, 43.

² Letham, NET Bible, Snodgrass, etc. It is evident for all who consider this passage.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are the focus of verse 3.

Then verses 4-6 focus on the Father, verses 7-12 on the Son, and verses 13-14 on the Spirit.³

There is also beautifully in this text three perspectives on time: eternity past, the work of Christ in time, and the end of all history described in verse 10.⁴

Notice also in verse 3 the threefold use of blessed, blessed us, and blessing.

The literary and theological beauty of this passage are not to be missed.

What Paul writes in verse 3 as an opening blessing is very similar to 2 Cor. 1:3 and 2 Peter 1:3.

And what we can say is that we are not praising some generic God. We are blessing the only true God.

We are blessing the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!

Why is this blessing given?

It is because in Christ and through the working of the Holy Spirit we have been given every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

The word spiritual doesn't mean that we are blessing God for the spiritual rather than the physical gifts we receive daily.

Spiritual here speaks of the blessings that we have through the working of the Holy Spirit.⁵

Here we look back to the blessings that God gave to Abram and his seed.

Now through the working of the Holy Spirit we who have no physical connection to Abram are brought into this blessed condition in Christ.⁶

A good parallel text here would be Gal. 3:13-14.

Gal. 3:13 Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "*Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree*"), **14** that the **blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus**, that we might receive the **promise of the Spirit** through faith.

What is also a somewhat challenging phrase is that these blessings are in the heavenly places.

³ Snodgrass, 44-45.

⁴ Snodgrass, 44-45.

⁵ Robert Letham, A. T. Lincoln, and Klyne Snodgrass all emphasize this important point.

⁶ Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, 76.

About 3 years ago I preached two sermons on the phrase **heavenly places**, a phrase found 5x and only in the book of Ephesians.

Heavenly places: 1:20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12.

What is meant by this phrase?

We cannot just look at the flesh and blood world in which we now live.

Eph. 6:12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*.

It is not that we reject this physical world, but we consider that there is a larger reality.

There is a heavenly reality where Christ is exalted and where He reigns over us and all our enemies.

This heavenly place is also where there is a battle against other spiritual forces.

“Though believers live physically on this earth, they receive spiritual resources and their identity from a higher plane. The spiritual blessings given to Christians are enjoyed in the present life, for they derive from what God has done in Christ in the heavenlies.”⁷

Back in the 1800’s there was a woman, Hetty Green, who inherited \$7.5 million. This would be worth over \$100 million in today’s dollars.

Hetty took this fortune and invested it wisely, but lived like a pauper.

According to one source:

Allegedly she never turned on the heating or hot water, never washed her hands, constantly wore one old black dress which was only ever washed at the hems to save on soap, and apparently spent an entire evening searching her old carriage for a lost stamp worth two cents.

The most outrageous tale of her thriftiness, though, is surely that of her son and his broken leg. She initially refused to pay for medical treatment, resulting in a condition that later required amputation!⁸

What is the point of this illustration and its connection with our text?

⁷ Klyne Snodgrass, 47.

⁸ <https://www.gocompare.com/covered/2012/10/historys-greatest-cheapskates/>

We must not be spiritual paupers who have been given so much but who live like we have so little.

The abundance of what we have been given is not just like having a million dollars in the bank.

We have been given something so much greater. It is through the Word of God and through the working of the Holy Spirit that we come to see just how much we have been given!

As we continue focusing on the response of praise, we next focus on verse 6.

We are to praise God for the glory of His grace which has been graciously poured out on us in the Beloved.

Various definitions for grace have been given.

Maybe you have heard of the acronym **God's Riches At Christ's Expense**.

I don't think it is wrong to speak of grace as a gift or something that God gives.

However, grace is not just a gift. Grace is connected with God's **full acceptance** of us and the **gift of Himself** to us.⁹

The glory of His grace is that it is given to totally undeserving sinners in a way that has totally satisfied justice.

This is reason for great praise to God!

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me!

And we realize that grace is not just the initial entrance ticket into God's kingdom. It is that which you need for all of life. You are saved by grace and we live by this amazing grace!¹⁰

2) GOD'S SOVEREIGN AND GRACIOUS CHOICE, VV. 4 AND 5.

We focus next on God's sovereign and gracious choice.

In verses 4 and 5 we have two key phrases – **He chose us** and **having predestinated us**.

Verse 4 explains why God is blessed, because He has chosen a people in Christ.¹¹

The verb translated as chosen could also be translated as **elected**.

⁹ Snodgrass, 50.

¹⁰ Snodgrass, 50.

¹¹ NET Bible note, s.v. Ephesians 1:4.

We are dealing here with the **doctrine of election**.

I trust you are familiar with what are called the Five Points of Calvinism or TULIP.

These five points were not developed in this form by John Calvin.

They don't come from any single Reformer. Rather, I believe, they are an attempt to summarize key teachings in Scripture, recovered in the Reformation, dealing with salvation.

Here we have the teaching summarized by the second point: Unconditional Election.

Why unconditional?

Did God choose you because of something that He saw in you?

Were you elected because of something you did or would do?

How much were you doing before the foundation of the world?

The focus so clearly is on God's determination, on God's choice.

And as we see from Ephesians 1, this verb is not alone.

In the next verse we have **predestined**. We also have good pleasure and will in verse 5.

