

Spiritual Blessings In Christ
Ephesians 1:1-23
Key Verse: Key Verse: 1:3

by Sarah Barry

“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.”

Paul was in prison in Rome because he accepted and obeyed God's world mission purpose and command. He preached the good news of God's love for all people. He had been arrested in Jerusalem because of his Gentile ministry. But God was at work even in the worst of times and his arrest became a ticket to Rome. Paul wrote this letter to the Ephesian Christians from a Roman jail. (60-61 A.D.) Paul spent three years of his third missionary journey in Ephesus. He taught the Bible in the hall of Tyrannus and concentrated on raising disciples of Jesus. There was much opposition and some exciting things happened. But the church in Ephesus was born and grew. And from there, the seven churches of Asia Minor were pioneered. Ephesus was an important trade center and the leading city of Asia Minor. It was in Ephesus that Paul caught the vision for reaching the whole Gentile world through Rome. (Acts 19:10, 21) Also, in Ephesus he decided to visit Jerusalem with a journey team and an offering from the Gentile churches. He knew God's heart for world mission and he wanted to plant this world mission vision in the church in Jerusalem. (Ac 20; Ro 15)

In this Epistle Paul does not talk about the kind of practical problems of faith and life that he writes about in 1 Corinthians. He writes about Jesus Christ and about the "mystery of the gospel"--God's great purpose of world redemption and God's plan to unite all things through Jesus Christ. The mystery of the gospel is that God loves the whole world, and Jesus died to save Gentiles as well as Jews. So the church must be a missionary community, always reaching out to the non-Christian world to bring all kinds of people to a saving knowledge of Christ, and into true unity in the body of Christ. Ephesians tells us that we must welcome one another in love, maintain spiritual order in our fellowship, and be fully equipped with spiritual armor and weapons to do battle with our adversary, the devil. Paul calls himself an ambassador in chains. He was imprisoned because he crossed barriers and preached and practiced God's love for all people--Jew and Gentile, slave and free, man and woman. He exposed the mystery that had been hidden. He asks for prayer that he may fearlessly proclaim the gospel. This letter is full of encouragement and thanksgiving and praise to the almighty, sovereign, loving God. It is about loving each other and being one in Christ. Here in this first chapter, he talks about the abundant spiritual blessings with which God has blessed us in Christ.

Part 1--Spiritual blessings in Christ

Let's read verses 1-3. "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 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." Paul could have been full of self-pity and complaints. He could have complained about God. He could have complained to God. After all, he served God faithfully and obeyed his world mission command with his whole heart. And what did it get him? He was in jail.

Last week 23 South Korean Christians were kidnaped and held as hostages in Afghanistan. They went there in obedience to Jesus' command to go and make disciples of all nations. They were mostly medical students, nurses and English teachers. They were working to help the poor and needy people of Afghanistan. Their leader, Pastor Hyung Kyu Bae, was executed. He joins the martyrs of the church from Stephen and the Apostle James, and others down through the ages who have given their lives for Jesus and the gospel. The other hostages are at grave risk. I pray that God may give them faith and courage to honor God in life or in death. May God raise up a vital and growing body of believers from the blood of martyrs spilt on Afghan soil.

Paul's situation was tough, but he did not complain. He was full of thanksgiving. He did not think about himself. He thought about God's great mystery, concealed down through the ages but now made known. He thought about Jesus and about the men and women who were faithful in Christ Jesus who lived in Ephesus. So he writes this letter to them. It is full of thanksgiving and hope. How could Paul be so full of thanksgiving and hope? It was because of the

spiritual blessings. Spiritual blessings come from God and from Christ who was raised from the dead and seated at the right hand of God in the heavenly realms. In the first 14 verses, “in Christ” or “in him” are repeated 13 times. Spiritual blessings are given “in Christ.” What does it mean to be “in Christ?” Jesus describes our relationship with him as a vine and branch relationship. (Jn 15:5) We are in him and he is in us. We draw our life and strength from Jesus. If we are cut off from him we are spiritually dead. Paul also talks about our union with Christ. We are united with him in his death and in his resurrection. (Ro 6) We come to be “in Christ” when we hear and believe the word of truth, the gospel of salvation, and invite Jesus into our hearts. The Holy Spirit works to apply that gospel to our lives. He comes to dwell within us. Read verse 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...” God’s blessings are God’s grace and they are a source of peace. Paul could be full of peace and thankfulness because he had spiritual blessings from God—from the heavenly realms where Christ reigns. (3,20) Even if we have all the human and material blessings that we could want or imagine, if we do not have God’s blessings, we cannot be really satisfied and we can have no peace. What, then, are these spiritual blessings?

