

EPHESIANS | Every Spiritual Blessing

Rob Rogers

May 7, 2023

Introduction

Today, we're kicking off our summer sermon series on the book of Ephesians. We'll be working our way verse by verse through this that the Apostle Paul wrote to the churches in Ephesus.

There are some resources that are available to you throughout this series.

1. **Ephesians Journals.** If you were here for our series through the book of Acts, you'll recognize these, but it's a way for you to track along with the scriptures and includes space for notes.
2. **Audio Readings.** As a supplement to getting into the Word, we'll be posting very simple audio readings of Ephesians. We want to encourage you to listen to the Word as we're working our way through Paul's Letter to the Church in Ephesus together.
3. **HSM/MSM** Both the High School and Middle School ministries will be tracking along with us through Ephesians this summer. *For any parents in the room, I want you to hear this...*

In a book released in 2021 called *Handing Down the Faith*¹, researchers found that the most powerful influence on the faith lives of American teenagers and young adults "is the religious lives of their parents."

The authors identified three factors in determining whether an adult child remains in their faith past high school...

1. *If the family attends church at least once a week.*
2. *If the parents reported that their religious faith was "extremely" important.*
3. *How often they have conversations about religious matters.*

In other words, keeping kids in their faith into adulthood is nearly impossible without parental commitment.

"If parents would increase the frequency of those conversations by just one standard deviation, they will have a 66 percent reported increase in their reported level of faith in 10 years."²

~ Andrew Zirschky, Research Professor at Austin Seminary

It shows that the strongest tie to lasting faith is related to how often parents talk to their children about religious matters "as a part of ordinary life."

After every message in this series, we're going to put one question on the screen for you to bring to your teen, as we're all going through the same scriptures on Sunday mornings. Because the greatest determining factor in your kids keeping their faith as they get older is not me, it's not Dylan, or Nick, it's not their friends... it's conversations with mom and dad about their faith. *Your teens are also being encouraged to ask you about the message as well... so, you better pay attention. You may get a pop quiz afterward.*

¹ Christian Smith, Amy Adamczyk. *Handing Down the Faith*. (Oxford University Press, Mar 15, 2021)

² Andrew Zirschky. *Beyond the Screen*. (Abingdon Press, Dec 5, 2015)

Background

The Apostle Paul first ministered in Ephesus in about AD 53, He revisited about two years later on his third missionary journey he came back to Ephesus and ministered there for at least two additional years.

- Ephesus was the **richest city** in the richest region of the Roman Empire.
- It was the primary **port to Asia Minor**—all the region's trade came through it.
- It had the **world's largest temple**, dedicated to the goddess Artemis/Diana—four **times bigger** than the Parthenon in Rome. It was one of the **Seven Wonders** of the ancient world.
- This temple was a center for prostitution as worship to Diana.
- The temple priests were so profitable that they ended up becoming the bankers of Asia... funding construction and expansion throughout the region.

The letter to Ephesians was likely circulated to many of the other churches in Asia. Paul wrote the letter from prison while he was awaiting trial in Rome.

What's so amazing about Paul, is he's facing some horrendous circumstances, his life, his future hangs in the balance. And yet his primary concern is not for himself... but for the church, for his friends. He writes to them, not to correct wrong behavior, or any corrupt practices... *but to remind them of who they are IN CHRIST.*

And here's why: Ephesus was a hostile environment to Christ followers. This letter is written as a survival guide to believers in that city. For us — in a world that is becoming increasingly hostile toward Christianity — we want to glean as much as possible from this letter. So that we won't just survive — *but that we might flourish even in the face of increasing opposition to the ways of Jesus.*

The first three chapters are about orthodoxy, what we believe. It's doctrine. It's theology. Chapters 4-6 are about orthopraxy. It's what we practice. How we live and conduct ourselves in light of the first three chapters.

Every spiritual blessing

Ephesians 1:1-14

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus: ² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love ⁵ He predestined us for adoption to Himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will, ⁶ to the praise of His glorious grace, with which He has blessed us in the Beloved. ⁷ In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, ⁸ which He lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹ making known to us the mystery of His will, according to His purpose, which He set forth in Christ ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Him, things in heaven and things on earth. ¹¹ In Him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, ¹² so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of His glory. ¹³ In Him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in Him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

There is so much packed in this passage that we could spend years on it and never reach the bottom... In fact, in the original Greek vs 3-14 is one sentence. Once Paul gets rolling, he just goes... this is one of the most powerful theological declarations in all the New Testament.

What I want to do today is zero in on one sentence in this passage that serves almost as a summary of the rest of what's described in the passage.

Ephesians 1:3

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,

- It says anyone that is IN CHRIST, **has** been blessed... past tense. It doesn't say you might be blessed, or will be blessed, it's you HAVE been blessed... and it's absolute language. It says that if you're in Christ you HAVE been blessed with EVERY spiritual blessing in the heavenly realm. What does that mean?

