

Your Riches in Christ Part 1

“Chosen to be Blameless”

Eph.1:3-4

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the one having blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world that we might be holy and blameless before Him, in love 5 having predestined us to adoption through Jesus Christ into Him, according to the pleasure of His will 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace which He freely gave us in the Loved One 7 in Whom we have the deliverance through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace 8 which overflowed to us in all wisdom and knowledge 9 having made known to us the mystery of His plan, according to His pleasure which He planned in Him 10 the task of the fulfillment of the times, to unite all things in Christ, the upon the heavenly realm and the upon the earth in him 11 in whom also we were chosen, having been predestined according to the purpose of the one working all things according to the will of his plan.12 to the end that we, the ones having hoped in Christ, might be for the praise of His glory 13 in Whom also you, having heard the word of truth, the Gospel of your salvation, in Whom also, you, having believed were sealed by the Holy spirit of promise 14 Who is a deposit of our inheritance, to deliverance of the possession to the praise of His glory.

Review: Truth, Righteousness & The Gospel

So many people struggle in their Christian lives, but they don't realize it's not because of a lack of practical tips on how to live. It's because of a shallow, weak, or even non-existent foundation of fundamental understanding about God and the Gospel. After the greeting in vv.1,2, Paul begins the letter with a one-sentence blessing. The sentence begins, “**Bless the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has...**” and then goes on to describe what God has done in the rest of the sentence. Any time Paul writes a sentence summarizing what God has done, you can expect it to be quite a sentence. And he doesn't let us down here. The opening sentence would almost certainly be regarded by an English teacher as a “run on.” In fact, it is almost the same length as the Gettysburg Address. In the Greek it's 202 words, extending from v.3 through v.14. It's the longest sentence in the Bible (WBC), and perhaps the greatest sentence ever written. This one sentence probably brings up more complex theological concepts than any other sentence in the NT, and yet it is very easy to summarize: “Bless God for what He did in Christ.”

Introduction

The Importance Knowing God

The first word is the only command in the whole section. In fact, you won't see Paul issuing any other commands until ch.4 (except for in 2:11 where we are told to remember something). That's one reason first half of Ephesians is not preached nearly as often as the second. There are no instructions as to how to behave, so people presume that it is not very

practical. People want to know what they are supposed to do and how they are supposed to act, but the first three chapters of Ephesians don't tell us how to live at all – they just inform us about God. We should learn a very important lesson from that.

Learning about God is more important than learning how to behave.

Application: What are the implications for daily living?

Remember this principle when you read your Bible. And especially remember that when you teach the Bible – especially those of you who teach young children. So often we just teach them about behavior, but it is so much more important that we teach what God is like even if it is not always as popular. Learning the truth about God is more important than learning how to live life. Getting to know God better is the highest pursuit there is – even higher than learning how to behave the right way.

The way we started Creekside Church was by sending out a flier that was very simple. One on side it said, “The most important thing about you is...” and on the other side it completed the quote from noted pastor and author A.W. Tozer: “...what comes to your mind when you think about God.” The reason we chose this approach is because we wanted to start this church with a group of people who had a desire to know God.

God's highest Priority

What does God want from us? Obedience? Certainly. He wants us to obey, but more than that He wants us to *know* Him.

Hos.6:6 For I desired...the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. What is the greatest command? Love God. There isn't anything you can do in this world that is better ,more important ,more admirable ,more worthy of reward or more beneficial to humanity than to love God. And the only way to love God more is to know Him more.

Knowledge of God is the meaning of life itself. If someone ever asks you “What is the meaning of life?” just say, “Well, Jesus said in **Jn.17:3 this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God.** It is the highest pursuit there is. There is absolutely nothing you could do at a given moment that is a more worthwhile. You can learn CPR and lifesaving techniques, you can learn how to build bridges, you can figure out how to bring about world peace, but none of that compares in importance.