First, chosen in Christ. Verse 4 says, “For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.” We must look at our lives from God’s perspective. The Creator of heaven and earth had a plan for his world before he created it. And he had a plan for each of us. (Ps 139) God knew that the beautiful world he created would become a dirty and ugly fallen world because of mankind’s sin. In such a world no one could really be happy. God was not happy either. He could just walk away and forget about it. Or he could dump it in a celestial trash can and start over. But the Bible tells us that he loved the world. And sent his one and only Son to suffer and die for the people of the world. He made a plan to save and redeem fallen mankind and to unite all things in himself. He chose us to be a part of this great, all encompassing plan. What an amazing spiritual blessing. The big picture is in God’s mind, but he starts with us one by one. God chose us in Jesus before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. We weren’t holy and blameless when he chose us. We aren’t holy and blameless now. We are sinners. But God chose us in Christ. Through Christ he is working to make us holy and blameless. He chose us to participate in his great plan to bring all people to himself. He did this for the praise of his glory.

God began his redemptive plan in the Old Testament by choosing one man, Abraham. (Actually, he began before the creation of the world.) He promised to bless him and make him a blessing. Abraham was not holy or blameless, but he believed God’s promises. God credited his faith to him as righteousness. (Ge 15:6) God chose one nation, Israel out of all nations on earth to be his treasured possession. He wanted to make them a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. They failed, but God did not fail. God sent Jesus the Messiah through them. Jesus chose his disciples. They did not volunteer. But they accepted his choosing and his call and they followed him. Finally, they confessed, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” God chose all of us. 1 Peter 2:9 says, “You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” God chose Paul. God said, “This man is my chosen instrument. To carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.” (Ac 9:15-16) Paul did not volunteer to be an apostle to the Gentiles. He didn’t even like Gentiles because he was a legalistic Jew, a Pharisee. But he was not disobedient to God’s calling. God blessed him and blessed the world through him. God chose each of us in Christ to participate in his world redemption plan. He chose Pastor Ron to be the pastor of our church. Pastor Ron did not volunteer. God chose him and appointed him and he seeks God’s help daily to be faithful to that calling. Being God’s chosen people is sometimes a blessing that is hard to bear. Tevye in “Fiddler on the Roof” lived in Russia. He and the other Jews there suffered because they were Jews. Once Tevye looked up to the sky and said to God, “Thank you for choosing us! But why don’t you choose someone else sometime?” We can understand him.

Second, predestined. (4b-5) “In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ...” God predestined us in love. We are children of God and heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. Some people don’t like the word, “predestined or predestination.” They don’t like it that God “predestines” people. But at the same time, they fatalistically think that they are predetermined by their parents’ genes or by fatalistic family circumstances or because something bad happened to them as children. Some people excuse their homosexual lifestyle or their slavery to lust on the grounds of biological or genetic determinism. These fatalistic ideas plant despair and hopelessness in people’s hearts. But the sovereign God predestines us in love to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ. He alone can break the chains of fatalism. When we accept the sovereignty of our loving God we are set free from fatalism. Our God is a living God. He responds to faith and to prayer. God decided to destroy the Israelites who worshiped the golden calf. But when Moses prayed for them, God relented. (KJV says “God

repented.”) (Ex 32:12-14) He changed his mind. He listened to Abraham’s prayer for Sodom. In his sovereign wisdom, our God gives us freedom to choose to follow Jesus and freedom to reject his love. Our sovereign God works to accomplish his good purpose in us and in the world. He works to make us holy and blameless in his sight. He works through the mighty power by which he raised Jesus from the dead. “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” (Ro 8:28) When we accept God’s sovereignty and know that God is good and God is powerful, then we can get rid of fatalistic ways of looking at life.

“In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons.” (4b-5a) Adoption to sonship was a Roman thing. An adopted son has the same rights and privileges as a natural son. We know the story of Judah Ben Hur who was condemned as a galley slave. He rescued a Roman Consul from drowning and Consul Quintus Arrius adopted him as his son. He had all the rights and privileges of the son of a Roman Consul. But he also had the right to refuse this. (Which he finally did) As God’s sons and daughters we have an inheritance that will never perish spoil or fade, kept in heaven for us. If we don’t want this blessing, we are free to reject it and live as spiritual paupers without hope in the world. Adoption as sons and daughters is God’s grace. It means that we have a love relationship with the Creator God. To know that our lives are in the hands of a loving, almighty God is a great spiritual blessing. Our God does not rob us of free will. He gives us freedom to accept or reject his love and grace.

