

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

## To Bless and Be Blessed

### Ephesians 1:3

**Intro:** I have a small file cabinet sitting beside my desk at home and the bottom drawer has always been reserved for the notes from previous teachings. When we completed II Kings, I was faced with the dilemma of finding room for all of those notes. As of now, that drawer is chocker-block full of sermon notes covering the entire NT and a good portion of the OT historical books. That cabinet drawer represents nearly 1000 worship services held at Grace Chapel over the last 18 years and all of those services were conducted with various elements, all of which were important. There's the sermon, of course, but also the specific reading of the text, prayer and singing. Each element has value but when I think about our worship over all this time, I've come to see that one of the most important aspects of all of these various parts of worship is our corporate singing. This is because it's in the corporate act of singing that the congregation voices their praise to God. The sermon is important, we learn from it. But doctrine, if it is rightly understood, leads to praise. If we discover who God is and what He has done for us, we will praise Him!

Paul must have understood this as well because the majority of his letters begin early on with a hymn of praise and prayer to God. We know that Paul's letters tend to be divided into 2 sections: teaching and application or you could also say Christian faith and Christian life. Doctrine is followed by duty. But normally, long before he gets to the duty section, Paul rejoices in what God has done for us by praising Him. The Book of Romans reviews basic doctrine and praises God for it. II Cor is another example. We see the same thing in Galatians (briefly), Philippians, Colossians and others. Of all these, none is so overflowing with this initial praise to God for His great blessings as Ephesians.

This first half of ch1 is a remarkable section. Over the centuries, believers have reveled over it, gloried in it, wondered about it and even stumbled over it. To begin with, it's all one sentence in the original language-from v3 to v14. English translations usually break the words up to make it easier to read, but in the Greek Paul simply begins with a note of praise to God for every spiritual blessing and then keeps going, adding phrase upon phrase

and doctrine upon doctrine, as he lists these benefits in detail. This section has been called a magnificent gateway to the epistle or a golden chain of many links. But it's not just a panorama of color and movement that we're confronted with in these verses. We also meet with a vast display of doctrines. In fact, these doctrines are interconnected, which makes it difficult to decipher and analyze the paragraph.

Some commentators have noticed that the work of God the Father is mainly on display in v3-6, the work of the Lord Jesus Christ in v7-10 and the work of the Holy Spirit in v11-14. They've divided the paragraph along Trinitarian lines and this Trinitarian framework is probably the most helpful. Paul is saying that the blessings listed here come to us from God the Father but that they only become ours in Jesus Christ, and are applied to our lives and Christian experience by the Holy Spirit. We notice, for example, that God the Father is the subject of nearly every verb in the section, and that the phrase in Christ or in Him occurs throughout.

So, in the Greek, vs3-14 are 1 long sentence but there are some English translations that make v3 a sentence by itself. This is an appropriate approach because v3 actually declares the main theme of the entire epistle as well as highlights what is to follow. V3 says that God has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ and it calls believers to praise Him for it.

**3** – First off, Paul calls for a blessing to be offered to the Father. The idea behind the word Blessed is to be praised with worshipping love in the sense that believers are to recognize the Father's glory, honor and goodness and openly praise Him for it with hearts of gratitude and love.

The worship service isn't something to be skipped or endured until the sermon starts. You might not know every song; you might not like every song but every song is designed, chosen and offered to provide the congregation an opportunity to enter into and engage in the act of sacrificial praise to God with other like-minded believers. The song might not be in your style, in your range or in your key (if you have one) but it is in your lane because it speaks of the common experience of God's work in the believer's life. Paul told the church in Corinth that God loves a cheerful giver (II Cor 9:7). The context of that verse is centered on giving of our material blessings but it also legitimately applies to our giving of praise to God.

Now, the reason we are to bless (or praise) the Father is because He has already blessed every believer with every spiritual blessing. This phrase exudes an attitude of certainty and assurance. This blessing is ours! God's resources have been made available to us and they will always be there for us. Charles Spurgeon put it this way: "We are not sitting here and groaning and crying and fretting and worrying and questioning our own salvation. He has blessed us and therefore, we will bless Him. If you think little of what God has done for you, you will do very little for Him; but if you have a great notion of His great mercy to you, you will be greatly grateful to your gracious God." The focus of Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus is to describe in detail this exact blessing. The theme of the Epistle is the vast riches believers possess in Christ.