Jer.9:23 This is what the LORD says: "Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, 24 but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,"

You can be brilliant and stack up degrees behind your name, you can spend hours a day working out, you can build a business and retire at age 30, but none of that is worth boasting in. They are small things, only knowing God is a big thing.

Illustration:

The world boasts in knowledge of celebrities (“I shook Michael Jordan’s hand,” “Harrison Ford is a close friend of mine”) Some will even boast about knowing someone who has met a celebrity. Someone once asked John MacArthur if he had ever met Billy Graham. MacArthur replied, “No, but I know God.”

You may be thinking, “What is there to know? I know about God. God is love. God is powerful. He’s up in heaven.” But is that knowledge of God? If I told you I have a friend and that my friend wears glasses and has a pair of red shoes, would you feel like you really know him? If you were to describe your wife to someone, how many things could you say? What about God? How much could you tell a person about God? How well do you know Him? Ask yourself this: how often does God do something that surprises you?

Necessary for Right Behavior

Christianity, in many sectors, has drifted from a deep knowledge of God. People talk about God in insipid terms “the big guy” or “the man upstairs” Millions of TV viewers hardly batted an eye when Kenneth Copland said God is between 6’ 1” and 6’ 2” and weighs just over 200 pounds. Fred Price says that God doesn’t want to live inside a blind person, because the only way God can see in the earth realm is through the eyes of his people, and so if he lived in a blind person, God would be limited because he wouldn’t be able to see. Those are some of the extremes, but even in the Evangelical world there seems to me to be a diminishing knowledge of what God is like.

- People get mad at God (which is only possible if you have a concept of God as one who can do something wrong).
- Some think of God like a giant Santa, who never have negative thoughts - he is just love and warm fuzziness.

People like that can’t explain suffering or natural disasters or hell. There are Christians who have such a tiny, weak, reductionist view of God that you will hear them offer some idea that is not in the Bible but that seems right to them and say, “God would never do this” or “God is too loving to do that...” – as if they have God completely figured out and can make authoritative statements about what He would or wouldn’t do. People try to make deals with God: “If you get me out of this, I will...” Saying something like that reveals an attitude that God is somehow needy of something we have to offer. The low level of understanding about what God is like is in many cases alarming. One reason why a knowledge of God is more important than instructions for behavior is the fact that without an accurate understanding of God, you won’t be *capable* of right behavior. On the other hand, the more accurate your understanding of God, and the more you love Him, the more your behavior will be as it should be automatically.

The Response of praise

Even more important than that, a deep knowledge of God is essential for proper worship. That is the emphasis here. Every command in Ephesians is important. It’s just that the very first one – the command to bless God, requires 3 chapters of explanation for us to fully appreciate it. My personal goal in this study is to come to the point of appreciating it like Paul did – so that my theology becomes a doxology, which is a statement of praise to the LORD. It’s one thing to have an awareness of all these things, even Satan has that. What I want is for the reality of them to become some real and so meaningful to me that this kind of

Illustration:

You don’t have to discipline yourself to talk about how wonderful your favorite restaurant is, it just comes out. Likewise, if you really love sunsets, and you see a spectacular, beautiful, dazzling sunset that just ignites the entire sky with every color of the spectrum – You comment on how wonderful it is. It just comes out. No one needs to prod you. You don’t need anyone to say, “Praise the sunset by speaking of its attributes – say it like you really mean it – from the diaphragm...” Without any prodding, and without any conscious preplanning, you just see it and say, “Wow! That is gorgeous!” That’s what praise is – when you are talking about how wonderful something is, you are praising it.

response of praise will come welling up out of me and fill up the space of my mind and heart and mouth. C.S. Lewis, one of the foremost Christian writers of the twentieth century made a great observation about this: "Praise is the natural response of delight – almost an involuntary response."

Verse 3

Application: What are the implications for daily living?

If you want to learn to truly worship God – don't practice worshipping. Don't sign up for worship lessons. Just pay close enough attention to what God is like, and you won't be able to hold the praise in. I don't know what was going through Paul's mind as he sat down to write this opening statement, but judging from what came out of his heart he must have had some wonderful thoughts about God.

