

## **“EVERY SPIRITUAL BLESSING IN CHRIST”**

Ephesians 1:1–14

Key Verse: 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...”

Do you feel blessed? Be honest. Sometimes we say “yes,” sometimes, “no.” Some of us may be trending toward the “no” category. Why do we see ourselves like that? Maybe it’s because we’re experiencing problems. Or maybe, though we may be doing so-so, we encounter people who seem to have it all. We compare ourselves with them and suddenly we feel like we’re lacking. What’s more, material and human blessings are very visible, but we can’t see spiritual blessings at all. So what *are* our spiritual blessings in Christ? Why do we need to *know* how blessed we are in him? How do these blessings really become *ours*? What *difference* does it make? May God open our hearts and speak to us through his word today.

What’s the setting? First, Paul is writing this letter from a Roman prison (3:1; 4:1). He addresses Christians in the city of Ephesus (1:1b). Ephesus was one of the largest cities in the Roman Empire. It was a wealthy place where many people came to work and do business. Paul himself had gotten a church started there, on his third missionary journey. When he first arrived and spoke boldly in the Jewish synagogue, some people continued in their unbelief and spoke evil of the new Christian way of life. So Paul took his new disciples with him and taught the Bible daily in the hall of Tyrannus. This went on for about two years, and through this, all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord (Ac19:8–10). God raised elders in the Ephesian church who had personally witnessed Paul’s beautiful shepherd’s life, and they grew to love him (Ac20:17–38). In total, Paul stayed about three years in Ephesus (Ac20:31), then left. Since then, he’d taken an offering to Jerusalem, gotten arrested and left in jail for a few years, and finally traveled to Rome under house arrest. This is likely where and when he wrote this letter.

How does Paul introduce himself? Look at verse 1a. “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God...” “Apostle” means one who’s been sent. “Christ” means “King,” so “Christ Jesus” means “King Jesus.” Paul isn’t working for his own ambition; God sent him as an ambassador of Jesus his King. Also, “apostle” means Paul’s been sent with the authority of Jesus. This is why we need to listen to everything he says. Paul emphasizes that this has happened to him “by the will of God.” In today’s passage he mentions the will of God four times (1,5,9,11) because God has his will for each of us, too. Originally

Paul had been an enemy of God, but God, in his divine will, chose him, called him and turned his life around to be his servant (Ac9). Humanly, though, Paul's life had been hard, and now he's in prison. But he's confident that he's living and serving "by the will of God."

How does he address his readers? Look at verse 1b. "To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus." Paul calls them "saints" and "faithful in Christ Jesus." As we're going to see later, they're not without their struggles. They're not perfect. But they've been made holy by the precious blood of Jesus. By God's grace they've been faithful to Jesus, faithful in serving him. What a reputation: to be considered as somebody who's been "faithful in Christ Jesus"! What a beautiful life goal! In verse 2 Paul gives them such a gracious greeting: "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Then, in Greek, verses 3–14 are one long sentence. It contains repeated words, phrases and ideas. To understand it all seems hard. Actually, it's simple. It begins: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!" (3a) Paul goes on to repeat, "...to the praise of his glorious grace" or "to the praise of his glory" (6a, 12b, 14b). Why does he write like this? Once he gets started, he can't stop, because he's so excited about praising God. He's inviting his readers, and us, to do so too. It's good to get excited about praising God!

But why should we praise him? Paul says, "...who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places..." (3b) This is the main content of the passage. These Christians were living in a city where people had many obvious material blessings. Paul wanted them, above all else, to see the far greater spiritual blessings they had in Christ. So he lists them in verses 4–14.

