

Ephesians 1:3-14 (Part 1: vv. 3-6)

Blessed Be the God of Grace

Following his Trinitarian salutation of grace and peace, the apostle Paul breaks forth in an extended outburst of praise to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is contained in one magnificent sentence in Greek running from **v. 3 to v. 14**. An introductory thanksgiving to God, which focuses upon God's gracious work through Jesus Christ in the lives of the saints Paul is addressing, is typical in Paul's epistles. However, here in the epistle to the Ephesians Paul begins with a simple blessing of God and then heaps one phrase upon another each one building upon the other towards a glorious crescendo of praise for the glory of God's grace in Christ Jesus.

Paul takes a traditional prayer of blessing from Jewish worship and fills it full of Christ, which is the theme of Paul's epistle. God is summing up all things, whether in heaven or on earth, in Jesus Christ (**v. 10**). Therefore, Paul blesses God for all the work He has accomplished for His elect people in Christ. The cosmic blessings of God come to you only "in Christ," a phrase which is not only central to Paul's theology, but to the epistle itself (**used in every verse of your English Bibles**). The blessings of God are not hidden in some small corner of the earth nor are they limited to one small measurement of time. Rather, Paul blesses God for His blessing us from eternity to eternity, which includes the whole created order of the heavens and the earth (**v. 3, 10**). Our blessings in Christ are all-inclusive of everything in creation. Paul told the Romans, "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us **all things**?" (**Rom. 8:32**). We haven't simply inherited a small track of land in Palestine, but the fulfillment of Abraham is now ours in Christ, which Paul explains in Romans 4:

For the promise to Abraham or to his descendents that he would be **heir of the world** was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith (**Rom. 4:13**).

And as Paul explained to the Galatians:

If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendents, heirs according to promise (**Gal. 3:29**).

The whole created order is being summed up in Jesus Christ, who is God's firstborn of a new creation, and we who are in Christ Jesus are new creatures in which the old things have passed away and the new things have come. We are now heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ. Every blessing that we have received from God has been effected in and through Christ.

Though it is impossible to discern a tightly knitted structure to Paul's blessing, he clearly sees the blessings of those who are in Christ as the sovereign work of the Triune God. Paul sums up the work of each member of the Trinity with the phrase "to the praise of the glory of His grace" (**vv. 6, 12, 14**). First, our spiritual blessings originate in the Father who is "our Father" in Christ Jesus (**v. 2**), who has blessed us (**v. 3**), chosen us (**v. 4**), predestined us (**v. 5**), lavished His grace upon us (**vv. 6, 8**), revealed the mystery of His plan and purpose for the creation (**vv. 9-10**) and accomplishes all things in accordance with His will (**v. 11**). Second, these spiritual blessings are given to us only within the sphere of Christ who is mentioned no fewer than 15 times within the first 14 verses of Paul's epistle. Third, our blessings are "spiritual" or of the Holy Spirit (**v. 3**) whose presence is stamped upon every blessing given to us in Christ and in whom those blessings are sealed upon us as God's mark of possession and our inheritance (**vv. 13-14**). All

three members of the Trinity work in perfect harmony and order to accomplish God's foreordained will and purpose set before the foundation of the world.

Following the work of each member of the Trinity is a phase, which reminds us that all God's blessings are theocentric in nature. In **vv. 6, 12, 14** Paul concludes the work of God for us in Christ as being accomplished "to the praise of the glory of His grace." Truly, as Paul exclaims in Rom. 11:

For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be glory forever. Amen. (**Rom. 11:36**).

The praise begins (**v. 3**) and ends (**vv. 6, 12, 14**) in God. God is absolutely sovereign over every inch of creation and He is working all things according to His sovereign plan and purpose (**vv. 5, 9, 11**). Very simply, He ordains everything that comes to pass and He is accomplishing His perfect plan for His ultimate praise and glory. In all of this you remain an unworthy and undeserving recipient of the blessings of God. For Paul reminds us that "**while** we were dead in our transgressions, God made us alive together with Christ" (**2:5**). His goal in all His work is to glorify Himself in all things, including the details of your salvation in Christ.

As is typical of Paul's introductory thanksgiving, he introduces themes early in the prayer of thanksgiving which will become central to the epistle itself. God has chosen us so that we would be His holy and blameless people (**v. 4**). He has lavished His grace upon us and predestined us "to become conformed to the image of his Son" (**cf. Rom. 8:29**). We have been chosen, predestined according to God's will and plan so that we might walk in a manner worthy of our calling (**4:1**). We are the Light in the Lord that we might walk as children of Light (**5:8**). We have been sealed by the Holy Spirit (**1:13**) so that we might no longer grieve the Holy Spirit (**4:30**), that we might keep the unity of the Spirit (**4:3**), that we might be filled with the Spirit (**5:18**), that we might take up the sword of the Spirit (**6:17**) and that we might pray continually in the Spirit (**6:18**). In the Spirit we have received the guarantee of our eschatological inheritance (**1:14**) which transforms our life (**5:5**). We who have been predestined for adoption according to God's will (**1:5**) and have been given insight into the mystery of that will (**1:9, 11**) now walk in accord with that will (**5:17; 6:6**) and we who have heard the truth (**1:13**) will speak and do the truth (**4:15, 21, 25; 6:14**). In union with Jesus Christ, the life of Christ now produces His righteousness in and through us.

Vv. 3-6 -- God the Father

God is blessed because He has blessed us. Paul describes God's blessing with three prepositional phrases: "with every spiritual blessing," "in the heavenly places," and "in Christ."