Bless God

Blessed be

His first two words are **Bless God**.

This concept of "blessing" is an Old Testament idea that has kind of dropped out of our lexicon, but has remained in the vocabulary of the Jewish people. Jewish people, in their prayers, will often bless God. But for whatever reason we don't. I don't know why that is, because it is a fairly common thing to see in the New Testament and is a wonderful way to praise God.

2 Cor.1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort...

1 Pe.1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth...

DICTIONARY:

"to bless" (*eulogetos*) "to bestow good."

This form (with the "tos" ending) literally means "worthy of blessing," but in common usage comes to mean "blessed be..." (Hendriksen) When applied to God it carries the idea of worthiness to have good bestowed. When God blesses us, He gives us good things. But we can't really give God anything, so the best we can do is declare the fact that He is worthy to have good things bestowed upon Him. So when you read, "Bless God" it means, "Regard Him and speak of Him as being worthy to receive good things."

Blessing God is a very rich and wonderful way to praise God. Especially since the object of this praise is **the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ**, that is, He is both Jesus' Father and Jesus' God.

Don't let that make you uncomfortable as you think about the Trinity. For Jesus to look to the Father as His God is no problem for the Trinity. Jesus Himself said **John 20:17 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'**

**the God
and
Father of
our Lord
Jesus
Christ**

Application: What are the implications for daily living?

The greatest thing anyone could ever do – including other members of the Trinity, is to recognize God the Father for who He is. The fact that the Father is the God of Jesus does not mean that Jesus is a lesser being in any way. What else could God the Father be to Him? He is everybody’s God. Paul mentions that here for an important reason, this passage is all about our relationship to God in Christ. In order for Him to be our God and Father He has to be Jesus’ God and Father, because we can be in relationship to Him only through Christ Jesus.

He Blessed Us

The reason given for why we are to bless God is that He **has blessed us**.

**who has
blessed us
with
every
spiritual
blessing**

That’s what all of vv.4-14 are about. It’s summarized in v.4 - He blessed us **with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ**. We have received all the **spiritual** blessings.

Don’t misunderstand that, it’s not that they are spiritual as opposed to material blessings. Material blessings can be spiritual too. They are **spiritual** in that they are from the Holy Spirit. The measure of anything in the New Testament is “How spiritual is it?” The more something can be said to be spiritual (from the Holy Spirit), the more important and valuable it is.

These blessings are of utmost importance more than anything in this world, because they are **spiritual**. And it’s not just some spiritual blessings, but **every spiritual blessing**. The word **every** here is absolute. We have literally received every spiritual blessing there is. People say, “Have you received the second blessing?” I answer Yes – and the third, fourth, fifth....I’ve received all of them – every spiritual blessing in Christ.

**in the
heavenlies**

In the heavenlies is a phrase that appears five times in Eph but nowhere else in the Bible. The point of the phrase is to highlight the fact that these things are taking place in another world – a higher plane of which this world is just a subset.

One major theme of the Gospel is when you become a Christian your citizenship is immediately transferred from this world to heaven. Your citizenship changes, but you remain here. So you go from being a citizen to a visitor – a foreigner. (That concept is explored in detail in our study of Colossians 3 (Tape 67). Now that your home is elsewhere, your concerns are elsewhere. You have far more interest in blessings there than here.

One of our families is moving to Washington this fall. They would be much more interested in reading about a huge tax rebate planned for next year in Washington than one in Colorado. It is natural to care about the things that take place where you make your home.

in Christ

The point is we are not only blessed, but we are blessed in ways that really matter, and all of these blessings come **in Christ**. God has no other means of bringing spiritual blessings to people.

DICTIONARY: “in” (ev) “by virtue of your close association with”

Being in Christ means you are so closely connected with Him that God the Father thinks of you the same way He thinks about Christ, what belongs to Christ belongs to you, and He loves you in the way that He loves Christ.

