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PRETORIA NORTH BAPTIST CHURCH

OUR
SPIRITUAL
POSSESSIONS
IN CHRIST

From the Trinity

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PART 1: FROM THE FATHER

Introduction

In this three-part series we will be examining Ephesians chapter 1 verses 1 to 14. We will be examining the spiritual possessions that we have in Christ given to us by the Father (part 1), the Son (part 2) and the Holy Spirit (part 3). This article is not meant to be an extensive study but merely a brief overview.

From the Father – 1:1-6

“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 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, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.”

Verse 1-2: Paul starts the book with his traditional format of greeting. He introduces himself and states where his authority comes from, “of Christ Jesus by the will of God”.

Paul addresses the Christians at Ephesus as *saints*. In laymen’s terms this simply means, the holy ones or the virtuous ones. In certain religious traditions the term *saint* is ascribed to a person who is seen as ‘above average’ or a ‘super Christian’. Paul however calls mere everyday Christians like you and me **saints**. The reason for this is because those who place their faith in **Christ alone** lack nothing. They have everything inside Christ that they need for this life and the next and they have it in abundance. The apostle, the pastor and the church member are all equal in **sainthood status**, because all who believe receive **everything from God**. God bestows on the believer of Christ every spiritual blessing and possession withholding nothing and given from an unending, unlimited stream of abundance.

These blessings or possessions is what we will be examining throughout this short series, starting with the possessions given to us by **God the Father**.

Verse 3: Paul starts verse 3 by blessing the God who has greatly blessed us. The question that should come to mind is why is Paul blessing God? How could Paul bless God in anyway, especially considering a passage in which Paul explains God’s tremendous blessings bestowed on us? Paul’s usage of the clause, “Blessed be the God and Father” has enough content packed into that verse to justify a series for it alone. We will mention a few truths regarding Paul’s blessing in order to keep the article short and allow us to proceed to the next verses.

Paul’s blessing of God the father is not meant to be seen as Paul giving God anything that he didn’t had. Paul’s statement is ascribing to God glory as the origin of all blessings. In a way, Paul is calling God the God of blessings.

The word blessing has at its root a meaning of happiness. When Jesus stated, “Blessed are the poor in spirit”, he is, among other things, saying “Happy are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the

kingdom of heaven". Paul is therefore ascribing **happiness** to God. Paul is not doing it in a way that he wishes happiness for God, instead he is making a statement, **God is happy** and he is happy to bestow on us all these blessings (good things, things that will make us happy). **In short, God is the blessed God who blesses us.**

- **"in Christ"**: The crux of this whole passage is this preposition. These blessings that are given by the Triune God are not to be found anywhere apart from Christ. **In Christ alone there is blessings: eternal life, adoption and grace.**

- **"every spiritual blessing"**: As mentioned in the introduction, there is nothing the believer in Christ lacks. These blessings are not given progressively. They are not badges that must be earned as we develop as Christians. The believer receives all these blessings upon the moment they place their trust in Christ.

- **"in the heavenly places"**: This phrase has dual meaning. Firstly, it refers to "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places", meaning that these blessings given to us by God come from heaven. The realm of God. The infinite, unlimited, inextinguishable source that is God. His blessings are forever and never ending. We cannot out-sin God's forgiveness. We cannot come to the end of God's grace. For the believer in Christ there is definite assurance that their connection to God is and will forever be unbroken.

Secondly, the phrase refers to goal or ultimate destination of our blessings. The blessings that we receive from the Father are not earthly blessings. We receive them while on earth and they are given to us in order to cope and survive here in this world, but ultimately these blessings are meant for the eternal life, not the temporary life. God's blessings are focused on heaven. He blesses us so that we will have our **best life in the life that is to come.**

Verse 4: Paul starts off by mentioning a **heavenly blessing**, **"even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world"**. In this verse Paul makes it clear that our blessings from God are not based on merit. We did nothing to receive God's blessings. God didn't look for potential before blessing. His blessings are solely based on his choice. Spurgeon said on this truth:

"I believe the doctrine of election, because I am quite certain that, if God had not chosen me, I should never have chosen Him; and I am sure He chose me before I was born, or else He never would have chosen me afterwards; and He must have elected me for reasons unknown to me, for I never could find in myself why He should have looked upon me with special love. So I am forced to accept that great Biblical doctrine."

I was not favoured by God to receive his blessings instead of my next-door neighbour because I'm smarter or wiser than my neighbour, no. I was chosen by God solely based on his sovereign unconditional choice. This forces me to be humble and grateful. If God did not decide to look on me with grace I would have never known or chosen him. His choosing of me is nothing of my doing. I have nothing to boast of or nothing to lay claim to. Everything I am and have is because God chose me.