In verse 9 you have will, good pleasure, and purposed.

In verse 11 you have appointed, predestined, plan, purpose, works, and will.¹²

John Calvin wrote here:

The very time when the election took place proves it to be free; for what could we have deserved, or what merit did we possess, before the world was made? How childish is the attempt to meet this argument by the following sophism! "We were chosen because we were worthy, and because God foresaw that we would be worthy." We were all lost in Adam; and therefore, had not God, through his own election, rescued us from perishing, there was nothing to be foreseen.

In considering the doctrine of election it is important to keep in mind as we see in verse 4 our election is in Christ.

It is not that God just randomly chose a bunch of individuals.

¹² Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, WBC 42; Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 22-23.

God determined to choose a vast number of sinners out of their sin and rebellion and bring them salvation and unite them together in Jesus Christ.

We also consider here that Paul speaks of our election in Christ in light of redemptive history.

The commentator Francis Foulkes briefly summarizes this:

Israel was chosen, not for any merit, but to be the means of the fulfilling of the eternal purpose of God (see Deut. 7:6–8; Isa. 42:1; 43:20–21). In the New Testament the principle of election is confirmed, **but there is no longer a national limitation** – a truth that this letter later develops and expounds.¹³

We will look later at the phrase that **we should be holy and without blame before Him**.

Notice also the two words at the end of verse 4, **in love**.

It is possible these two words should be connected with holy and blameless.

Other translations understand in love to connect with verse 5 and God's predestining us to adoption.

An argument can be made for both approaches. Some would argue that the older translations that join love with holy and blameless are preferred.¹⁴

Let's focus on verse 5.

In terms of the grammar, verse 4 is the main verb – He chose us.

Verse 5 helps illustrate God's choice and its purpose.

The verb **predestined** is very similar in meaning as to choose.

It means to ordain beforehand.¹⁵

This verb is used again in verse 11.

It is also used in Romans 8:29-30 and also significantly in Acts 4:28.

Acts 4:27 "For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered

¹³ Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC 10; IVP/ Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 55.

¹⁴ Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC 10; IVP/ Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 56.

¹⁵ Mounce Greek Dictionary.

together **28** to do whatever Your hand and Your **purpose determined before** to be done.

Here the glorious work of predestination is adoption into the family of God as sons by Jesus Christ to the Father.

It is very likely that you have had an argument or strong discussion with another person on the subject of election or predestination.

Sadly, these are controversial subjects. Even more sadly the plain truth of God's Word is ignored or explained away.

Paul did not share this truth for the purpose of providing a debate subject.

This truth is meant to humble and also encourage us.

Election and predestination are not mechanical, clinical, austere actions of God. They manifest His love and power to His people.

Notice the beautiful truth of verse 5 - according to the good pleasure of His will.

What matters most is God's joy and delight in all that He does.

Our joy must always be connected with God's joy and purposes.

Quoting again John Calvin here:

No doctrine is more useful, provided it be handled in the proper and cautious manner, of which Paul gives us an example, when he presents it as an illustration of the infinite goodness of God, and employs it as an excitement to gratitude. This is the true fountain from which we must draw our knowledge of the divine mercy.

Let's focus before we conclude on the last part of verse - that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.

How do we understand this call to holiness?

There are three related possibilities.

First, it is possible that these words speak of our justification.

MacArthur stated:

This refers to Christ's imputed righteousness granted to us (*see notes on 2Co 5:21; Php 3:9*), a perfect righteousness that places believers in a holy and blameless position

before God (5:27; Col 2:10), though daily living inevitably falls far short of His holy standard.

Second, the exact grammar here is not common but it is used in other parts of the NT to speak of our duty.

For example, in 1 Cor. 10:6 Paul after presenting some of the sad history of Israel writes:

1Cor. 10:6 Now these things became our examples, to the intent that **we should not** lust after evil things as they also lusted.

So, it is possible these words speak of our duty before God.

What is the appropriate response to God's sovereign grace?

It is a life of sacrifice and devotion.

The two words holy and blameless come from the language of sacrifice in the OT.¹⁶

We also can find in Scripture references to our glorification.

Yes, there is a declaration of righteousness that is part of life now.

There is the call also to holiness that is part of the present.

There is the expectation in glorification that one day we will be perfect in holiness before God.

Eph. 5:27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

What did Paul have in mind is the question?

I don't think it is inconceivable that Paul had in mind these three different aspects.

This is the glorious application of God's work of salvation in the lives of His people.

We are holy, we are to be holy, we will be made perfect in holiness.

What praise and total dedication of life our eternal, sovereign, holy, and gracious God deserves!

How do you know that you are elect in Christ and predestined to adoption as sons?

¹⁶ J. B. Lightfoot, *Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul from Unpublished Commentaries*, Lightfoot's Commentaries on the Epistles; Accordance electronic ed. (Altamonte Springs: OakTree Software, 2006), paragraph 8258.

2Pet. 1:10 Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to **make your call** and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble;

Are you looking to the Lord Jesus Christ and the grace of God alone for salvation?

Have you been brought to that point of conviction of sin, past and present, such that you cry to God for His forgiveness and grace to turn from it?

These are the signs of God's sovereign grace the result of His eternal choice to choose you in Jesus Christ.

Do you praise and thank Him daily for His work?

Prayer

Closing Hymn: 439

Benediction: Eph. 3:20-21

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.