Verse 4

The Five Blessings

In a sentence this long it's easy to get caught up in the details and miss the main point. So let's begin by summarizing the whole blessing: "*Blessed be God who blessed us in five ways: Sanctification, Adoption, Salvation, Revelation and Possession*".

- **He chose us to be holy and blameless, (sanctification)**
- **having predestined us to adoption (adoption)**
- **by grace which He freely gave us (forgiveness and riches), (salvation)**
- **having made known to us His plan to unite all things in Christ. (revelation)**
- **He made us heirs to an inheritance (possession)**

There are a hundred things we could talk about from this text, and a thousand little rabbit trails we could explore, but the grammar of the sentence highlights these 5 things, so that will be our focus.

1. Sanctification (or Purification) v.4

4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before Him

v.4 just as

just as

DICTIONARY:

**"just as" (*kathos*) □ "in accordance with the fact that"
Here it has both a comparative and causal force, and in this way verse 4 elaborates on and grounds the previous thematic statement. (WBC)**

This verse is arguably the clearest statement in the whole Bible on the doctrine of election. You can read thick volumes on the doctrine of election, but I'm not sure you would find anything that we can say for sure about election that isn't revealed in this one verse.

**He chose us
in Him**

He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before Him

That's really all there is to the doctrine of election. We know, of course, that there is also a human side. The human side is that you have to choose God. You must decide, as an act of your will, to repent and believe and give your life to God. The rest of Scripture is very clear on that. But it isn't highlighted here.

Certain Calvinists have taken that to imply that the human role is not a factor in any way. They say since passages like this mention no human response, things like faith or repentance must be things that take place only after you are saved, but not in order to be saved. That is incorrect. The reason the human side is not discussed in this passage is not to imply the human side isn't essential, but to focus on the divine side alone because the purpose of this passage is to elicit a response of praise, so the focus is on what God does in salvation.

If there is any doubt in anyone's mind whether or not God is in full control of everything, this is the place to go, because the vocabulary in this sentence used to describe God should eliminate any doubt. There are no less than 8 different words used to describe God's determinative will.

v.4 – He chose (*eklego*)

v.5 – refers to His predestining (*proorizo*), his good pleasure (*eudokia*), and His plan (*thelema*)

v.9 – says He pleased (*eudokia*) and He purposed (*protithamai*)

v.11 – He appointed (*klaroo*), predestined (*proorizo*), planned (*prothesis*) and purposed (*boule*) according to His will (*thelema*).

Paul uses every term he can think of to emphatically state the sovereign control of God in the strongest possible terms. It's all part of God's plan. The fact that you are saved brings obvious benefits to you, but more importantly you are saved because of the role your being saved plays in God's ultimate plan. That's why the decision that you would be saved was made **before the foundation of the world.**

**before the
foundation
of the world**

Isn't it interesting that when Paul calls us to praise God for our salvation he points first not to our conversion experience, but to something that took place in eternity past? It is natural to praise God because of some wonderful thing that you experienced, but it takes faith to praise God for something you know only through belief, something completely removed from your experience. We don't praise God because of what a wonderful experience election was. None of us have experienced election, since it happened before we even existed!

The real joy of our salvation doesn't come from experiences. It comes from knowledge of the truth and trust in that truth. Don't seek your joy primarily from religious experiences; seek it from a deep understanding of the truth about God.

Have you ever wondered why sometimes God tells us He decided something before the creation of the world? If God is all knowing, which He is, then He knew *everything* He planned to do from before the creation of the world. So why are certain things singled out?

