

# Living Faithfully in the Riches of God's Grace

*To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ...( Ephesians 3:8)*

## **Our Blessings**

Ephesians 1:1-3

*1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are at Ephesus and who 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 with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ...*

In the opening two verses of this letter, Paul has already revealed the character of not only himself as an appointed ambassador sent out by the purpose and will of Christ to proclaim the gospel; but also the character of every true believer in Christ, calling them both “*saints*” (holy ones set apart for God’s work) as well as those who are “*the faithful in Christ Jesus*” (those who possess faith in Christ and express faith in Christ). The privileged positions of being ambassadors for Christ and belonging to Christ through faith are the result of God’s grace and the peace He afforded us in sending His Son Jesus Christ to this earth to be our Redeemer.

Now, in addition to both his own and the believer’s character, Paul next introduces us to the character of the blessings that belong to believers by virtue of their relationship to Christ. Notice he uses both pointed and lofty language, *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ...* It is clear that Paul has two key concerns here. The first is God Himself (“*Blessed be the God and Father*”)...; and the second are the blessings God gives to believers (“*who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing*”).

Now we need to be careful to note the order that Paul placed these two great subjects; first the Blessed one and second the blessings. He begins with stating to his readers something we are to know about God. God is “blessed.” God is to be celebrated as praised for who He is and what He does. His first focus is on the Person of God. Then, and only then does he move us to consider something about the character of the believer’s blessings.

Paul begin with the words, “*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...*”? Why is it that the first word here is “*blessed*” [*eulogetos* (ευλογητος) – literally means – “the one who is spoken well of...” It is a term of praise; of thoughtful and vocal consideration of the very nature and character of a person; in this case, of God. Why does Paul begin this way, with a good word of praise to God? Is it not true that our tendency is to focus quickly on our blessings (or our lack of blessings) rather than upon God – who He is and what He has done? Is it not true that we often fixate on what is in it for us rather than what it is we are to give to God? Think of your prayers. Do you rush into them demanding something from God? “Father, help me with this project; grant me this new job; reconcile me with this person?” Do you ask for your daily bread before you have hallowed the name of God? Paul begins with God and the giving of a good word to God.

If you were invited to have an audience with the President of the United States at the White House; do you suppose you would rush right in and state your requests and make your demands; or might there be some protocol; some etiquette; some decorum that ought to rightfully be followed before addressing the most powerful man of our nation? And yet, we are reminded by Paul that our consideration of blessings must begin with a consideration of the person of God. While it is always good to consider the nature of our blessings from God, we must only do so after having first rightfully worshipped God; having praised His name, having rehearsed all that God has done for us that we might be blessed by God at all.

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Might I suggest to you that the reason why we can often be depressed, discouraged, down-hearted, and even a bit cold to the blessings we do have from God is that we do not begin with simply delighting in and worshipping the God of all our blessings. Let me share an insight with you and you tell me if this isn't so; be it true of you or true of someone you know. I contend that the most miserable of "Christians" are those who are always focused on themselves; and on the "blessings" before they consider God. They rarely tell you anything significant about God; only what they lack. They get so distracted by wanting more blessings or not getting some blessing they think they ought; that their moods and actions betray their being "saints" and "the faithful who are in Christ Jesus." They get so focused on their circumstances that they fail to look up and be in awe of the God who loved them and saved them. Beloved, if you want to be blessed (and who doesn't), if you want to experience the fullness of grace that God intends for you; then look up to God. As one preacher put it, "*The practical man is not the one who runs after the blessings, but the man who considers the Source of the blessings and is in touch with that Source.*"<sup>1</sup> So then, we need to begin with simple praise to God; that God is; that He is good; that He is in control; the He has loved us and loved us in Christ. Let us bless the Lord our God, for He has done great things.

This brings us to the meat of our text this morning. Verse 3 is pregnant with truth, some things the Ephesians would have known here at the outset, some things that Paul would unpack for them in the rest of the letter. As we set the stage for our study of Ephesians, focusing on living faithfully (practically living out the truth) in the riches of God's grace; let us note four truths about the believer's blessings that Paul reveals to his readers.

## **I. The Channel of our Blessings**

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

Having reminded us to worship and praise the God who blesses us, we now come to note the first of four truths concerning our blessings. I say first, and yet this truth is found at the very end of the verse; *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places **in Christ**...* I would have you stop to realize that if this last statement, "*in Christ*" is left out; these spiritual blessings are simply not possible. Being "*in Christ*" is the channel, the very source of everything truly Christian. Our faith is "*in Christ*"; our hope is "*in Christ*"; our life is "*in Christ*". The truth is that every blessing any Christian ever receives comes through the channel, the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This past week one of the teenagers asked me this question; "Does God love everyone?" You would think such a question would be easy to answer, right? Of course God loves everyone, right? It is true that God extends a degree of gracious, loving care to all people. Our Lord Jesus said, "*for He [God the Father] causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous*" (Matthew 5:45). In Psalm 145:15-16 the Psalmist declares, "*15 The eyes of all look to You, And You give them their food in due time. 16 You open Your hand And satisfy the desire of every living thing.*" We can infer from verses like these that God does extend what we call "common grace" – a general love and care to all humanity.

