

# Paul's Thanksgiving Testament

Ephesians 1:1-23

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.”**

## Synopsis

In Christ we are blessed with every spiritual blessing. He has made us, the Church, His very body on earth. Let us bless our God and Father, and Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness today.

After his introduction and greeting which, like every other phrase in this chapter, deserves it's own complete sermon Paul begins his message with these words [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.”**

We know what it means to be blessed by God, but what does it mean to bless the Lord? Of course, it can mean to praise Him. Praise is an outward expression of something that we have in our hearts. And this is what God desires, even more than praise: that we might love the Lord our God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength. That inner delight, love and gratitude toward God is what is meant by blessing. God blesses you, and delights in you, and He is pleased when His people bless Him.

What was it that moved Apostle Paul to bless and thank God? In this epistle he lists the many **“spiritual blessings”** we have in Christ. We might think of this as Paul's Thanksgiving testament. What are **“spiritual blessings”**? This phrase introduces a category for certain blessings that are **“spiritual”**; it implies other blessings are outside this category, even though they are no less blessings and from God. Modern man does not like categories. Categories divide things up and challenge us to judge between this and that. I submit to you that the reason we don't like categories is that we don't want to judge. And we don't like to judge because we are afraid to BE judged. But the inspired Apostle has a category for **“spiritual blessings”**. The other category he usually posits against the spiritual is the worldly or carnal or natural. For example, he says in Colossians, **“Set your mind on things above, not on things of the earth.”** [Col 3: 2] So the categories are scriptural and necessary.

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What are the spiritual blessings Paul blessed God for? He begins with God's choosing of us in v. 4. **"For He chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight in love."**

The word **"chose"** is the Greek word from which we derive the words election and eclectic. God elected us. We talk a lot about elections in America. But when God elects someone to belong to Him, there is no danger of a miscount, no need for a recount, and no possibility of anyone meddling with the ballots. God's vote is the only one which counts. It's not a popularity vote, but it is His choice. This doctrine is closely related with the doctrine of predestination. It all means that we who are God's people were chosen by Him. He didn't do this based on our decision or choice or actions or virtues. **"He chose us before the foundation of the world."** It is the most staggering and wonderful blessing that God the Father chose you to be his adopted child, and to lavish upon you every spiritual blessing. You may have really big problems that rob you of your joy and make Thanksgiving an awkward time. But if you are a Christian, you are in the most privileged category of human beings in all history. You are the elect, the saints, the Church. Blessed be our God and Father, who has chosen us!

Because He chooses us to be his children, God has also given us a purpose. Did you notice it there in v. 4? **"That we might be holy and without blame before Him in love."** People who have no root in the Bible tend toward Existentialism, which is to say, meaninglessness. But we have an awesome purpose in Christ, to be the holy objects of God's love, and to be in a holy love relationship with Him.

I had a very long section arguing why we should be holy and without blame, quoting many of the commandments in the Bible to be holy, pure and sinless - I also wanted to argue that holiness is OUR business, not something we are to just sit and wait for God to accomplish - verses like, **"Make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge, self-control, etc.,"** [2Pet 1: 5] and **"Come back to your senses and stop sinning."** [1Cor 15:34] I took most of these out simply because God says, **"Be holy"**, and you don't need a lot of verses to reinforce that command. If you do, go search the scriptures for yourself. But the question is, HOW can we be holy?

It's important that you understand, first of all, that if you are a Christian, you ARE holy and without blame by virtue of the blood of Jesus Christ. He was punished in your place. Paul calls this **"redemption through his blood and forgiveness of sins"** [7]. God's salvation and the forgiveness of sins is the most

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costly spiritual blessing. All the wealth of the world could not purchase such redemption. Only the blood of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, could be the offering for the sin of the world. Only His righteousness is sufficient to save us from our sins.