What are they? Let's see. Even before the creation of the world God chose us to be holy and blameless before him (4). In love God predestined us to be adopted as his own children in Jesus (5). He's blessed us in his own Beloved Son with his glorious grace (6)(FLIP SLIDE). He's blessed us with redemption through his blood and the forgiveness of all our trespasses (7). He's lavished the richness of his grace on us in many ways (8). In all wisdom and insight he's also made known to us the mystery of his will, to unite all things in Christ (9–10)(FLIP SLIDE). Finally, God has guaranteed us an inheritance in his eternal kingdom by giving us the promised Holy Spirit (11–14). Unlike money or possessions, this inheritance is imperishable, undefiled and unfading, "kept in heaven for you" (1Pe1:4). So Paul says, "...in the heavenly places." It's a place way better than even the most secure bank vault. In this letter Paul is going to say more about these blessings, especially God's grace, God's love, and the mystery of unity in Christ. With all these

spiritual blessings, we're not "needy." As David said in Psalm 23, we don't "want" (Ps23:1b).

So how does anybody get all these blessings? Read verse 13. Paul is summarizing here the way of salvation. It's very simple, and it's universal. Hear the word of truth in the gospel of Christ and believe. To believe also means to put our hope in Christ. So Paul says all these blessings are for those "who were the first to hope in Christ" as well as for "you also," meaning these new believers. These blessings are still available for anyone, even right now, today.

Out in the world people work and study hard to get their blessings. I heard of a young guy who's got a good marriage going. His brother, who's unmarried, envied him, so he told him, "Look, I work hard on my marriage; if you want this, get to work!" It's true in many ways. We can't just sit around and wait for blessings to drop like an apple into our mouths. But all the spiritual blessings, every single one of them, don't come to us because of our efforts. God showers them on us when we hear the word of truth in the gospel of Christ and simply believe. When we respond in faith, God gives us the Holy Spirit, who helps us see how real all these blessings are. Also, he helps us see how our blessings in Christ are all we need.

Still, we may not be sold on this. We still like human and material blessings. We doggedly pursue them, because we can't imagine being happy without them. There was a man who got married, but soon he came home and found that his new wife had left him, no explanation, no forwarding address. He was devastated. Then he started dating, but nothing seemed to work. No matter how hard he tried, no relationship got very far. One day, alone in his recliner he started yelling at God: "Why is this so hard? I've been faithful to you, why can't you do just this one thing for me?" Then he heard a faint voice saying, "Am I not enough for you?" Finally it dawned on him: "Jesus is enough for me." He started weeping. The love of God filled his heart. He forgot all about his desperation. He stopped dating. Jesus gave him peace. Then strangely, a lovely young lady at church took notice of him. His satisfaction in Jesus made him interesting. Eventually they married and started a ministry to singles who are desperate to marry, telling them, "Jesus is enough."

Are we sure about this? Is Jesus really enough? Do I really need that high paying job, that top position, or even marriage? Or do I *only* need *Jesus*? Is this how we're praying for our children and those we care about, to experience that "Jesus is enough"? Is it our *most fervent prayer*? Or are we pushing some other agenda on people? Usually such agendas are for our own honor and glory. Honestly, some of us have some serious soul-searching to do. In fact, we all do. Our Lord Jesus said, "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his

soul?” (Mt16:26) So many people have grabbed all the human blessings but found themselves a wreck in the end. Paul shows us the opposite example elsewhere when he wrote: “But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him...” (Php3:7–9a)

Why is being in Christ the best blessing? Because in Christ all our sins are forgiven. In Christ our love relationship with God is restored. In Christ God lavishes his grace on us. In Christ we can see God’s mysterious will for our lives. In Christ we have a glorious inheritance for all eternity. He lifts us out of our sin and the power of death and brings us all the way up to his eternal blessings in heaven. Nothing compares. If this is real to us, we’ll be praising God just like Paul did.

Finally, why do we need to be absolutely sure that in Christ we have “every spiritual blessing”? As Paul is going to tell us later, if we’re sure about these blessings, we’ll “no longer be children, tossed to and for by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine” or “deceitful schemes” but rather, we’ll “grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ...” (4:14–15).

So, are we praising God for every spiritual blessing we have in Christ? Or are we longing for the visible blessings around us and envying those who have them? May God help us hear the truth of the gospel, repent, believe in Jesus and receive the Holy Spirit. In this way, may God give us the full conviction that in Christ we have every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.