But, it is clear that what Paul speaks of here is anything but common, and, as the rest of the letter unfolds, we come to see something more than a general love for all people, but rather a specific and salvific love extended those who, according to verse 4, are His chosen in Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

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Rather than common grace, here we see Paul speaking of a particular and more focused grace. It is true that the evil and good, the unjust and the just all enjoy common blessing from God, but only those who are Christians receive the special blessings that come through the channel of being "in Christ." Paul is addressing these special blessing that come through Christ.

By realizing this special grace that comes by being in Christ, we are reminded that this is the work of Christ alone. Verse three begins focusing on God and ends focusing on Christ. In Acts 4:12 we are presented with the exclusivity of Christ when Peter wrote: "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved." There is "no one else" and "no other name." Christ stands alone. He needs no assistance in bringing us the grace of salvation. We do not contribute to this salvation. Jesus is the only Mediator of the saving blessings from God, the only channel through which any of us may come.

Why is this important to draw our attention to? Beloved, I preach this to myself as well as to you. I know how in any given moment how quick I am to forget such a truth as this; how easily I will burst into the throne room of God without rightly considering the wonder and the necessity of coming before God in and through Christ. He is our only access into the throne room. He is our escort into the throne room. He is our advocate in the throne room. Paul will be relentless in this letter of reminding believers of their being "in Christ." If you are not "in Christ" then you are yet in your sins. We must never forget that every blessing we enjoy, every attainment and achievement ever experienced, every good and perfect thing comes to use through the Channel who is Christ.

### II. The Character of our Blessings

*[God], who has blessed us with every **spiritual** blessing in the heavenly places in Christ...*

But there is more. A second truth about our blessings is when Paul carefully describes their character. What is the character of these blessings? Paul says they are "spiritual." The idea of "spiritual" gives us the idea of a contrast. They are not earthly blessings, but spiritual blessings. They are not natural blessings, but supernatural. They are not of the earth, but rather they are of the Spirit.

Our blessings from God come to us through the channel of Christ, but their character reflects something spiritual; something that is not worldly or of the flesh. Here we have the work of the Holy Spirit. The blessings we enjoy originate in the Father, come to us as we are "in Christ" but actually become ours by the Spirit of God; these are spiritual blessings. And so we see even here in this third verse the working of the Trinity; the great blessing to be unpacked in the next few verses is that of redemption and all three members of the Trinity will be exposed; verses 4-6 revealing the work of the Father; verses 7-12 the work of the Son; and verses 13-14 the work of the Spirit.

Recall that at the baptism of Jesus in Matthew 3:13-17. There we find Jesus, who is God in the flesh, yet setting aside His divine rights in order to save us. The Son of God lived as a man among us. And as a man, it was necessary for Him to receive the Holy Spirit in order to begin His public work of proclaiming the gospel among people. Jesus received the spiritual blessing of the indwelling Spirit of God, given by the grace of God, to enable Jesus, the Son of God to accomplish His great task.

Why do I share this? Because, beloved, even as the Holy Spirit was given to Jesus, enabling Him to live out God the Father's intended purpose; this same Holy Spirit is given to us, who by faith, become the sons of God. This same Holy Spirit enables us, even as He enabled Christ, to live out God the Father's intended purpose. Thus, the believer, you and I, if we have come to faith in Christ, are filled with the fullness of Christ to do the full work of Christ. Oh,

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blessed thought. How is it that we who are described in Ephesians 2:1 as being dead in our trespasses and sins could ever become “spiritual” – filled with the Spirit of God? It can only happen as the Spirit of God makes us alive, quickens our hearts, opens our eyes and empowers us for service to Christ.

The natural man, the unbeliever, finds no enjoyment in considering such spiritual things; things about sin and salvation; about hell and heaven; about eternal death and eternal life. Such things are nonsense to him. People who are not “in Christ” find more pleasure in the things of this world, things that can be touched and looked at with physical eyes. Start to speak of heaven, of holiness, of those things that honor God and such a person gets disinterested. Why? They are dead. Their lives are controlled by the prince of the power of the air (Ephesians 2:2) – that is the devil; not by the Spirit of God. Until the Spirit of God quickens them, makes them alive; gives them a spiritual mind, spiritual blessings will be nonsense and fantasy to them.