This righteousness is imputed to us entirely by the grace of God. If this is true of you (that you are holy and blameless by his grace), then you must conform to that imputed righteousness. Remember God's purpose and will for us is **"to be holy and blameless in his sight"**. There would be NO need for all these commands if sanctification were also imputed. We wouldn't need to **"put off the old man"**, or **"mortify the deeds of the body"**, or consider cutting off anything (even body parts) that cause us to sin. All such commands in the Bible would not only be unnecessary but misleading! If you have been forgiven, you are a debtor to the Lord, and if you thank God for his grace, it's the least you can do to conform to His image instead of to the lusts of your former life. Be holy because HE is holy; be holy because YOU are holy! BE what you really ARE. Be the NEW creation, not your OLD self.

Do you see how difficult this is? We are an extremely narcissistic people. "I am the best ME there can be, and so I should never be asked or expected to change, grow, or learn something from another person. Why should I want to be a new creation, when I'm so wonderful?" But the obvious problem of sin is that WE are the enemy, enemies of God, enemies of ourselves.

Again, I ask, how is it possible that we should be holy and live blamelessly? It is absolutely impossible for an unbeliever. But for the elect who have been set free in Jesus Christ, it is possible. How? The answer is hidden in v. 4. Do you see it? Erase the period from before the last two words and you shall see the answer: **"in love."** I'm deliberately ignoring the sentence break in the NIV because the inspired Apostle did not put it there. Since we don't know exactly what Paul meant **"in love"** to modify, I'm going to revert back to the older translations, nearly all of which attach the phrase **"in love"** to the preceding thought.

**"In love"** can then refer to the Christian's love for God. Obviously if we are in Him, He loves us. Most people assume God's love, and they are most certainly right to assume He loves his elect. What isn't clear is whether we love Him. Here's the point: No one will ever sanctify himself to grow in holiness if he doesn't deeply love the Lord, and he will not love Him if he has not understood how much God loved him first. God so loved YOU that He gave his only begotten Son for you. If that doesn't mean much to you, well, you have no reason whatsoever to deny

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yourself, take up the cross and follow Him. I repeat, no man can please God, obey God, or in any way be holy or blameless before God if he doesn't love God with all his heart and soul and mind and strength. He cannot. He will not. And you cannot, and you will not without love. Love is the fulfillment of the law.

Consider the story of the woman who anointed Jesus with very costly oil in Luke 7. Remember how Jesus spoke of her to his host, Simon the Leper?

**“Simon, you gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in. You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil. Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little.”**

This woman was literally in love with Jesus. This love was the thing that counted to Jesus; it was in direct response to and directly proportional to the forgiveness of her sins by the Lord Jesus. I think she loved the Lord Jesus in the same degree she hated her former life of sin.

We use this expression “in love” to refer to romantic infatuation. Being spiritually “in love” with Jesus is a deep, very pure devotion. True Christians, like this woman, delight in the Lord and in the knowledge of the things of God. Such a Christian is focused on his Beloved. His greatest hope is to see his Lord's face smiling upon him on Judgement Day. His love for God compels him to holiness; it also makes him hate his sin and forsake it passionately. Charles Spurgeon put it best:

**“If faith does not make you holy, it is not worth a rap. If your faith does not make you hate sin and wean you from it, it is not the faith of God's elect.”**

God has given us so much. How can we not love and thank Him, not just with praise from our lips, but with blessing from the bottom of our hearts, as well as holiness, purity and obedience? How can we dare conform to the worldly, trashy, adulterous age we live in, rather than to our Lord's holy example? Not only has he chosen us and redeemed us, as if that were not already far more than we could ever ask or imagine, he has given us union with God, [10] **“that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth - in Him.”**

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Sometimes we find our enemy coming to humbly ask forgiveness. We might grudgingly forgive them, but avoid them for many years. Not so with our God. Instead, he makes us ONE with Himself. We are part of Him, united with Him, **reconciled**. Even now we are **“seated with him in the heavenly realms.”** [Eph 2: 6] This mystical union is so wonderful, we cannot comprehend it. Paul elaborates on this in ch.3, praying that they might **“know the width and length and depth and height of the love of Christ which passes knowledge, and be filled with all the fullness of God.”** Astonishing! Do you know that you are meant to be filled with all the fullness of God? Do you ever sit and meditate on this astounding spiritual blessing that passes knowledge?