Third, Redeemed. Look at verses 6-7. “to the praise of his glorious grace which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace.” Redemption is a spiritual blessing that sets us free. We were living as slaves to sin. The Bible says that whoever sins is a slave to sin. Slaves are not free. They serve a harsh taskmaster. A sinful habit takes hold of us and refuses to let go. We think that we are free if we do whatever we feel like doing. This is the devil’s deception. We think that following the desires of our sinful nature is a mark of freedom, but soon we find that this is slavery that makes us miserable. Sin is a very demanding master. He does not let us go. But God redeemed us through the blood of Jesus. Peter says, “for you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but revealed in these last times for (our) sakes...so our faith and hope are in God.” (1Pe 1:18-21)

Fourth, Forgiven – Forgiveness is a spiritual blessing that brings peace. Read verses 7-8. “We have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace which he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding.” God is wise and understanding. He knows what we really need. We need to be forgiven and to forgive. He also gives us wisdom and understanding so that we may realize the importance of being forgiven and forgiving others. David was a king and a successful general. He was a poet and he was loved by everyone. But he wrote, “Blessed is the man whose sins are forgiven.” (Ps 32) He realized that his achievements did not satisfy him or make him happy. He found that forgiveness is the best blessing. It is through receiving God’s grace of forgiveness that we receive and know God’s love. God’s love and grace fill our hearts with inexpressible joy.

Fifth, Hope—and a mystery revealed. See verses 9-10. “And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, 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.” God’s great hope for the world was a mystery until Jesus came. (18) Now, the mystery of his will is made known. His plan is to unite all things in Christ. Our hope is in Christ who saves us by his gospel and gives us the Holy Spirit as a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance in heaven. (11-12) We are in God’s kingdom and God’s kingdom is in us. The mystery revealed gives us a sure hope. Christ is enthroned in heaven and he is enthroned in our hearts. He is enthroned in his church. People must have hope. When we have no hope, we despair. We sometimes grasp false hopes and these false hopes keep us going for a while—hope of making money and living the American dream, hope of finding the perfect husband or wife; hope of making a great achievement. But these hopes, even if realized, don’t give real peace or satisfaction. But real hope, hope that does not disappoint us, is hope in God. God is a God of hope and he invites us to share his hope.

Part 2—Thanksgiving and prayer topics

First, Thanksgiving topics— Read verse 15. “For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in all my prayers.” Paul was thankful because the believers in Ephesus had strong faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. He was thankful because they loved each other and their love extended to all kinds of believers everywhere. Paul prayed for them and was full of thanks. He had no place for complaints and no room to feel sorry for himself in his mind and heart.

Second, prayer topics. Paul has two prayer topics for them and for us. First, That we may be given a spirit of wisdom and revelation so that we may know God better. Verse 17 says: “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.” To know Jesus is to know the Father God. Even near the end of his life, Paul wrote, “I want to know Christ. Surely he knew Jesus. But he still wanted to know him better. I want to know God better too. May God give all of us this spirit of wisdom and revelation so that we may know him better.

Next, he prays that the eyes of our hearts may be enlightened so that we may know the hope to which he has called us. Read verse 18. “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. Our spiritual eyes are often blinded by the things of the world. Sometimes they are blinded by our own ambition or greed or lust. Isaiah and Jesus said that we have eyes but cannot see and ears but cannot hear (Isa 6:9,10; Jn 12:40). Though we are Christians and have tasted the goodness of God’s grace and love, we are deceived by the devil. We become spiritually blind. We put our hopes in false messiahs. So we too must pray for ourselves and our sheep and our children that the eyes of our hearts may be enlightened. May God help us to see the incomparable value of spiritual blessings.

Third, the power source of all spiritual blessings. The power source of all spiritual blessings is the power of God who raised Jesus from the dead. Jesus died to defeat the devil and God raised him from the dead and enthroned him at the right hand of God to claim and consolidate that victory. Look at verses 19-23. “...and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.” Praise Christ who is seated far above all rule and authority and power and dominion. Praise God who has placed everything under his feet and appointed him head over everything in the present age and in the age to come. (20-23) Praise Christ who hands the kingdom over to God so that God may be all in all. (1 Co 15:24-28) Praise God, the giver of every spiritual blessing. May all of us be a part of his great plan for world redemption, for the praise of his glory.