

The Christian life is really a treasure hunt as we progressively discover the vast wealth that already is ours because we are now in Christ.

“For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face, that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God’s mystery, that is, Christ Himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” Colossians 2:1-3, NAS95.

From the moment He saves you, God bestows on you, as Paul puts it, “every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.” Verse 3 is the opening topic phrase of a long sentence (in Greek) that runs down through verse 14. Some Greek scholars have called it one of the most complex Greek sentences in the entire Bible to sort out, as Paul piles phrase upon phrase to explain what some of those spiritual blessings are in 202 words!

Throughout eternity we will go on discovering the riches of God’s grace, which He lavished upon us (1:7-8). We are spiritually rich in Christ beyond our capacity to imagine. One of the most important things for your spiritual growth is to ask God to open the eyes of your heart so that you will know “what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints” (1:17) infinitely perfect, He would be unrighteous if He did not glory in that which is perfect, namely, in Himself.

Blessing is certainly a biblical concept. An Old Testament story about blessing stands out. The old man was nearly blind as he reached out to touch the face and hands of his son. "It is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau." The aged hands felt the hairy forearms, not realizing that they were wrapped with the skin of a goat to simulate those of his twin brother.

The scene is one of deception where Jacob plotted to steal that which his father had chosen for his brother Esau. What was at stake? A plot of ground? A large sum of money? Power? Prestige? No, it was all for a BLESSING.

The word "bless" is one of the most used religious words among English-speaking Christian people. We use the word constantly in conversation and song:

"Count Your Blessings" ; "Bless my soul" ; "Showers of Blessing" ; "The Lord bless you"

The word is used so much, in fact, that it is often just a cliché. For example when you say, "The Lord bless you" to someone, are you saying it as kind of Christian "goodbye"; are you using it as a sort of prayer that the Lord will do good things for the person? Just what is it that you are expecting, or hoping, that the Lord will do?

Or, when you "count your blessings," what are you counting? If you were to list your blessings, would you list all the good things that you might have today, like good health, enough money, happy family life, a job? But what about the unpleasant things in your life? Are they blessings? Do you think of trials and tribulations, testing, as blessings? If the Lord allows testing of your faith, is that a blessing?

The word "bless" is translated from the Greek term eulogetos. It is a compound word, made up from joining two words together.

1) Eu is the word "good."

(2) Lego is the verb, "to speak."

The resulting compound means "to speak good toward someone." And that is what Paul is going to do in this chapter. He is going to "speak good" of the Lord. He is going to praise the Lord and exalt His goodness and His power and His grace.

So in remembering Jacob, we don't normally put so much emphasis in a blessing. But perhaps we should. Especially when we note how Paul opens his epistle to the Ephesians.

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, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love 5 He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.(Ephesians 1:3-6).

When we speak of a blessing, we don't usually talk about blessing God. It is much

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more common to speak about having been blessed by God. We usually think of the greater blessing the lesser - the Lord blessing us. But Paul begins this section by pronouncing a blessing upon both God the Father and upon the Lord Jesus Christ.

God blesses us with every spiritual blessing in Christ so that we may in turn bless and glorify Him, the giver of every good and perfect gift. Blessed by God, we bless God.

Because God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, we should bless God.

To bless God as we should, we need to understand how He has blessed us.

1. God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.

That we will address in Eph. 1:4-14, but today we will just seek to understand and apply verse 3.

A. The gospel begins with God, not with us.

From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible is a book that reveals to us who God is. It begins (Gen. 1:1), "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." It ends with the Revelation of Jesus Christ, the supreme manifestation of God to us. As He told His disciples (John 14:9), "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" Because God is a spirit, invisible in the brightness of His glory from our fallen human eyes, we cannot know Him through human philosophy or intuition. If we are to know Him, He must reveal Himself to us, which He has done in Christ.

Our own church doctrinal statement says "all scripture is given to glorify God and it's priority is the revelation of Jesus Christ."