If an outline is helpful for understanding the section from v3-14 then an outline will also be helpful in nailing down the particulars of this wonderful, theme-declaring verse. This outline is not a hard and fast rule but simply a guide to assist us in our understanding of all that's being revealed in this text. How does one understand the Bible? In order to understand the Bible, you first need to read it. How does one read the Bible? You read the Bible the same way you eat an elephant – one bite at a time. So let's take a bite of v3 and chew on it for a few minutes.

I. The source of our blessing. It's God the Father; James also affirms this in his Epistle (Jam 1:17). Every good and perfect gift comes from the Father and He never regrets the giving nor does He ever withdraw the gift! The Father has made us rich in Jesus Christ! When you were born again into God's family, you were born wealthy! Through Jesus Christ, believers share in the riches of: God's grace (1:7, 2:7), God's glory (1:18, 3:16), God's mercy (2:4) and the unsearchable riches of Christ (3:8). Our heavenly Father is not poor; He's rich and He's made us rich in His Son.

There are a lot of insanely wealthy people in this world. Some of them make more income in a week than most of us will make in a lifetime. The majority of the world decries this wealth, mainly because they will never have it but that it not true for the Christian. All of this earthly wealth is mere pennies when compared with the spiritual wealth we have in Christ. In this letter, Paul will explain to us what these riches are and how we can draw on them for effective Christian living.

II. The scope of our blessing. We have every spiritual blessing. What are we to make of the word “spiritual” in this sentence? The word could mean either of two things 1) that the blessings come to us by means of the Holy Spirit. This is what v14 certainly teaches. Or 2) it could mean that these are spiritual rather than material blessings. The phrase in heavenly places seems to suggest Paul’s probably thinking of it in the 2<sup>nd</sup> sense. Meaning, he’s thinking of blessings related to heaven rather than earth and is declaring that all of these blessings are freely given to us.

That’s not to say that God doesn’t give material blessings too. He does. Jesus promised that His disciples would be provided with all necessary things (Mt 6:25-34). Paul himself said, “My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:19). But these material provisions, which are needful and helpful here, are relatively unimportant when measured against spiritual riches.

In the OT, under the old covenant, God promised His earthly people, Israel, material blessings as a reward for their obedience (Deut 28:1-13). Today, though He promises to supply all our needs, He doesn’t promise to shield us from either material poverty or pain. Besides, although in this life we may have more or less material possessions, in spiritual terms we don’t just have some spiritual blessings but all spiritual blessings in Christ. This means that the Father has given us every thing we need for a successful, satisfying Christian life. The spiritual is far more important than the material. The spiritual blessings are higher, better and more secure than any earthly blessings we receive.

III. The sphere of our blessing. Our blessings are in heavenly places or in the heavenlies. The unsaved person is exclusively interested in the earthlies, because that’s where they live. Jesus calls them the children of this world (Lk 16:8). The Christian’s life is centered in heaven. Their citizenship is in heaven (Phil 3:20), their name is written in heaven (Lk 10:20) and their Father and their Savior are both in heaven. Thus, their attention and affection ought to be centered on the things of heaven (Col 3:1). These heavenly places refer to the location where Jesus is right now and where the believer is seated with Him (2:6).

The Christian actually operates within 2 spheres: the human and the divine;

the visible and the invisible. Physically, we are on the earth in a human body but spiritually, we are seated with Christ in the heavenly sphere – and it's this heavenly sphere that provides the power and direction for our earthly walk. The President of the United States is not always seated at his desk in the White House, but that executive chair represents the sphere of his life and power. No matter where he is, he is the President because only he has the privilege of sitting at that desk. Likewise with the Christian: no matter where you may be on this earth, no matter what may be your condition, situation or position in life, you are seated with Christ in the heavenlies and this is the basis of your life and power.

IV. The status of our blessing. It's in Christ! This means they are exclusively found and enjoyed in Jesus only! Last time we mentioned the importance of the phrases in Christ, in Him, or their equivalents, that they appear some 164 times in Paul's writings. There is hardly a more important concept in the NT since it's only by means of our union with Christ that any of these great spiritual blessings come to us. We will be coming back to the phrase again and again as we work through this letter, and we'll be looking at some of the more ethereal aspects of the phrase then. Here it's more important to stress that these blessings can only be given to us through Jesus.