Most things in life God wants us to think of as being conditioned on events. There are times when God tells Israel, "*If* you obey I will do this, and *if* you disobey I will do that." But God knew from before the creation whether or not they would obey, so why does He say "if"? Since God knew everything from before the creation of the world, why would He ever use the word "if"? The answer is because even though He knows everything that is going to happen, He wants us to understand that certain outcomes are determined from our point of view by what we decide. If you think of God like a father teaching a young child. He tells us, "If you touch fire, you will get burned" (even though He already knows whether or not I will touch the fire – He says "if" because He wants me to understand that what I decide to do has consequences that are connected to my decisions.) So in contexts where God wants us to think in terms of the outcome being contingent on our actions or on the events around us, He will say "if you do this" or "if that happens..." Sometimes He will even point backward and indicate that something else could have happened. In Acts 27 Paul told the Centurion not to sail. But he sailed anyway, and it ended in shipwreck. So then in verse 21 Paul pipes up with an "I told you so."

21 Paul stood up before them and said: "Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete; then you would have spared yourselves this damage and loss.

From our human perspective the damage and loss wasn't an essential part of God's eternal plan. They could have just listened to Paul, averted that wreck, and God's plan still would have prevailed. But in other contexts, God doesn't want us to think solely in terms of our decisions or the workings of history as being determinative. There are some things that God wants us to know are part of His unchangeable plan. There are some things God doesn't want us to chalk up to some fluke, or something that could have gone one way or the other. These things are so central to His plan that they have to happen exactly as planned. When Scripture introduces these things, you see this language that it was planned before the creation of the world.

There aren't very many things in that category. In fact, there are only two. Two things the Bible points to as having been planned from before the creation, two things we are to think of as being so absolutely essential to God's plan that they were guaranteed to happen exactly as they happened. One such thing is the plan of Jesus dying for our sins and the provision for eternal life (1 Pe.1:20, Tit.1:2, Rev.13:8). The other is the salvation of the elect.

2 Tim 1:9 speaks of...

God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life-not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time

Mt.25:34 "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.

**that we
might be
holy and
blameless
before
Him**

The Kingdom hasn't just existed since the creation of the world, but it's been being prepared for you specifically since the creation of the world. Rev 17:8 refers to unbelievers as those **whose names have not been written in the book of life from the creation of the world** But the clearest of all is this passage right here:

He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless.

Some people have tried to soften the doctrine of election by saying, "God simply looked into the future, checked to see whether or not I would have faith if given the choice, saw that I would, and then ordained that to happen." There are two main problems with that. Firstly it makes a mockery of God's act of predestination. If God has to see what's going to happen before He can ordain it to happen, in what sense is He ordaining anything? If we pray for rain tomorrow do we think that God says, "Oh, first let Me look into the future and check to see if it's going to rain. If it is, then I'll go ahead and ordain it." Secondly, it seems to be the opposite of the intent of passages like Ro.9:11-13

before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad-in order that God's purpose in election might stand: 12 not by works but by him who calls-she was told, "The older will serve the younger." 13 Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

The whole point of God making the selection prior to the existence of the individual is to prevent us from thinking that the decision is based on any historical contingency or temporal circumstance. The fact that it took place before the creation means that nothing since the creation has taken place that has effected the decision. Nothing since the creation has happened that has led God to elect His people.

If God did look into the future, all He would be looking at is what He Himself ordained. And that includes things you decide with your own free will. In 2:10 it says that God even ordained in advance the good works that you do. The choice to predestine something can't be based on foreknowledge of events that are also predestined. Making God's choice of us contingent upon our choosing Him destroys the whole intent of the "before the creation of the world" language. Is it true that I'm saved because I chose to follow Christ? Yes, from a limited, human perspective. But it's also true that ultimately I'm saved because before I ever existed it was part of God's overall purpose to save me.

Ro.8:29 those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

“What about class election, the idea that God didn’t chose individuals, but rather He chose a class of people? It’s not that before the creation God said, “OK, Darrell Ferguson will be saved.” He just said, “OK, anyone who ends up being in Christ will be saved” and it remains an open question who will end up being in Christ.

