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BLESSED, WE BLESS

Ephesians 1:3

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Ephesians Lesson 2

Blessed, We Bless
Ephesians 1:3

I read recently of a treasure-hunting company that found a sunken galleon with hundreds of millions of dollars worth of coins. Of course, no sooner had they announced their find than some government claimed that the treasure really belonged to them, not to the finders. But, I've often thought that searching for lost treasures would be a fun job.

The Christian life is really a treasure hunt as you progressively discover the vast wealth that already is yours because you are now in Christ. From the moment He saves you, God bequeaths on you, as Paul puts it, "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ." Verse 3 is the opening topic phrase of a long sentence (in Greek) that runs down through verse 14. Some Greek scholars have called it one of the most complex Greek sentences in the entire Bible to sort out, as Paul piles phrase upon phrase to explain what some of those spiritual blessings are.

Throughout eternity we will go on discovering the riches of God's grace, which He lavished upon us (1:7-8). We are spiritually rich in Christ beyond our capacity to imagine. One of the most important things for your spiritual growth is to ask God to open the eyes of your heart so that you will know "what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints" (1:17).

But, why does God lavish His blessings upon us? Is it all about us or is it about Him? One of the most important truths in Scripture to grasp is that God is passionate about His glory. John Piper explains this in many of his books, but especially in *God's Passion for His Glory* [Crossway Books], half of which is a reproduction of Jonathan Edwards' treatise, "The End for Which God Created the World." It is *not* an easy book to read (I have read it twice now), but it is worth grappling with! Edwards argues that because God is infinitely perfect, He *must* seek His own glory, because to seek the glory of any being or thing less perfect than God would be sin. For any creature, self-glorification is sin. But, because God is

infinitely perfect, He would be unrighteous if He did *not* glory in that which is perfect, namely, in Himself.

So, why does God bless us with every spiritual blessing in Christ? It is so that we may in turn bless and glorify Him, the giver of every good and perfect gift. Blessed by God, we bless God.

Because God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, we should bless God.

To bless God as we should, we need to understand how He has blessed us.

1. God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.

Paul will unpack that idea in 1:4-14, but today we will just seek to understand and apply verse 3.

A. The gospel begins with God, not with us.

From cover to cover, the Bible is a book that reveals to us who God is. It begins (Gen. 1:1), "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." It ends with the Revelation of Jesus Christ, the supreme manifestation of God to us. As He told His disciples (John 14:9), "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" Because God is a spirit, invisible in the brightness of His glory from our fallen human eyes, we cannot know Him through human philosophy or intuition. If we are to know Him, He must reveal Himself to us, which He has done in Christ.

The Bible shows that we must be radically God-centered. As Paul exclaims (Rom. 11:36), "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen." And so Paul begins this magnificent unfolding of the gospel by being radically God-centered. Note the repetition of God and Jesus Christ in these opening verses: "Paul, an apostle of *Christ Jesus* by the will of *God*"; "in *Christ Jesus*: (1:1). "Grace to you and peace from *God our Father* and the *Lord Jesus Christ*" (1:2). "Blessed be the *God and Father* of our *Lord Jesus Christ*..." (1:3). He continues (1:4), "*He* chose us," (1:5) "*He* predestined us," "through *Christ Jesus* to *Himself*," "*His* will," (1:6) "to the praise of the glory of *His* grace, which *He* freely bestowed on us in the *Beloved*." Work your way through the rest of this long sentence and notice how radically God-centered it is.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones observes (*God's Ultimate Purpose* [Baker], p. 13), "Much of the trouble in the Church today is due to the fact that we are so subjective, so interested in ourselves, so egocentric. That is the peculiar error of this present century." He goes on to argue that the message of the Bible is to bring us back to God, to humble us before Him, so that we can see our true relationship to Him in all of His glory. He argues (*ibid.*), "We must not start by examining ourselves and our needs microscopically; we must start with God, and forget ourselves."

When God opens your eyes to get a glimpse of Him in His glory, majesty, holiness, power, and wisdom, like Isaiah, you are instantly humbled in the dust to cry out (Isa. 6:5), "Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." That glimpse of God shows you why you need the Savior. So we must begin by some understanding of who God is.

B. The gospel begins with God blessing us.

You do not understand the gospel if you think that you can bring anything or contribute anything to God in order to gain salvation. This is one of the greatest errors that keeps people from receiving God's blessing of salvation: they think that they must be a good person or do some sort of good works in order to earn a place in heaven. But the good news is that you come to God just as you are and receive *everything* from Him as His gift. That is the meaning of the word, *grace*. If you do anything to deserve it or earn it, it is not grace. God's grace means that He justifies the *ungodly*, on the basis of faith alone, not works (Rom. 4:4-5).

This goes back to the matter of God's glory. If we could contribute anything toward our salvation, then we could share in the glory. But, if it all comes from God on the basis of His grace, then He gets all the glory. The giver gets the glory. So we can only come to God empty-handed, deserving His judgment, but pleading for grace through the merits of Jesus Christ. God is pleased to pour out the blessings of salvation on those who acknowledge that they do not deserve it. Then He gets all the glory. So we must come to God as those who are needy, asking Him to bless us.