The Bible shows that we must be radically Christ -centered. As Paul exclaims (Rom. 11:36), "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen." And so Paul begins this magnificent unfolding of the gospel by being radically Christ-centered. Note the repetition of God and Jesus Christ in these opening verses: "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God"; "in Christ Jesus: (1:1).

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (1:2). “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...” (1:3). He continues (1:4), “He chose us,”

(1:5) “He predestined us,” “through Christ Jesus to Himself,” “His will,” (1:6) “to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.” Work your way through the rest of this long sentence and notice how radically God-centered it is.

C. The God who blesses us with salvation is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Why does Paul use this designation of God in this context? (He uses a similar phrase in 2 Cor. 1:3; see, also, 1 Pet. 1:3.) In part, Paul uses this designation to focus on the fact that while He was on this earth, the Lord Jesus, the eternal Son of God, depended on the Father for His every need. In His humanity, Jesus knew the Father and leaned upon His all-sufficiency for every need to show us how we should live in dependence on the Father.

Also, Jesus is the one and only mediator between the Father and us (1 Tim. 2:5). All that we receive from God, we must receive through the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ becomes our heavenly Father when we come to Him through His Son. The Son of God is eternally God, but He laid aside His glory and took on Himself the form of a servant, becoming obedient to death on the cross to secure our salvation (Phil. 2:5-11). Thus all spiritual blessings come to us through the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, through the obedience of the Son of God to His God and Father.

This means that there is no salvation outside of Jesus Christ. If good people can earn their salvation by their good deeds, then the Son of God did not need to leave His glory in heaven and come in obedience to the Father to die on the cross. Any system of salvation apart from Christ and the cross is false. It diminishes what Jesus Christ did for us, shedding His blood to secure all the blessings of heaven for us, even while we were

D. God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, not necessarily with every physical or material blessing on earth.

A modern heresy teaches that it is God's will for all of His children to be healthy and wealthy in this life. The false prophets of this cult live in huge mansions, drive expensive cars, and indulge themselves in every flagrant luxury that they can, luring their gullible followers with promises of the same. It is completely anti-Christian! While God promises to meet our basic physical needs, He knows that our deepest need is spiritual, to be rightly related to Him. So He blesses us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.

Our lives on this earth are short and uncertain, at best. But, we will spend eternity either with God in heaven or in hell under His judgment. As the story of the rich man and Lazarus illustrates (Luke 16:19-31), it is far better to live in dire poverty and suffering in this life and have eternal riches in heaven than to live in luxury in this life and spend eternity in the agonizing flames of hell. Or, as the apostle John puts it after telling us not to love the world or the things in the world (1 John 2:17), "The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever."

You may be thinking, "But isn't this impractical? What good are spiritual blessings to me if I can't live comfortably in this life? Isn't this just 'pie-in-the-sky-when-you-die'? Aren't those who focus on heavenly blessings not much earthly good?"

Hardly! In fact, precisely the opposite is true. C. S. Lewis saw this when he wrote, "The Christians who did most for the present world were precisely those who thought most of the next. It is since Christians have begun thinking less of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this. Aim at heaven and you get earth thrown in; aim at earth and you get neither." (Source in Lewis unknown; cited on: <http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/sermonmanuscripts.html>.)

Or, as Paul commands (Col. 3:1-2), "Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set

your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.” Our treasures or blessings are all in Christ, in the heavenly places. Our greatest need is spiritual and we have every spiritual blessing in Him.

If you’re still thinking, “But this is so impractical,” keep in mind that when Paul wrote this, he was in prison. Every time he moved he could hear and feel the heavy chains clanking around his wrist and his ankle. He could have been depressed and complaining about his circumstances. He could have said, “I don’t need spiritual blessings right now! I need to get out of this stinking cell and have my physical needs met!”