But those who are “in Christ” have been made to ponder things spiritual. They are led by the Spirit of God to contemplate the wonders and glories of the Son of God. The Holy Spirit is the one who convicts the world of sin, of righteousness and of judgment; who guides believers into the truth of Christ, and who enables the believers to serve Christ. Let me ask you, do you long to ponder things spiritual? Does that describe you? Is this what others would say about you? Do you contemplate who God is and what He has done for you? Do you speak to others of the excellencies of Christ to your family and friends? Do you see the “blessings” in your life, including your ability to know Christ, as a gift of the Spirit of God, come to you by the will of God through the work of Son of God? Or do you see your blessings as something deserved because of something non-spiritual; the work of your flesh. As we count our blessings, we are to see them as that which God has done and be in awe. Our blessings are spiritual in nature; of the Spirit.

### III. The Context of our Blessings

*[God], who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ...*

Next we come to the context of our blessings. What does Paul tell us about these blessings? Let us note two things.

First, notice with me what I will call the lavishness of our blessings. We see this revealed to us by the use of just one word. Paul says that God has blessed us with “every” spiritual blessing... What an arresting word as we stop to ask the question, “How many of the blessings of God belong to us if we are in Christ?” What is the answer? “Every” spiritual blessing is ours in Christ. Beloved, everything we need has been given to us. Peter speaks of this in 2 Peter 1:2-3 saying, “2 Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; 3 seeing that His 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.” Nothing is left out. We do not lack for anything. We are called to live a life of holiness and faithfulness; a life worthy of the gospel and I fear that we sometime “feel” ourselves to be lacking something; as though God has held back from us what is needed to live for Him; to proclaim Him; to be a monument of His grace before all who would see us. That is a lie; for God has given every spiritual blessing and have granted to use everything needful for life and godliness.

These blessings have been lavishly, richly, generously, copiously poured out upon us. Every blessing of life and every grace of God is ours only in Christ. In this first chapter of Ephesians, Paul uses the words “in Christ,” or its equivalent, fourteen times. He intends for us to understand that all grace, all salvation, all blessedness is “in Christ.” All that the triune God has done for us, all that He gives to sinners, and all that He requires of sinners is in Christ! Let me have you see with me just some of these blessings that have been lavished on us:

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- All new covenant mercies are in Christ (1:1)
- All spiritual blessings are in Christ (1:3)
- Our election is in Christ (1:4)
- Our predestination is in Christ (1:5)
- Our adoption is in Christ (1:5)
- Our redemption is in Christ (1:7)
- Our forgiveness is in Christ (1:7)
- All truth and knowledge are in Christ (1:9)
- Our eternal inheritance is in Christ (1:11)
- Our hope is in Christ (1:12)
- Our assurance of salvation is in Christ (1:13)
- Our pledge of the Holy Spirit as the guarantee of salvation is in Christ (1:14)

This is the lavishness, the richness of our spiritual blessings. And the truth of the matter is that this only begins to scratch the surface of what we have in Christ, but there is a second matter of context to be considered here. Not only are we told of the lavishness of these spiritual blessings, but we are also told of the location of such blessings. We read...[God], *who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing **in the heavenly places** in Christ...*

Some may be tempted to think that Paul was simply being carried away in this moment, using lofty language; that is more fluff rather than meat. Nothing could be further from the truth. Paul tells us that the blessings we enjoy are “in the heavenly places.” Here we are to see another contrast; that contrast being between the “blessings” under the Old covenant, versus the “blessings” under the New covenant.

In large part, the blessings granted Israel in the Old Testament were more material and temporal. How did a man, take Job for example, know if he was blessed by God? Often Old Testament saints would look at the size of their herds, the extent of their lands, even the number of their sons to determine the blessing of God. We need to remember that God often used pictures and types in the Old Testament to prepare His people for further, deeper and more spiritual truths to be revealed. The Passover lamb was a truly physical and temporary picture pointing to something deeper and greater, the One true Passover Lamb, who while physical, was also spiritual and eternal rather than temporary. As the New Testament unfolds, God calls His people not to look so much for earthly, temporal blessings, but rather blessings that are in the heavenly places; beyond the sight and sin of the earth.

What is Paul calling his readers to here? Beloved, we are being called to be “other worldly.” This world, and all it contains, is temporary. It is fading. It is dying. Seek your blessing here and they will fade away and leave you helpless. But seek your blessings in the heavenly places and such an inheritance will never fade, for it is kept by the power of God for you.

This is where we run into problems when sharing the gospel, isn't it? People, many even in the church, are focused on the “here and now” – and such an attitude causes people to fall away from the truth and from the Church. Lives are too busy for spiritual things and seeking things in places that cannot be seen with the eyes. Man is more interested in probing a dead rock or a ball of gas orbiting the sun rather than contemplate the heavenly places where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. It would be like being invited into the oval office of the White House, to be given an opportunity to speak to the President of the United States, being told to make a list of ten things you would like to discuss with the President once you get behind those

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closed doors, only to be more fascinated with the shape, color and sharpness of the letter opener on your own desk. Foolishness.

