



## Ephesians: The One New Temple of God

### Praise Be to the God and Father... Ephesians 1:3-14

<sup>NIV</sup> **Ephesians 1:3**...Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. <sup>4</sup> For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love <sup>5</sup> he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will-- <sup>6</sup> to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. <sup>7</sup> In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace <sup>8</sup> that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. <sup>9</sup> And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, <sup>10</sup> to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment-- to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. <sup>11</sup> In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, <sup>12</sup> in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. <sup>13</sup> And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, <sup>14</sup> who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession-- to the praise of his glory.

Recently, I received an alumni letter from Dallas Theological Seminary. In the letter, there is a great story told by Swindoll. I thought for purposes of our discussion that I would read it to you.

I have a friend whose daughter is into the whole ecological scene. Thankfully, she married a man of like passion, so it's a good match.

Not long ago the two of them, along with their preschool son were driving, up the East Coast, not far from the Atlantic. They came upon a sign that intrigued them: Naturist Camp: 3 Miles, with an arrow pointing toward the ocean. Thinking that they might meet up with some new friends who love the natural world, they turned. A couple of miles along the two-lane road, they looked into the distance and were shocked to see three people on bicycles, riding toward them...totally nude.

Realizing their mistake, they were suddenly embarrassed that their son would see the oncoming bikers before they could turn around. The dad slammed on the brakes, tried his best to do a quick U-turn as he and his wife tried to divert their son's attention. Neither worked. The boy was staring intently while his dad was steering intensely.

Both parents were amazed when they heard their boy burst forth, "Look, Mom and Dad - none of them were wearing safety helmets!"

Now, that's what I call staying focused.

I like that because what we are trying to do this morning is stay focused on Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians. We have looked already at a lot of introductory material and sometimes that becomes a distraction. You will remember that last time we talked at length about the structure of the Epistle to the Ephesians. We talked about how the book was naturally divided into two parts. We called the first part the doctrinal part and the second half of Ephesians we called the ethical part.

Another way to look at it is that the first half of Ephesians is about what God has done for us in Christ, while the second half is about how we ought to live in light of what God has done for us. We called those two parts the indicative and the imperative.

What I want to do this morning is narrow the scope of our study. I want to focus, for a few moments, on the structure of the first half of Paul's letter because it can also be divided into two parts. The section we are going to concentrate on this morning is Ephesians 1:3-14 and I think it is fair to say it is one long, continuous praise directed toward God. That should seem fairly obvious especially since it starts with the words: **Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ**

Now, the second part of the first half of Ephesians runs from 1:15 through the end of chapter 3. It would be fair to call it an extended prayer, or at very least, it would be fair to call it the content of what Paul was praying for the Ephesians.

Notice how Ephesians 1:15 starts out:

<sup>NIV</sup> **Ephesians 1:15**...For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, <sup>16</sup> I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. <sup>17</sup> I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. <sup>18</sup> I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints...

Then if you will look at the end of the section you will notice how Paul ends it.

Look at verse Ephesians 3:14.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Ephesians 3:14**...For this reason I kneel before the Father, <sup>15</sup> from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. <sup>16</sup> I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, <sup>17</sup> so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, <sup>18</sup> may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, <sup>19</sup> and to know this love that surpasses knowledge-- that you may be filled

to the measure of all the fullness of God. <sup>20</sup> Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, <sup>21</sup> to him be glory in the church and in Christ.

Now, what all this means to us practically is that the structure of Ephesians 1-3 is fairly simple to keep in mind.

First, there is a greeting in verses 1-2. Second, there is the offering to God of praise for what He has done for us in Christ (Ephesians 1:3-14). Third, there is prayer to God that He will enlighten the eyes of our hearts to fully comprehend all that He has done for us in Christ (Ephesians 1:15-3:21).

You can see how after Paul has gone through the first three chapters it is natural that he would want to work out the implications of how we should live in light of what had been discussed and that is exactly what he does in chapters 4-6.

Now, with all that in mind. Let's look together at Ephesians 1:3-14. Last week, I gave you a homework assignment to look at all the places where the phrase **"in Christ"** or **"in Him"** or anything like that appear. I asked you to try to connect those phrases to the blessing that is attached. What did you find?