- **"that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love"** Paul mentions here another blessing as well as a cause and a result.

- **Blessing:** A blessing that flows out of God's blessing of election is the blessing of **holiness and blamelessness**. God's choosing of us means that he makes us holy and blameless.

He makes us like himself. He makes us qualified for eternal life in heaven (“redemption through his blood”). If you have faith in Christ, it means that God has chosen you, it means that you are holy and blameless, despite how you feel or your sin.

- **Cause:** Paul mentions that because of our election, that is **enough of a cause or reason** for us to pursue holiness. We mentioned above that a blessing of God’s election is holiness and blamelessness despite our feelings or sin. This doesn’t mean that we have free reign or license to sin, on the contrary, God’s election is the greatest motivation for and cause of holiness in our lives. If I know that because of God’s blessings, I’m guaranteed heaven today, despite my struggles and sins, I’m strengthened and comforted. I can continue to fight my sin with the knowledge that God is **on my side and not out to get me or to catch me in the act.**
- **Result:** The result of God’s election, his choosing of us, is that we are made holy and blameless. When we stand before God, if our faith is in Christ, we will be holy, as He is holy, and blameless. There will be no accusation that can be made against us.

- **“In love”:** Many scholars have debated the proper placing of this prepositional phrase. One camp would place the phrase at the end of verse 4, another camp would place the phrase at the beginning of verse 5. A third camp would claim that Paul’s ambiguous placing of the phrase was on purpose. A way for Paul to connect verse 4 and 5 with the singular usage of a prepositional phrase. It would be safe and orthodox for the Bible reader to choose any three of the camps.

- **“He chose us...that we should be holy and blameless before him in love”** – God’s choosing is done in love towards us or that we should be loving and show love towards him as we are holy and blameless.
- **“In love he predestined us”** – This refers to God’s election based on love.

Verse 5: Verse five contains juggernaut words like, **predestined and adoption.** Flowing from the previous verse, Paul states **that** God’s predestination of us comes from his love for us. The term and topic of predestination is one that authors have written whole books on.

- **Predestination:** Predestination is broad term that usually refers to election (making of believers) and reprobation (hardening of hearts or left to their own sinfulness). We will only be looking at the first element, election. Grudem defines election as: **“Election is an act of God before creation in which he chooses some people to be saved, not on account of any foreseen merit in them, but only because of his sovereign good pleasure”.** As part of God’s blessings toward us, Paul makes mention that God chose us for salvation. We are not saved because of our merit, but because of God graciously opening our eyes to see and behold Christ in order to place our faith in him. This means I cannot lose my salvation. If I was chosen by God not because of my merit and despite God being able to see my future sin and failures, how can I lose my salvation based on my merit or lack of? If I’m able to lose my salvation it means that I’m currently in the process of keeping myself saved. If I could lose my salvation it means that my current status of salvation is based on my own works. If I could lose my salvation, **I would** (John MacArthur).
- **Adoption:** **“Adoption is an act of God whereby he makes us members of his family”** (Grudem). When the blessed God bestows on us the various spiritual blessings, he not only forgives us our sins and gives us heaven, he also makes us fellow heirs with Christ. He makes us his sons and daughters. The amazing reality of this truth is that God elevates

us to the same level of sonship (and by default, daughtership) as our Lord Jesus Christ. This is why we can call God our **Father**. We are brothers and sisters of our Lord Jesus Christ and fellow heirs with him. The love that God the Father shows to his Son, the Lord Jesus, is the same love he shows to those who are **in his Son (John 17:23)**.

- **“through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will”** – Paul once again reminds us of the fundamental truth, that none of the blessings mentioned in this passage are available outside of Jesus Christ. **In Christ alone our hope is found**. No other person, god or pretending mediator can provide for us these blessings. **Christ and Christ alone. We should place our trust in him ALONE**. This is the will of God, as Paul mentions in the closing part of the verse. It was God’s will to do it all this way. Any other way is wrong and blasphemous.

Verse 6: This verse functions as a type of crescendo for the first six verses, the blessings received from the Father. Paul draws our attention away from ourselves and the magnificent blessings that are bestowed upon us and reminds us of the ultimate reason for why any of this happens and matters, **“to the praise of his glorious grace”**. Everything, and Paul means **EVERYTHING** revolves around God’s glory. As mentioned already, we were not chosen because of anything of value in us. We were predestined because of God’s desire to **glorify himself**.