You see, if you leave out the in Christ you'll never have these blessings at all. Every blessing we enjoy as Christians comes to us through Jesus Christ. God has blessings for all sorts and conditions of men. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught that God 'makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good' (Mt 5:45). There are certain common, general blessings that are enjoyed by all of humanity. It's what's called 'common grace,' but that's not what Paul is dealing with here. Here he's dealing with particular grace, with special grace, the blessings that are enjoyed by Christians alone. People often stumble at this truth, but the distinction is drawn very clearly in the Scriptures. The ungodly may enjoy much good in this world, and those blessings come to them from God in a general way, but they know nothing of the blessings mentioned here. Paul's writing to Christians and he wants them to understand and grasp the special blessings and privileges available to them as Christians so he emphasizes that all those blessings come in and through Jesus Christ, and Him alone. You can't be a Christian without being in Christ. Christ is both the beginning and the end. He's Alpha as well as Omega. There are no blessings for Christians apart from Him.



What is a person's position apart from Jesus Christ? Paul answers this in **ch2**: being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world (**2:12**).

What is the believer's position in Christ? We have every spiritual blessing and so we praise God the Father, as Paul does, exuberantly. But what are those spiritual blessings? The rest of this section is a thorough listing of these blessings. We'll be looking at most of these in greater detail as our study progresses, but it's worth looking ahead to the entire scope of them now.

1. Election. This topic troubles some people because they think that if God elects individuals to salvation then the value of human choice is destroyed and the motivation for holy living disappears. Not so. Instead of destroying the value of human choice, election gives us a capacity for choosing that we didn't previously possess as lost persons.

Before we were made alive in Christ we had a human will which was directed against God, not towards Him. We could choose, but we always chose wrong. When we're made alive in Christ we received a new nature, by which God, who before was undesirable to us, now became desirable, and we willingly submit ourselves to Him. As far as holy living is concerned, the Bible says that God wills our holiness. So, instead of being an excuse for unholiness, election guarantees the opposite.

2. Adoption =becoming God's child with all privileges implied. On this basis we're said to be heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ (**Rm 8:17**) and have the privilege of bringing all things to God in prayer and of being heard by Him.

3. Redemption = being delivered from the slavery of sin by the death of Christ. In Paul's day a person could become a slave in 1 of 3 ways: by being born a slave; (children of slaves were automatically slaves too); by becoming a slave by conquest (citizens of a conquered city or nation would be enslaved); by becoming a slave through debt (if you couldn't pay off a debt, the last possible option was slavery). Significantly, the Bible speaks of people being slaves of sin in each of these ways. We're born in sin, receiving our sinful nature from our parents (**Ps 51:5**). We're conquered by sin (**Ps 19:13**). We're also slaves of sin through debt (**Rom 6:23**). Redemption means Jesus delivering us from this slavery to sin by His

work on the cross. Before, we were held captive and could not break free to do God's bidding. Now we're freed to serve God by Jesus' death.

4. Forgiveness of sins. Even though forgiveness of sins and redemption are closely linked, forgiveness is something quite different from redemption. Redemption means being freed from sin's power, so that it no longer rules over us. Forgiveness means having God wipe the slate clean.

5. The revelation of God's purpose in history. Paul lived in a very broken world, as we do. He saw Greek pitted against Roman, Jew against Gentile, rich against poor, aristocrat against commoner. He saw people struggling for themselves and, above all, struggling against God. "Will this go on forever?" Fortunately, Paul knew the answer. The disharmony of the world won't go on forever, for the same God who has predestined us to salvation in Christ has also predestined all things to be brought together in submission to Him. Paul wrote to the Philippians: At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven and of those on earth and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father ([Phil 2:10-11](#)).

6. Sealed by the Holy Spirit. Seals authenticate documents and declare that the promises contained in them are good. This is what the Holy Spirit does for Christians. Paul says that God's gift of the Holy Spirit is an authentication that believers are truly God's and that none of the promises God has made to them will fail.

7. An inheritance. The Holy Spirit, though a seal on the document, is actually more than certification of God's promises. He is Himself a portion of our inheritance. Paul speaks of this when he terms the Holy Spirit as the guarantee of our inheritance ([14](#)). This is a nice turn of phrase. According to [v14](#), Christians are God's inheritance. But the Holy Spirit, who is God, has been given to us as a down payment on the fullness of the inheritance which is already ours in Jesus Christ.

These are just a few of the spiritual blessings that the Father has already given us in Christ through the Holy Spirit. It's both comforting and assuring to know that the Trinity is working in concert for our ultimate and eternal benefit. Surely, our God should and must be praised! 😊