That view also has some serious problems, the biggest of which is Acts 13:48. Paul preached at Antioch and **48 When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.** The one’s who respond to the Gospel are the ones who are appointed to. If all election is, is God choosing a method of salvation, it seems to me the whole force of Paul’s point in Eph.1 breaks down. If all God did was ordain a method, and I’m saved because I was smart enough to respond, how does that result in me blessing God for blessing me with election? The whole point is that we bless God because He blessed us by choosing us.

How does that fit with warnings about apostasy?

2 Peter 1:10 Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall

Perseverance is required just as faith is required, but that is not the focus here. The point here is to make it crystal clear that God selected us to be the ones who would be made holy and blameless. Any discussion of election inevitably tuns into a discussion of man’s free will. But the major point here is not on the election as opposed to free will. Election is not in opposition to free will. The emphasis is on the fact that we were chosen to be holy and blameless.

It is a grand privilege just to be brought into existence. It is an infinitely higher privilege to be brought into existence and then to be given a mind, so that you can have an awareness of your own existence and a relationship with your Creator. But far, far above the wonder of simply receiving life as a sentient being is being selected to be holy and blameless before God.

Nothing in this life is more discouraging for the Christian than sin. So what could be more encouraging than the message that you are destined for holiness and blamelessness? Paul is so grateful for that. And the Bible is crystal clear that we are to be grateful beyond words for that. Yet so many of us struggle to appreciate it.

In fact, not only do we often fail to be grateful, but we get upset and unhappy about it. When we hear about election and God choosing us it is supposed to cause great joy, but instead it causes distress, arguments and doubt. Paul says the proper response is to bless God, but there are many whose natural response is not to think of God as being worthy of blessing. Sadly many people think God is worthy of cursing because of this doctrine.

How could something designed to bring such joy and admiration for God backfire and produce such consternation and questioning of God? Perhaps it is that we can’t appreciate being chosen, because we think everyone should have been chosen. We don’t think He chose enough people. When God says that He chose us, our first thought is that if we are saved because He chose us, then others are lost just because He didn’t choose them (even though Scripture is clear that the lostness of the lost is their own doing, and the God desires that they not be lost).

Application: What are the implications for daily living?

Do you want this doctrine to bring you joy and thanksgiving? Think of it in the way that it is presented in this passage. There is nothing here about the lost. Discipline your mind not to speculate about that. Read verse.4 and think only about what it says, not what it doesn’t. Back in eternity past, prior to the Creation, God, in His infinitely wise, perfect mind decided to bring many things into existence. Everything He was to create, of course, would be good. But some things were better than others. So God’s thoughts went this way. “I’m going to create billions and trillions of different things with varying degrees of goodness. But one of the things I’m going to make is going to be holy and blameless. His name is going to be...(fill in your name) “I’m going to make another being who will be holy and blameless in my sight, and her name will be...(Fill your name in).

Application: What are the implications for daily living?

Stop thinking about others who are lost. Stop wondering how that fits with free will. Stop figuring a way to harmonize it with something else. Leave all that in God's hands. He can sort all that out. He can pull this off without violating justice or being unloving or unfair or overriding free will or doing anything wrong. Don't ask me how right now, don't try to figure it out right now, just trust Him. Trust Him with all things.

Just think this and this only: Before the creation, when God planned everything out, He said, "I'm going to make a bunch of things with varying degrees of glory and wonder for My own pleasure and near the top – among the most wonderfully good of all the things I will create (fill in your name). I intend to make a being of surpassing beauty and goodness – rescued from evil and made holy and blameless in My sight. And his name will be (your name)."

If we could just stop there in our thinking without second-guessing God on how He pulls it all off it would revolutionize our worship. For one thing, my guess is the singing would be twice as loud and ten times as heartfelt. What would it do to the intensity of your prayer life? What effect would it have in battling temptation? How many notches higher would your level of joy and contentment be?

Most of you understand that those people who are believers and who persevere to the end are loved by God with a love that has no end. But did you realize that as a believer you are also loved by God with a love that had no beginning? Did you know God never began loving you? Prior to your even existing, way back in eternity past, through God's foreknowledge He loved you for eternity.