C. The God who blesses us with salvation is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Why does Paul use this designation of God in this context? (He uses a similar phrase in 2 Cor. 1:3; see, also, 1 Pet. 1:3.) I'm sure that there is much more here than I understand, but in part, Paul uses this designation to focus on the fact that while He was on this earth, the Lord Jesus, the eternal Son of God, depended on the Father for His every need. In His humanity, Jesus knew the Father and leaned upon His all-sufficiency for every need to show us how we should live in dependence on the Father.

Also, Jesus is the one and only mediator between the Father and us (1 Tim. 2:5). All that we receive from God, we must receive through the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ becomes our heavenly Father when we come to Him through His Son. The Son of God is eternally God, but He laid aside His glory and took on Himself the form of a servant, becoming obedient to death on the cross to secure our salvation (Phil. 2:5-11). Thus all spiritual blessings come to us through the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, through the obedience of the Son of God to His God and Father.

This means that there is no salvation outside of Jesus Christ. If good people can earn their salvation by their good deeds, then the Son of God did not need to leave His glory in heaven and come in obedience to the Father to die on the cross. Any system of salvation apart from Christ and the cross is false. It diminishes what Jesus Christ did for us, shedding His blood to secure all the blessings of heaven for us, even while we were yet sinners.

D. God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, not necessarily with every physical or material blessing on earth.

A modern heresy teaches that it is God's will for all of His children to be healthy and wealthy in this life. The false prophets of this cult live in huge mansions, drive expensive cars, and indulge themselves in every flagrant luxury that they can, luring their gullible followers with promises of the same. It is completely anti-Christian! While God promises to meet our basic physical needs, He knows that our deepest need is spiritual, to be rightly related to

Him. So He blesses us with every *spiritual* blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.

Our lives on this earth are short and uncertain, at best. But, we will spend eternity either with God in heaven or in hell under His judgment. As the story of the rich man and Lazarus illustrates (Luke 16:19-31), it is far better to live in dire poverty and suffering in this life and have eternal riches in heaven than to live in luxury in this life and spend eternity in the agonizing flames of hell. Or, as the apostle John puts it after telling us not to love the world or the things in the world (1 John 2:17), "The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever."

You may be thinking, "But isn't this impractical? What good are spiritual blessings to me if I can't live comfortably in this life? Isn't this just 'pie-in-the-sky-when-you-die'? Aren't those who focus on heavenly blessings not much earthly good?"

Hardly! In fact, precisely the opposite is true. C. S. Lewis saw this when he wrote, "The Christians who did most for the present world were precisely those who thought most of the next. It is since Christians have begun thinking less of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this. Aim at heaven and you get earth thrown in; aim at earth and you get neither." (Source in Lewis unknown; cited on: <http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/sermonmanuscripts.html>.)

Or, as Paul commands (Col. 3:1-2), "Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth." Our treasures or blessings are all in Christ, in the heavenly places. Our greatest need is spiritual and we have every spiritual blessing in Him.

If you're still thinking, "But this is so impractical," keep in mind that when Paul wrote this, he was in prison. Every time he moved he could hear and feel the heavy chains clanking around his wrist and his ankle. He could have been depressed and complaining about his circumstances. He could have said, "I don't need *spiritual* blessings right now! I need to get out of this stinking cell and have my *physical* needs met!"

But, instead, he breaks into this doxology, praising God for giving him every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. If understanding those blessings could sustain Paul in a Roman prison and give him the buoyant hope that he exudes in all of his letters, then this stuff is about as practical as you can get! It will sustain you in whatever difficulties you face.

- E. God's blessing us with every spiritual blessing in Christ shows us the all-sufficiency of Christ for our every need.

All blessings come to us in the person of Jesus Christ. Apart from Him, we can do nothing (John 15:5), but in Him we have every spiritual blessing. In Him "are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge," and "in Him you have been made complete" (Col. 2:3, 10). God's "divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence" (2 Pet. 1:3).

Either these promises are pious platitudes that are of no practical value (as "Christian psychology" often insinuates), or these and many other Scriptures show us that God has given us in the person and work of Jesus Christ all that we need to face life's problems. He has given us His Holy Spirit to indwell us and to produce in us the fruit of the Spirit: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Gal. 5:22-23). These qualities describe an emotionally or psychologically whole person. Most of those qualities have a relational aspect, so that the person with these qualities will be able to get along harmoniously with others. These qualities are promised to every person who walks by the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:16).

In other words, God does not say, "My Spirit will produce love in all of you, except for those who have never been loved and who have an anger problem. You'll need therapy to work through your anger." Or, "I will give joy to everyone except those who are clinically depressed. They may need Prozac if they want My joy." He does not say, "Every Christian can experience My peace, except for those with an anxiety disorder. They're going to need the insights of Carl Rogers to get through this thing!"