Because today, 2000 years after this was written... we use the word bless in some ways that almost undermine the significance of what Paul is telling us here....

- We sign letters and emails... "*Blessings.*" What do we mean?
- Someone sneezes we say, "*God bless you.*" Why?
- Or in the South... if we want to be particularly patronizing toward someone, what do we say? "*Bless your heart.*"

If we're not careful, we can find ourselves taking a concept that is so packed with significance and meaning and make it nothing more than a cliché or a platitude.

Or we think of blessings as primarily material...

- A new car is a blessing
- A new job is a blessing
- A tax refund is a blessing
- A good hair day is a blessing
- That one open parking spot right in front, is a blessing
 - *And God does bless us in various forms.*
 - *But Paul is not talking about material blessings.*

Many of us are so focused on acquiring material blessings that we've completely overlooked the superiority of all the spiritual blessings that are already ours in Christ.

"What value are spiritual blessings when I'm struggling just to pay the bills. Or repair a broken relationship, or fighting an illness..."

A life saturated in spiritual blessings

Let me just point you to the outworkings of a life saturated in spiritual blessing in a deeply broken and fallen world.

- A person walking in every spiritual blessing, lives in the calm, unhurried pace of Jesus in a world of frenzied, anxious achievement and hurry.

- A person walking in every spiritual blessing does not feel the need to push beyond their limits, and overextend themselves vocationally, financially, or relationally.
- A person walking in every spiritual blessing is someone who has learned to forgive over and over again in a world filled with outrage, animosity, hatred, and vengeance.
- A person walking in every spiritual blessing is someone who is at peace in the middle of the unknown circumstances of life.
- A person walking in every spiritual blessing, is noticeable, not because they're trying to be noticed... but because they're one of the few people in the world NOT trying to be noticed.
- If you find one of these people and ask them... they'll tell you that they've gained something infinitely more valuable by walking in the spiritual blessings of God than anything else they've found in this world.

Paul describes some of the spiritual blessings we've received in the passage: *"Adopted, redeemed, forgiven, we've been brought into the family of God, the Beloved, we have a heavenly inheritance, we've been sealed with the Holy Spirit."*

How do we receive and live in the spiritual blessings?

Ephesians 1:3

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ...

Ephesians 1:4

He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world.

Ephesians 1:7

In Him we have redemption through His blood.

Ephesians 1:11

In Him we have obtained an inheritance...

Ephesians 1:13

In Him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in Him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.

To be "in Christ" means that God no longer treats you according to your guilt, your shame, your sinfulness. If you are in Christ, when He looks on you, He sees the beauty, the splendor, the perfection, the righteousness of His own son.

Colossians 3:3

For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God."

Romans 8:1

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

2 Corinthians 5:17

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

Galatians 3:26-28

...for **in Christ Jesus** you are all sons of God, through faith. ²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized **into Christ** have **put on Christ**.

When you trust in the gospel... the good news of God's grace over your life... you are putting on Christ... you're hidden in Christ. You're clothed in Christ.

If you're here and you aren't "in Christ," you've yet to trust in Him for salvation from sin and the consequences of sin, nothing that Paul is talking about here applies to you. If you've yet to place your trust in Christ as King, as Lord, as the Savior from all of your empty and vain efforts of self-justification, self-assurance, and self-exaltation, and ultimate self-absorption... none of the incredible riches that Christ has made available to you are yours. They can't be.

- In our demand for independence and autonomy, our clinging to our right to self-determination and self-rule, we've made ourselves enemies with a loving God who longs to bless us with every spiritual blessing!

To be in Christ means that you have (past tense) already gained all the riches, all the blessing, all the goodness *that we could never earn* that Christ alone deserves.,

- In and of ourselves, there is not one of us on the planet that is worthy of God's blessing. Not one. And yet... every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realm is ours in Christ.

The riches of heaven available to you

One of the great dangers for us that is addressing here is there are moments, days, weeks, months, maybe even years that go by in the lives of Christians, where we are living discouraged, defeated, fearful, anxious lives.

I know we all have our own seasons and versions of this... and without even realizing it, if we're not careful we can begin to live with a poverty mindset... settling for a mundane, mediocre, mildly impactful life... maybe believing the worst about ourselves... falling into self-loathing, or self-pity... entertaining the condemning thoughts our enemy is feeding to us.

As Paul writes to the Ephesian believers... He gives us the antidote.

Paul is saying, *Everybody wake up! Don't you realize what you have in Christ?! Don't you realize who you are!? Don't you realize how treasured you are?! How loved you are!? Don't you see what He's made available to you!? Every spiritual blessing in the heavens are yours, they're available to you, right now, in Christ!*

Paul is saying, *Don't you dare settle for the scraps of this world when you have the riches of heaven available to you!* You are not what you feel, you are not what the world says, you are not what people say, you are who God says you are, and if you are **in Christ, this is what's true of you.**

- You are chosen.
- Loved.
- Redeemed.
- Adopted
- Treasured.