Indeed, God's spiritual blessings to us are not in the earth beneath, but in the heavenly realms. In the OT, a person who was blessed was wealthy and successful and powerful. In the NT God has lavished us, not with cattle and camels, but with sonship, wisdom, honor, glory, power, and most of all, union with Himself! Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us **“in the heavenly realms in Christ.”**

Do you still wonder what you ought to be thankful for this Thanksgiving? There is more. Look at v. 11.

**“In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will.”**

What is our inheritance? Jesus said we will inherit the earth! All things are ours! In Christ, you are not poor. Your Father owns all things; the cattle on a thousand hills are His! (If fact, the hills are his, and even the planets and the stars are all His! He made them.)

Not only so, but God who created all things, controls all things and uses all things - **ALL** things - for the good of those who love Him! [Rom 8:28] We can call this God's **sovereignty** or **dominion**. God's infinite riches have been lavished upon you and me in Jesus Christ. God's sovereignty in our lives is the main idea in vv. 18-22. God has called us to the hope of the **riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints**, as well as to:

**“his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above**

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**all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.”**

Christians, we need God's power to work in us. And we need it to do His work, which He left for us. Whenever our Lord Jesus spoke, people were amazed at the authority (power) in his words. We need that. And do you know what? He has promised it to you. **“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you: ...”** [Acts 1: 8] The Holy Spirit is another spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms! Can there be any power greater than the very Spirit of God dwelling in us? **“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ.”**

There is one thing in this passage for which Paul thanks God expressly. Did you notice it in v. 16?

**“I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.”**

Paul was overwhelmed with love and thanksgiving to God for these humble people in Ephesus, that he brought them before the throne of God non-stop. They were not famous or rich or great. Many of them were slaves, perhaps many were illiterate. They were simple, but they loved the Lord, and were God's true Church. What does it mean to be the church? The word church just means the set apart people. Look at vv. 22,23.

**“And God placed all things under Jesus' feet and appointed Him to be head over everything to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way.”**

Can you imagine a more amazing spiritual blessing than this? That we are Christ's body? The body of Christ is a metaphor used by Paul to describe God's people. We, the Church, are that very kingdom of priests, that holy nation which God purposed to create and fulfilled in the Messiah. In Gal 6:16 he calls the Church the “Israel of God”. The Church is God's own glorious, eternal kingdom. If you have reservations about this, look ahead to ch. 2, and you will see that the Church is, in fact, the very dwelling place of God, his temple. Our God doesn't dwell in temples made by human hands; no, He dwells in us.

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**“Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.”** [Rev 21: 3]

Our Lord Jesus is incarnated still, in the Church. Paul says [Eph 5:30-32] that we are members of his very flesh and bones, just as a husband and wife are one flesh. The church is that rock in Daniel's prophecy, that was cut not by human hands, which struck the kingdoms of this world, and became a great mountain and filled the whole earth, the kingdom of God which shall never be destroyed, nor left to another people. [Dan 2:34,35,44]

And let me ask you this: Are you thankful for the Church? Are you thankful for other Christians? I am deeply thankful for this church, for God worked so much in my life through you. I have never stopped thanking God for you and praying for you. For we are connected organically into one living Body of Christ. Indeed, let the poor say, **“I am rich”**; let the weak say, **“I am strong.”** [Joel 3:10] Blessed be God who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing!

What does it mean to bless the Lord? It is to love Him, and it is to thank Him. To bless God is to give myself over to Him and to His cause completely; it is to fall before Him in wonder, love and praise, giving myself to belong to Him forever. It is to:

**“Give unto the Lord the glory due to His name and to Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.”** [Ps 29: 2]

Dear freinds, we are on holy ground in heavenly places. Are these things not thrilling and exalted to think about? Are you thankful for these spiritual blessings today?

**“Bless the Lord, O my soul; And all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits.”** [Ps 103: 1,2]