What we find in Ephesians 1:3-14 is that Paul blesses God. Another way to say it is that Paul praises God. But why? He praises God because God has already blessed us with every spiritual blessing. That leads us to ask the question, **"What does Paul mean by spiritual blessings?"** He could mean blessings that are related to the Holy Spirit and certainly Paul is going to raise that point at the end of this section. That is the position that Charles Hodge takes when he writes:

These blessings are spiritual not merely because they pertain to the soul, but because they are derived from the Holy Spirit, whose presence and influence are the great blessing purchased by Christ. (*Ephesians by Hodge, pg. 28.*)

Or it could mean **“spiritual blessings”** as compared to material or earthly blessings and that would make sense in light of the fact that Paul says we have received these spiritual blessings in **“heavenly places”**. That helps in one sense but in another it leads us to ask the question what does Paul mean by **“heavenly places”**? In the Greek New Testament the word **“places”** is not there. It is inferred by translators and it may be right. It may also be that Paul meant **“with regard to heavenly things”** or even **“the things of heaven”**. If that were the case then Paul meant:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all of the spiritual blessings we need concerning the things of heaven in Christ

I like that. But notice he has given us that blessing in Christ. It is in Christ's finished work that we have received the blessing. It is not in any work which we have wrought. But that, in turn, leads us to ask what elements make up this full spiritual blessing that we have received in Christ? That's the question Paul answers in the rest of the section. We know that from the phrase **“just as”**. It can be taken to be either the cause of our blessings or even the manner in which we are blessed. So, we could understand Paul to be saying, **“God has blessed us with all of the spiritual blessings we need concerning the things of heaven in Christ because of the following things”**...or he may be saying, **“The way in which God has blessed us with all of the spiritual blessings we need concerning the things of heaven in Christ is in the following manner.”**

The first thing that makes up a part of the spiritual blessing that we have received **“in Christ”** is that we have been chosen.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Ephesians 1:4**...For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.

Obviously, that phrase **“He chose us”** causes a good deal of the Christian church a problem. The theological term for it is “election”. Some people deny **“election”** altogether. Others deny that it is really the choice of God; they argue that it is God responding to the choice that He knows we will make.

I like the way James Montgomery Boice says it:

...they suppose that if God elects individuals to salvation, as this verse and others clearly declare that He does, then the value of human choice is destroyed and the motivation for a holy life vanishes. This is not what happens. Instead of destroying the value of human choices, election gives us the capacity for choosing that we did not possess previously as unregenerate persons.

Before we were made alive in Christ we had a human will. But it was directed against God, not toward Him. We could choose, but we always chose wrongly. When we were made alive in Christ we received a new nature, according to which God, who before was undesirable to us, now became desirable, and we willingly submitted ourselves to Him. (*Ephesians by Boice, pg.10*)

Notice, there are three elements involved in this verse. First, we were chosen **“in Christ”**. Secondly, we were chosen **“before the foundation of the world”**, and thirdly **“we were chosen that we might be holy and blameless before Him”**. All three ideas are important.

First, we were chosen **“in Christ”**. That means that our having been chosen is not really about anything we have done, it is instead about what Christ has done. That is important to remember when you find yourself going inward trying to figure out why it is that God graciously chose you. Even the stoic Calvin warned people regarding too much reflection on the issue. Listen to what he said:

First, then, when they inquire into predestination, let them remember that they are penetrating into the recesses of the divine wisdom, where he who rushes forward securely and confidently, instead of satisfying his curiosity will enter in inextricable labyrinth. For it is not right that man should with impunity pry into things which the Lord has been pleased to conceal within himself...But if we are elected in him, we cannot find the certainty of our election in ourselves; and not even in God the Father, if we look at him apart from the Son. Christ, then, is the mirror in which we ought, and in which, without deception, we may contemplate our election. (*Institutes by Calvin, Book 3, Chapters 21 & 24*)

Do you get what he is saying. He’s saying that if we try to understand all of the elements of divine election we will be delving into a labyrinth from which we will never escape. Secondly, he’s saying that when we do contemplate our election we should not do so focusing on us but rather on Christ. That is where our confidence in election comes, not in us but rather in Him.

Returning to verse 4, we see that we were chosen before the world began. That means that we were chosen apart from any works that we had done, good or bad. We were chosen not because of who we were but because of who Christ was and what Christ did.

Finally in verse 4 it says we were chosen to stand holy and blameless before Him. I think that is particularly important. We were chosen with the result that we would be holy and blameless before Him. We weren’t chosen because we were holy and blameless or even because of a decision that we would make; we were

chosen because God wanted us to stand before Him in the righteousness of Christ, pure and holy. Now, I want you to consider the importance of that from two perspectives. First, we were chosen in order that we might become holy and blameless before God. That implies that before we are converted we are not, in fact, already holy and blameless, which means that God's choosing us is not based upon any foreseen merit on our part.

But notice now the second aspect of being holy and blameless before Him. That is the purpose God had for choosing us in Christ. We ought to be taking our growth seriously. It is not enough to say we were chosen; we ought to strive with all of our being to grow in holiness. It is through the agency of Word and sacrament that has given us the tools to grow and we simply can no longer use the argument of election to excuse our sloth. Paul is already foreshadowing for his readers the direction he will go in the second half of Ephesians.

Now, look at verse 5.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Ephesians 1:4**...In love <sup>5</sup> he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will-- <sup>6</sup> to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

God in Christ predestined us to be adopted sons. He did that because of His kindness towards us. Now, think about the picture Paul is painting here. He is saying that once we were orphans, set adrift in a sea of sin. We were aliens separated from the faith of Israel. We were alone without hope in the world. But now everything is different. We have been brought into God's family. We have become the heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ. God not only now hears our

prayers but He hears them as His adopted children and He pours out His kindness on us.