- You'll never be forsaken.
- New Creation.
- The righteousness of God.
- Victorious.
- No longer a sinner, you are a saint of God.
- You're an ambassador.
- You're a royal priesthood.
- God delights in you.
- He rejoices over you.
- You've been cleansed & forgiven.
- You are Holy.
- You're Blameless.
- You are a co-heir with Christ.
- You've been set apart for a divine purpose.
- You are God's masterpiece.
- Your future is secure.
- Your victory is guaranteed.

All because of Christ — and there is nothing... absolutely nothing that can change what God has already declared over you. No demonic lie, no scheme of hell... no fiery arrows can change what God says about you!

Taking every thought captive

Being in Christ, putting on Christ... it's clothing yourself in the identity that God has given you every morning. Taking every thought captive and bringing into submission and obedience to what GOD says, regardless of how you feel!

STORY: A story passed down from the first century, tells of one evening, Rabbi Akiva was walking home after studying the Hebrew scriptures. He was in deep meditation and was so captivated by the text that he missed the turn to go to his home in Capernaum. Before realizing it, he had wandered directly to the front gate of a Roman military fortress and found himself face-to-face with the occupying enemy.

Before Rabbi Akiva could turn around and retrace his steps, he heard the voice of a Roman soldier atop the gate asking him this question, *"WHO ARE YOU? WHY ARE YOU HERE?"*

Startled, the Rabbi could only reply, "What?" The deep voice of the Roman soldier again resounded, *"WHO ARE YOU? WHY ARE YOU HERE?"*

The Rabbi asked him, "How much are you paid to ask me these questions?" The guard responded, "Two drachma per week." To which, Rabbi Akiva told him, *"I'll pay you TWICE that amount, if you'll stand outside my home and ask me those two questions every morning."*

Some of us need to start bringing this question to God every morning... "Who am I?" "Why am I here?" Because we're forgetful! You'll hear this today and wake up tomorrow and completely forget what we talked about today. You need a rhythm of reminding yourself of every spiritual blessing that is yours in Christ.

He chose us before the world began

Ephesians 1:4

He **chose us** in Him **before** the foundation of the world.

Do you understand the enormity of that claim? If God chose us at any point during our lifetime... we could wrongly conclude that Him choosing us had something to do with something we did, or our good deeds, with our morality or our behavior or performance in life. We could very easily and wrongly conclude that God chose us because we had greater potential, or higher mental acuity than other people... and therefore God chose us.

But that's not what it says... the timing is so important...

If you go all the way back to Genesis 1:1, what does it say? "In the beginning God created..."

Do you know what Ephesians 1:4 says? It says, *"**Before** the beginning, God chose you. Before Creation God Chose you, before the Garden, before Adam and Eve God chose you."* He knew you. He saw you. Your life. Your joys and your sorrows, your trials and your triumphs, you flaws and failures, and He chose you.

Does that mean there is no free will, that I had no choice?

John 6:44

No one can **come to Me** unless the Father who sent Me **draws him**.

- There is free will to come to Him... and yet without the Father choosing you, drawing you... you can't come to Him.

And somehow, God is big enough that free will and predestination can coexist... and we're not going to resolve in two minutes what people way smarter than us have debated for thousands of years.

He saw you before the foundation of the world, before you did a thing, and He chose you. He placed His love upon you. Before you could be a success or a failure, before your best moments, and before your worst moments. He knew them all, and He chose you anyway.

If He chose you before the world began, He will never give up on you.

If He chose you before the world began, He will finish what He started in you.

If He chose you before the world began, you can face whatever trials come your way because you're secure in Him.

If He chose you before the world began, you can have courage to stand firm in the midst of any opposition you might face in this life, because He is with you and He will never leave you or forsake you.

If He chose you before the world began, even when it feels like the whole world is against you, it means that the God who created the universe is so unbelievably FOR you. Paul says in **Romans 8:31**, ***If God is for us, who can be against us?***

Followers of Jesus — know who you are. And remember that He's the One who chose you. Appointed you. Empowered you. Called you. ***In Christ, you have been blessed you with every spiritual blessing.***

Discussion Questions

1. Do you have a relationship with any teenager with whom you could have a conversation about spiritual matters?
2. How are material blessings different than spiritual blessings?
3. What does someone's life look like who is walking in every spiritual blessing? What does your life look like?
4. How do you receive spiritual blessings?
5. How does what you feel/believe about yourself change when you are "in Christ"?
6. In the list of what God says is true of you — which one(s) speaks most directly to you?
7. How would you answer the questions, "Who are you? Why are you here?"

NOTES