But, instead, he breaks into this doxology, praising God for giving him every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. If understanding those blessings could sustain Paul in a Roman prison and give him the buoyant hope that he exudes in all of his letters, then this stuff is about as practical as you can get! It will sustain you in whatever difficulties you face.

This is not a prayer. Paul is not asking for blessing from God. Neither is it prophetic. He is not saying that there is coming a day when you will be blessed. Instead, he speaks of a present reality.

You have been blessed. It is an accomplished fact (aorist tense), and not only have you been blessed, but you have been blessed abundantly.

I occasionally meet Christians who are seeking some sort of "second blessing." What they do not realize is to what extent they have already been blessed.

If we do not live in accordance with the blessings with which we have been blessed, we live like spiritual paupers because of unbelief. Out of sight, out of mind. And the problem with the realm of blessing is that it is not here on earth where we can see it.

However, They are SPIRITUAL blessings as opposed to the physical kind. And they are in the realm of the HEAVENLY places versus the earthly places.

In Ephesians this phrase can refer to (1) the place of exaltation for Christ (1:20), (2) the place of exaltation for believers because they are united with Christ (2:6), (3) the

place or sphere in which God's wisdom is revealed to rulers and authorities (3:10), and (4) the place of warfare between believers and demonic forces (6:12). Thus "the heavenlies" are where Christ is, where we are, where demons are, and where God is revealed! In other words, "heavenly realms" does not refer to a physical location but to a spiritual reality, God's world, in which believers have a share and which evil forces still seek to attack. It includes all of the believer's relation to God and the church's experience. It is a way of saying that this world is not the only reality. A larger reality exists where Christ is already exalted as Lord, where believers participate in his victory, and where spiritual forces are opposed (Snodgrass, 47). Heavenly places, therefore, is a reference to 'the unseen world of spiritual reality (Stott, 35). It is the unseen, spiritual realm in which we enjoy God's presence, commune with Jesus, and wage war with the enemy.

They are eternal riches. And because we have an eternal inheritance, we are motivated to make our lives count for today.

But that is not all. Not only have we been blessed. Not only have we been blessed in a realm that is eternal. But we have also been blessed with every spiritual blessing.

This includes spiritual gifts, but it is not limited to them. It includes our salvation. It includes answered prayer. And it includes the grace of God for daily living. It includes EVERYTHING.

Don't miss this! There is no spiritual blessing out there with which you have not been blessed. You are batting a thousand in the spiritual blessing category. They are all yours in Christ.

E. God's blessing us with every spiritual blessing in Christ shows us the all-sufficiency of Christ for our every need.

All blessings come to us in the person of Jesus Christ. Apart from Him, we can do nothing (John 15:5), but in Him we have every spiritual blessing. In Him "are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge," and "in Him you have been made complete" (Col. 2:3, 10). God's "divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and

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godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and
excellence” (2 Pet. 1:3).

Either these promises are of no practical value or these and many other Scriptures show us that God has given us in the person and work of Jesus Christ all that we need to face life’s problems. He has given us His Holy Spirit to indwell us and to produce in us the fruit of the Spirit: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal. 5:22-23). These qualities describe an emotionally or psychologically whole person. Most of those qualities have a relational aspect, so that the person with these qualities will be able to get along harmoniously with others. These qualities are promised to every person who walks by the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:16).

In other words, God does not say, “My Spirit will produce love in all of you, except for those who have never been loved and who have an anger problem. You’ll need therapy to work through your anger.” Or, “I will give joy to everyone except those who are clinically depressed. They may need Prozac if they want My joy.” He does not say, “Every Christian can experience My peace, except for those with an anxiety disorder. They’re going to need the insights of a secular psychologist to get through this thing!”