I'm not saying that counseling is wrong or that the use of psychotropic drugs is always wrong (although they should not be the

first resort). I am saying that psychology has infiltrated the church and its effect has not been to direct hurting people to their spiritual blessings in Christ, but rather to human wisdom on how to cope with trials apart from reliance on God and repentance from sin. I have heard supposedly Christian psychologists say that to give Bible verses to a hurting person or to tell him to trust in God is worthless and even cruel advice! A Christian counselor should direct you to the all-sufficient Lord Jesus Christ and your spiritual riches in Him.

And I'm saying that before you take a drug to get over your problem, make sure that you have allowed your problem to drive you to greater dependence on Christ as your all in all. I read last week the story of a Christian woman suffering from severe anxiety and depression. Without even probing for the causes of her problems, her pastor told her to go to a doctor and get an antidepressant. She followed his advice and felt better within a few weeks. But she did not confront the sin in her life that was at the root of her troubles. It was only years later when she started attending a church where sin is called sin and people are held accountable that she saw her own sin, confessed it, and began to be truly healed in Christ. (For more on Christians and psychology, I have two articles on the church web site.)

God directs trials into our lives so that we will learn not to trust in ourselves, but in God and His mighty power (2 Cor. 1:8-9). He uses trials to make us examine ourselves in a deeper way, so that we will root out any selfishness, pride, or sin. If we try to solve our problems without digging deeper into the treasure house of our riches in Christ, we have missed God's purpose in sending those trials. So make it your lifelong quest to understand and be satisfied with Jesus Christ and all that God has made Him for your soul.

F. These blessings are for everyone that personally knows the Lord Jesus Christ.

Note the emphasis in these verses on "us": He has blessed *us* in Christ (1:3). He chose *us* in Him (1:4). He predestined *us* to adoption as sons (1:5). He freely bestowed His grace on *us* in the Beloved (1:6). In Him, *we* have redemption and forgiveness according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished on *us* (1:7-8). He made known to *us* the mystery of His will (1:9).

Who is "the us"? It is all of us who have come to know God's abundant grace through faith in Jesus Christ. In other words, these blessings are not just for some super-saints. Rather, they are God's gracious gift to every child whom He adopts into His family. While some of His children do not know and enjoy the blessings of their inheritance in Christ, they are just as much heirs as those that do enjoy these riches. So every Christian should diligently seek to discover, enjoy, and apply these vast riches in Christ Jesus.

To the extent that you understand and enjoy these riches, you will bless God for them.

2. Because God has blessed us with every blessing in Christ, we should bless God.

Paul uses the word "blessed" in two senses in this verse. When he says that God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing, he means that God has freely bestowed His good gifts on us in the person and work of His Son on our behalf.

But when we bless God, we cannot give Him anything that He lacks, because He has no lack. So our blessing God means to speak well of Him, or to praise Him for His glorious attributes and for His gracious actions toward us in Christ (Ps. 103:1-5). We thank Him for all that He is to us and for all that He has done for us and for all that He promises yet to do for us throughout eternity. We bless Him by joyfully giving back to Him what He has first given to us, namely, our time, our talent, and our treasure.

When my children were little, they liked to bless me with some sort of gift on my birthday or at Christmas. Where did they get the money to buy me a gift? They got it from dear old dad! I gave them what they needed and they took my gift and returned it to me as their gift or blessing. I blessed them, but they also blessed me by their gifts.

So we bless God by offering up "a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name." We bless God when we "do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased" (Heb. 13:15-16). We bless God when our hearts overflow with joy in Him because of His abundant grace towards us in Christ.

Conclusion

Martyn Lloyd-Jones states (*ibid.*, p. 49), “there is no more true test of our Christian profession than to discover how prominent this note of praise and thanksgiving is in our life.” To what extent do you find praise, adoration, thankfulness, and joy in God welling to the surface in your daily life? I’m not talking about glibly going around saying, “Praise the Lord” all the time. I am talking about heartfelt joy and satisfaction in Christ that floods into your soul. It should not be a rare experience!

If it is not as frequent as it ought to be, spend time meditating on Scriptures such as Ephesians 1 or Romans 8, which tell of the spiritual riches that are ours in Christ. Meditate on the Psalms, which are filled with the praises of God in the midst of life’s difficult trials. Allow your trials to drive you to a deeper experience of the all-sufficiency of Jesus Christ for your soul. Make it your life-long quest to “count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus [your] Lord” (Phil. 3:8). Being blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, bless the God who has so blessed you!

Application Questions

1. Why is it important to view trials as an opportunity to discover more of the riches of Christ for your soul? Why is grumbling in trials wrong (Phil. 2:14-16)?
2. Some will argue, “If psychology helps people with their problems, what’s wrong with that?” Your answer? (See my article, “Christians and Psychology: Some Common Questions Answered.”)
3. Why is the “health and wealth” gospel heretical?
4. When (if ever) should a Christian use prescribed psychotropic drugs? What guidelines apply?

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