“But, why does God lavish His blessings upon us? Is it all about us or is it about Him? One of the most important truths in Scripture to grasp is that God is passionate about His glory. John Piper explains this in many of his books, but especially in God’s Passion for His Glory [Crossway Books], half of which is a reproduction of Jonathan Edwards’ treatise, “The End for Which God Created the World.” It is not an easy book to read (I have read it twice now), but it is worth grappling with! Edwards argues that because God is infinitely perfect, He must seek His own glory, because to seek the glory of any being or thing less perfect than God would be sin. For any creature, self-glorification is sin. But, because God is infinitely perfect, He would be unrighteous if He did not glory in that which is perfect, namely, in Himself.” (Bible.org).

Although the verse makes mention of “his glorious grace”, his grace is part of his character and how he decided to reveal to us his character. God glorifies himself by showing grace towards us, who **do not deserve it**. Paul closes the section of the Father’s blessings by smoothly transition over to the Son, **“with which he has blessed us in the Beloved”**. Paul once again reminds his readers that these blessings, this grace is **only to be found in Christ**. Paul makes a beautiful reference to Christ as **the Beloved**. This shows how our affections should be aimed at Christ. He is our Beloved, our darling, our Groom. It also mirrors Christ’s affections towards us.

Closing Thoughts

For the Christian there is nothing he or she lacks. There exists no super Christians who have more spiritual blessings than others. All of God’s blessings he freely gives to those who place their faith and trust in Christ alone.

PART 2: FROM THE SON

From the Son – 1:7-12

“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.”

Verse 7: Paul starts off the section by reminding us of the reality that this grace and these spiritual possessions are only available in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul states that we have redemption. The word redeem means ‘to buy out’. We were bought out of slavery from sin and to sin and bought for the possession of our Lord Jesus Christ. The only way that a person can get the spiritual possessions found in the Lord is to be the personal possession of the Lord. Whoever remains in their sin is subject to the wrath of God (Romans 6:23). When Jesus redeemed us, he saved us **from** God and **for** God.

Our redemption was bought with price, the price of Christ’s life. Because the wages of sin is death, Christ had to die in order to buy us. So not only did Christ own us since he is our creator, now he owns us **doubly** because of our redemption.

This grace that was bestowed on us by Christ is not a lacking grace or a finite grace. Christ is rich in grace. He has no shortage to give or does not have to share his grace sparingly. He is **rich in grace** and he gives us from that **abundance of grace**. If grace was some sort of measurable substance, surely it would cost more grace to initially redeem us from the rot and filth of our sins than it would cost to maintain and keep us in a state of grace. Christ is so rich in grace that he can easily redeem us and afterwards keep us. We can rest on the merits of Christ. We do not have to struggle to keep ourselves in the faith, Christ does that for us. We simply need to trust and have faith in him.

Verse 8: In this verse Paul simply expands on the flow of thought from verse 7. Not only is Christ rich in grace and freely gives that grace to us, he **lavishes his grace on us**. The word lavish in this context carries the idea of ‘recklessly’ spending or ‘showering’ with. Christ gives us the grace we need, then he proceeds to provide even more grace and after that, he goes and showers us with **even more grace**. He lavishly gives his infinite, unending grace towards us. A simplified illustration would be to imagine a small sand particle on the bottom of Niagara Falls being crushed, stormed and flooded by the waters. We are that sand particle and the waters are Christ’s grace.



When we sin, our reaction should not be one that keeps us in despair and guilt. Our despair and guilt should force us to swim in the ocean of Christ's grace. When we fall to sin, we should rush to the waterfall of forgiveness and bath in it. Not only does Christ provide the grace, **he wants us to have it.**

In case anyone might think of accusing our Lord of being wasteful with his grace, Paul states that Christ gives his grace with wisdom and insight. Christ in his infinite wisdom and all-knowing insight lavishes on us his unlimited grace. At the same time his grace imparts wisdom and insight towards those who receive it. When we are saved from the filth and disgust of our sins, his grace also opens our eyes to see sin for that which it is, filth. And his grace opens our eyes to see him for who he is, **precious and most valuable.**

Verse 9-10: In his wisdom and insight he provides for us understanding and therefore gives us wisdom and insight. He makes known to us the mystery of his will and gives us wisdom and insight to understand this mystery. In the Bible, **a mystery is a truth that was once hidden or partially revealed, which is now fully revealed and fully understandable.**

This mystery that has been revealed has been done so "**according to his purpose**", meaning at the time of his choosing and in the manner of his choosing.