But that is not the end of the spiritual blessings we have received.

**NIV Ephesians 1:7**...In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace <sup>8</sup> that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understand

Not only have we been chosen in Christ, and adopted in Him, we have also been redeemed from our sins through His precious blood. Now, there are two ways in which we can understand this passage. First, we have redemption which equals the forgiveness of sins or we can understand redemption and forgiveness of sin to be two related but different things.

Usually, the idea of redemption has to do with being purchased. In the ancient world, it was most often used in the context of being purchased out of slavery. For example, a slave could be redeemed out of slavery by the payment of a certain price. Obviously, because it is connected here with forgiveness, it means that we were redeemed from the slavery of sin but we were also redeemed from God's wrath. The instrument of redemption was the precious blood of Christ and the result of the redemption was that our sins were nailed to the cross and blotted out in the atoning work of Christ.

I think it is also clear how these two issues of redemption and forgiveness are associated with adoption. We have been redeemed from the slavery of sin and our sinful slate has been wiped clean but even more God has now declared us to be sons and daughters in Christ.

But not only has He chosen us in Christ, predestined us to adoption, and redeemed us from the penalty and power of sin, he has also revealed to us the deep mystery of His kind intention toward us. Look at verse 9.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Ephesians 1:9**...And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, <sup>10</sup> to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment-- to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

Now, I'm going to skip over this section lightly because we will be discussing it in much greater depth later in chapter 3. Suffice it for the moment to say that Paul thought the inclusion of Gentiles with Jews in the Church of God was an extraordinary event, an event that absolutely caught the world by surprise.

But he still has more to say about another element of the full spiritual blessing we have received in Christ. Look at verse 11.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Ephesians 1:11**...In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, <sup>12</sup> in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory

The idea in this passage is almost completely obscured in our translation. Most scholars agree that the idea is not that we have obtained an inheritance but rather that we have been made a part of God's inheritance. Now this idea is critical to understanding not only the next few verses but to understanding the rest of Ephesians as well. You can get a sense of what Paul is driving at by looking at other Old Testament verses that communicate the same idea.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Deuteronomy 14:2**...for you are a people holy to the LORD your God. Out of all the peoples on the face of the earth, the LORD has chosen you to be his treasured possession.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Malachi 3:17**...They will be mine," says the LORD Almighty, "in the day when I make up my treasured possession. I will spare them, just as in compassion a man spares his son who serves him.

You see throughout the Old Testament God spoke of the nation of Israel as His own inheritance, His own possession. What Paul is saying is that now this new people, the Gentile believers in Ephesus and throughout the world have been included into that select number of God's household. They have now been made a part of God's possession in the exact same way as all Jewish believers of all time.

That's what Paul means by noting the difference in verse 12 between **"we who were the first to hope in Christ"** and those in verse 13. I want to read verse 13, but first I want you to notice the difference in verse 12 between the **"we"**, and the **"you"** that Paul mentions in verse 13.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Ephesians 1:13**...And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, <sup>14</sup> who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession-- to the praise of his glory.

Do you see what Paul is saying? He's saying you Gentiles have also been made a part of God's inheritance. You have even been sealed with the Holy Spirit as a **"down-payment"** or pledge of your inclusion into God's inheritance and that

“**sealing**” with the Holy Spirit is looking forward to the day when God finally redeems or collects His own possession.

Now, Charles Hodge has rightly noted that a seal could be used for one of three different reasons: (1) it could signify that an object is true or genuine. *That is the way it is used when it appears on U.S. currency. You see the seal and you know that the money is guaranteed to be genuine.* (2) it could be used to mark a thing as one’s property. *That is the way it is used when something like a name plate is applied. An imprinted Bible, seals that Bible as a certain person’s property.* (3) it could be used to make something fast or secure. *That is the way the term is used in the gospels when the Sanhedrin sealed Jesus’ tomb or today when a court seals documents.*

But one of the unique differences between all of those uses and the way Paul uses the term here is that all of those uses are external. Paul is saying that we are sealed by the Holy Spirit and the idea is that we are internally sealed. During the next few weeks we’ll talk at length about specifically what Paul was trying to get across here and which one of these definitions most aptly applies.

I think you can see why Paul starts this section of with a blessing directed to God for all the wonderful spiritual blessings that He has given to us In Christ and they are not just a long list of blessings they are indicate that we have full spiritual blessing in Christ.

We have been chosen to be holy and blameless. We have been predestined to adoption as sons. We have been redeemed from the penalty and even the power of sin. We have been informed of God’s great work and we have been made a part of God’s inheritance. Finally we have been sealed with the Holy Spirit. I

think when we consider all that we have in Christ, our response has to be the same as Paul's, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ."

Any questions?

Let's pray.