Secular Psychology and an integrated form of biblical Counseling has infiltrated the church and its effect has not been to direct hurting people to their spiritual blessings in Christ, but rather to human wisdom on how to cope with trials apart from reliance on God and repentance from sin. I have heard supposedly Christian psychologists say that to give Bible verses to a hurting person or to tell him to trust in God is worthless and even cruel advice! A Christian counselor should direct you to the all-sufficient Lord Jesus Christ and your spiritual riches in Him.

Recently, there was the story of a Christian woman suffering from severe anxiety and depression. Without even probing for the causes of her problems, her pastor told her to go to a doctor and get an antidepressant. She followed his advice and felt better within a few weeks. But she did not confront the sin in her life that was at the root of her troubles. It was only years later when she started attending a church where sin is called

sin and people are held accountable that she saw her own sin, confessed it, and began to be truly healed in Christ.

God directs trials into our lives so that we will learn not to trust in ourselves, but in God and His mighty power (2 Cor. 1:8-9). He uses trials to make us examine ourselves in a deeper way, so that we will root out any selfishness, pride, or sin. If we try to solve our problems without digging deeper into the treasure house of our riches in Christ, we have missed God's purpose in sending those trials. So make it your lifelong quest to understand and be satisfied with Jesus Christ and all that God has made Him for your soul.

F. These blessings are for everyone that personally knows the Lord Jesus Christ.

Note the emphasis in these verses on "us": He has blessed us in Christ (1:3). He chose us in Him (1:4). He predestined us to adoption as sons (1:5). He freely bestowed His grace on us in the Beloved (1:6). In Him, we have redemption and forgiveness according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished on us (1:7-8). He made known to us the mystery of His will (1:9).

Who is "the us"? It is all of us as individuals but more importantly it is us as the church, the body of Christ which Paul eventually addresses all of these truths in specific terms later in the letter. The church has come to know God's abundant grace through faith in Jesus Christ. In other words, these blessings are not just for some super-saints. Rather, they are God's gracious gift to every child whom He adopts into His family for the purpose of placing them in the body of Christ, His church and it is for His glory.

While some of His children do not know and enjoy the blessings of their inheritance in Christ as they should, for many reasons, they are just as much heirs as those that do enjoy these riches. So every Christian should diligently seek to discover and enjoy these vast riches in Christ Jesus. To the extent that you understand and enjoy these riches, you will bless God for them.

2. Because God has blessed us with every blessing in Christ, we should bless God.

Paul uses the word “blessed” in two senses in this verse. When he says that God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing, he means that God has freely bestowed His good gifts on us in the person and work of His Son on our behalf.

But when we bless God, we cannot give Him anything that He lacks, because He has no lack. So our blessing God means to speak well of Him, or to praise Him for His glorious attributes and for His gracious actions toward us in Christ (Ps. 103:1-5). We thank Him for all that He is to us and for all that He has done for us and for all that He promises yet to do for us throughout eternity.

We bless God by offering up “a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name.” We bless God when we “do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased” (Heb. 13:15-16). We bless God when our hearts overflow with joy in Him because of His abundant grace towards us in Christ and we preach the Gospel of the kingdom to make disciples for the glory of Christ.

Conclusion

Martyn Lloyd-Jones states (ibid., p. 49), “there is no more true test of our Christian profession than to discover how prominent this note of praise and thanksgiving is in our life.” To what extent do you find praise, adoration, thankfulness, and joy in God welling to the surface in your daily life? I’m not talking about glibly going around saying, “Praise the Lord” all the time. I am talking about heartfelt joy and satisfaction in Christ that floods into your soul. It should not be a rare experience!

If it is not as frequent as it ought to be, spend time meditating on Scriptures such as Ephesians 1 or Romans 8, which tell of the spiritual riches that are ours in Christ. Meditate on the Psalms, which are filled with the praises of God in the midst of life’s difficult trials. Allow your trials to drive you to a deeper experience of the all-sufficiency of Jesus Christ for your soul. Make it your lifelong quest to “count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus [your] Lord” (Phil. 3:8). Being blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, bless the God who has so blessed you!