As believers, we need to remember to have a right view of this world and our relationship to this world. According to the New Testament, this world is to be regarded by us as a very strange, foreign and temporary place. To be sure, it is filled with wonders, wonders of God; but this world is passing away. And I would hope that you, like me, would prefer to consider a residence and a citizenship that is eternal. Remember what Paul said to the Philippians? He wrote in Philippians 3:18-20, "18 For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, 19 whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things. 20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ..."

We are of the commonwealth of heaven. We are the tribe of Christ awaiting arrival to our promised land. Beloved, we are simply passing through this world. Yes, we can enjoy this world; it belongs to God. We can and are to see where this world points to its Creator. But we must also understand this is a fallen world; a world that has been damaged by sin, so much so that this world is a dangerous place for the believer. We are called to be non-conformists to this fallen world's ways of thinking and behaving (Romans 12:1-2). We are told this world is controlled by the prince of the power of the air who works in the sons of disobedience, bringing upon such sons the wrath of God (Ephesians 2:2). The sons of God look upon this world as fleeting and passing. Our concerns are not so much political; or social; or environmental. We do not get overly excited about such things. Rather, what excites us is considering our Savior, who is in heaven, who has promised to come again and fix all that is wrong. In the meantime, we are to be excited about proclaiming His truth; sharing the gospel; seeing people's lives changed by the power of the Word and the Spirit. For knowing that this world is passing away, we see ourselves as sojourners, just passing through. Therefore we keep our eyes fixed on things above, knowing that every spiritual blessing is ours and is kept in heaven, reserved in heaven, kept unperishable and undefiled for us.

What excite you believer? The temporal happenings on this earth; or the promise of eternal blessing in and from heaven? I have said before that nothing reveals the character of a person more than what he laughs at. As true as that is, I can also rightly say, "nothing reveals the character of a person more than what he spends his time thinking about." Do you think about Christ, in heaven, praying for you, planning for you, preparing a place for you? Or do you worry about the things of this earth; things that will pass away. Our blessings are kept in heavenly places and I long to see them!

### IV. The Circumstance of our Blessings

*[God], who **has blessed us** with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ...*

Let me quickly wrap this up by sharing with you the last point, the circumstance of our blessing. Having just said that our blessings are in the heavenly places, we might be thinking that we cannot partake of such blessings in the here and now. But notice what Paul said, *[God], who **has blessed us** with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ...* It is not that God will bless us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, but rather that He already has done so.

When is the believer able to enjoy these spiritual blessings? Right now. *[God], who **has blessed us...*** Today! How can this be? Beloved, the riches of God's grace; these blessings of God come to us little by little, progressively as we live faithfully unto Him. In Ephesians 3:19, Paul prays this for believers, that they may... "know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you

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*may be filled up to all the fullness of God.” Can you imagine what would happen to these frail, sin-infested bodies, if upon coming to Christ, we were instantaneously filled to the brim with the fullness of God? We might easily self-destruct. And so, as we will come to see even in this letter, God transforms us little by little; unfolding the promises and blessings of God in our lives; slow whittling away at our selfishness; our pettiness, our pride, our anger, our resentfulness and replacing it with the love of Christ; which, I understand as not only loving the Person and work of Christ; but also living out the richness of the love of Christ.*

*[God], who **has blessed us...** Beloved, now is not only the day of salvation; a day to call upon the name of the Lord to be delivered from your own sinfulness; but it is also the day to see the love of and for Christ increase in your life while seen the love of and for your own sinful desires decrease. What needs to be replaced by the love of Christ in your life today, right now? God has not blessed you today in order for you to remain in your sin; to wallow in self-pity; to drown in depression; to fuel your revenge; no, He has blessed you to know Christ, to love Christ, to reveal Christ to others. If you are in Christ, then you know the channel of your blessings is Christ alone; that the character of your blessings is spiritual; of the Spirit in nature; that the context of your blessings is that they are lavishly poured out upon you and kept for you in the heavenly places in Christ; and that the circumstances of your blessings are that they are not only for your future, but they are for your now. Would you ask the Lord for the power to live faithfully in the riches of His grace; to His glory, to the building up of His church; and to your own spiritual well-being?*

*Soli Deo Gloria*

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## **Discussion Questions:**

1. How do you typically address God in your prayers? How do you hear others address Him? Do you get a sense that you or those you hear are in awe and wonder of God? Why or why not?
2. How does seeing Christ as the only “channel” of our blessings help us fight discouragement and/or pride?
3. Do you live your life right now as one who is in possession of “every spiritual blessing...in Christ”? How does that reveal itself?