"With Every Spiritual Blessing" -- Paul uses the term "spiritual" not to refer to our inner spirits or our subjective, hidden life. Rather, the term refers to the blessings which result from the presence and work of the Holy Spirit who is applying the work of Jesus Christ to us by uniting us to Christ (**vv. 13-14; 5:18-19**). We presently experience the blessings of our heavenly inheritance through the work of the Holy Spirit (**cf. Gal. 3:2-3, 14** -- the blessing of Abraham). The Life of the Spirit is the gospel -- the application of the life of Christ (**Rom. 8:1-4**) which produces the life of Christ in us (**Rom. 8:11**). Jesus promised us:

16 "And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; 17 *that is* the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, *but* you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you. 18 "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you (**John 14:16-18**).

26 “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you (**John 14:26**).

26 “When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, *that is* the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness of Me (**John 15:26**).

“But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. 14 “He shall glorify Me; for He shall take of Mine, and shall disclose *it* to you. 15 “All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said, that He takes of Mine, and will disclose *it* to you (**John 16:13-15**).

The Holy Spirit has come not bring attention to Himself but as the Silent Shepherd He has come to give us the life of Christ by taking what belongs to Christ and glorifying Him in us. Therefore, it is through the person and work of the Holy Spirit that we have received every promised blessing of God in and through our union with Jesus Christ. Everything that God has promised His people from the time of Adam, Abraham, Moses, and David has now been given to us and is our present experience through the agency of the Holy Spirit.

"In the Heavenly Places" -- the realm or sphere or place or locale of our blessings through the agency of the Holy Spirit is in the heavens.

In this present creation (this age), heaven and earth exist as two perspectives of the one creation, one an invisible perspective and the other a visible perspective. Heaven, or the invisible realm, should not be thought of as "occupying a separate place off at a distance from the earth or the outer realm of space. Rather, heaven and earth refer to the same spatial creation much like the analogy of the body and the soul. The heavenly realm is the same area of the earth but it is invisible to the eye of man, unless the Lord opens His eyes to see the invisible or spiritual world all around him (cf. **Gen. 28:16-17; 2 Kings 6:17; Isa. 6:1**).

The invisible realm of creation, called heaven, is distinctly associated with God's presence. It is the place where God dwells, high and lofty sitting upon His throne. The goal of creation, given to Adam and latter republished in the tabernacle and temple, was for the earth to be a visible reproduction of heaven. This was also the goal of man himself who was created in God's image and who was promised to enter into God's glory. Adam was to fashion the world, by tending and guarding the garden of Eden, to be the sanctuary of God. Adam was to take dominion over the creation by shaping, tending, and expanding the garden until the whole earth was filled with a sanctuary of the glorious presence of God. However, since Adam failed to fulfill His responsibility of dominion over the creation, the second Adam has now come to take dominion over the world (**vv. 20-23**) until the fullness of God's glory presence fills the whole creation which is finally accomplished in the consummation of this age (**Rev. 21-22**).

At the consummation of this age, the age to come will remove all distinctions between the visible and invisible realms of creation. In the age to come, God's heavenly glory will finally be completely unveiled for all eyes to see all creation will be transformed and enveloped by His glorious presence in the new heavens and new earth. All separation from God's glory presence, which was pictured by the cherubim with a flaming sword protecting the entrance into the garden and by the veils that separated the holy place from the holy of holies, will be finally removed. That heavenly realm will then not only be where God dwells but where all who are in Christ will dwell before Him throughout all eternity. Paul speaks of the distinctions between this age and the age to come in **v. 21**.

In Paul's understanding of the work of Jesus Christ, the age to come is not limited to the future but has already broken in upon this present age so that there is now an overlap of the two ages. Remember the veil that separated the holy place from the holy of holies was split in two from top to bottom forevermore desecrating and removing the earthly temple as a type of God's presence among His people. Now in the new temple, the veil has been fully removed so that we might now draw near to God (**Heb. 10:19-25**).

In other words, the promised heavenly life to come is now our present experience in Christ. We have received the promised blessings of the future heavenly realm of full access into God's presence through the agency of the Holy Spirit who has united us into Jesus Christ (**cf. 1:20; 2:6; Col. 1:13; 3:1-3**). These blessings are not merely stored in the heavens as our treasured inheritance. Rather, through the agency of the Holy Spirit and our union with Jesus Christ the blessings of the life to come, our heavenly state, has already come upon us. Heaven itself is now our present reality while we remain in an age that is passing away in Christ. Our heavenly blessings, which belong to the life of the Spirit and our union with Christ (all three of these things refer to the same thing) are like the cloud by day and the fire by night which led Israel in their wilderness experience. As aliens and pilgrims of this present wilderness journey, the Holy Spirit is God's promised Immanuel presence, which leads and guides us until we reach the full possession of the heavenly Promised Land. But the Holy Spirit has given us our Sabbath rest in Jesus Christ "before" we have fully rested in the Promised Land. In other words, the Promised Land has come to us in the wilderness so that in our pilgrimage we will be assured of our full inheritance.

"In Christ" -- Finally, as we have said, this blessing of our heavenly life through the Spirit is our only in union with Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is not only the means of God's blessing us, but He is the realm or the place wherein we are blessed. It is in our incorporation into Jesus Christ as our federal head that everything that belongs to Him is now our present experience through the Spirit. In other words, the blessings of the realm where God dwells is not only ours through the work of Jesus Christ but also by our being incorporated into the person of the exalted and ascended Jesus Christ, who is Himself in the heavenly realm.

Therefore, you have been richly blessed by God on account of the person and work of Jesus Christ so that the very life and existence of the exalted and ascended Jesus Christ in heaven is now your blessed life and experience through the person and work of the Holy Spirit who has united you to Jesus Christ. In the Spirit, the life of Christ is now your life and everything that is true of Christ is not only your treasured inheritance, but by the life of the Spirit it is your present experience. That is only the beginning of why God is to be forever blessed.

Amen!

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