God's plan of redemption and his plan of bestowing blessings on those in Christ was never a plan-B. It was always his plan from the beginning. All that happens is according to his purpose.

Paul closes verse 9 by making sure that we remember that all of this is because of Christ. God's revealing and making known of the mystery is only visible and understandable in Christ. His plan has always revolved around Christ. **CHRIST ALONE!**

This plan and mystery as mentioned in verse ten is, "*as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.*" The plan was to coronate Christ publicly as the head of all. Part of this coronation was for Christ to redeem and uphold his own bride, the church, saved sinners.

The phrase "fulness of time" simply refers to the right time or the allotted time planned for by God.

“to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth”. All things exist because of Christ and all things are for him. All things on earth and all things in heaven are his and exist for him. **This includes you!** Christ should be the centre of your desires, thoughts and will. If you do not willingly submit to him, he will rudely awaken you one day to the reality of his centrality.

Verse 11: In Christ God has given us an inheritance. What is this inheritance? It is Christ. Christ is ours and we are his. We have what he has, and it is because of this that we have possession of all the spiritual blessings. Our inheritance is eternal life with God.

Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. – Psalm 73:25-26

This inheritance is given to us not based on our merit or even our wisdom in choosing God. This inheritance is given to us purely on the basis of **grace**. We were predestined by God according to his counsel and nothing else. We have no right to boast or no reason to be proud. We are no different than the sinning unbelievers next door, with the exception that God showed pity towards us.

Verse 12: Paul closes the section by once again drawing all things together with a magnificent crescendo. All of these blessings, our inheritance and the grace shown towards us are all done to the glory of God, more specifically to the glory of Christ. We should live our lives with that sole purpose in mind. Is what you are doing, deciding, wearing, eating and speaking glorifying Christ? That is where true happiness lies.

Closing Thoughts

We are most happy when we glorify Christ, because it is for this purpose that we were created, and we exist. Knowing Christ is the source of happiness and fulfilment.

PART 3: FROM THE HOLY SPIRIT

From the Spirit – 1:13-14

“In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.”

Verse 13: Paul starts of the verse by making a very important observation. Those who want the spiritual possessions and all the blessings mentioned in this chapter need to hear the gospel, understand it and then believe in it.

This verse is an encouragement as well as an instruction. It is encouraging in that we can rest on the fact that our only response to the gospel of salvation should be belief and trust. It is an instruction in that we are responsible for taking the gospel out into the world. We need to be the ones who preach, teach and share the gospel with those we encounter. If we do not, how will they ever be able to place their trust in Christ?

The focus of the verse however has to do with our relationship with the Holy Spirit. Paul writes, “*In him you also... were sealed with the Holy Spirit*”. A major blessing we receive when we place our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is that we are stamped, marked and sealed by the Holy Spirit. Just like a letter in ancient days would be sealed by a king and not to be opened unless by the correct recipient, so also are we sealed by the Holy Spirit for God.

This sealing is permanent and unalterable. We can never be unsealed, and the seal can never be broken. Once we believe in the Lord Jesus, we are his. We are sealed with the Spirit, bound to the Lord and never to be released.

This means we cannot sin our way out of salvation, not that any person saved from sin would ever want to try, but we can have assurance that the Lord will keep us despite our struggle against sin.

It also means that our assurance rests primarily on the works of the Lord Jesus and not on ourselves. Whenever we feel ‘saved’ because of our good works and obedience we need to repent and renew our minds to the reality and truth that we **are saved because of the Lord’s works**. Whenever we doubt our salvation, we need to **remind ourselves of the gospel and trust in the Lord**.

Verse 14: The Holy Spirit is described in this verse like God’s deposit. We are guaranteed salvation by God. God’s promise would be more than enough reason to never doubt him, but God goes even further to assure us. He gives us the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is responsible for changing our hearts from stone to flesh, the Holy Spirit is the one who enables us to believe and the Holy Spirit is the one who strengthens us and empowers us for the Christian life. God did not mere save us and leave us to our own, he provided the Holy Spirit.

The Christian life is a joint venture. It is us and the Holy Spirit. He is our Partner, our Helper, our Sustainer and our Friend.

Paul then closes the larger section by once again taking the focus off from us. He reminds us once again that this is all for the glory of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Closing Thoughts

It is because of God's commitment to glorify Christ that we can rest assured that God will keep his promises. God is in the business of glorifying himself, and he does that through our salvation and sealing. We can trust God to do what is best for us, because what is best for us is most glorifying to him.

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- And the countless of books, blogs and articles read over the years whose knowledge bestowed has become second nature and general knowledge.