

**“The Spiritual Blessings of God”**  
**Sermon Series on Ephesians – A Household of Faith #2**  
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**First Presbyterian Church – Winston-Salem, NC**  
**June 11, 2017**  
**(Eph. 1-14)**

**Introduction.**

Have you noticed how saying you feel blessed is in vogue these days? A quick look at Facebook and Twitter shows how many people feel #blessed. In our world of social media, saying you're blessed can be a way of boasting while at the same time trying to sound humble. For example, college scholarship? #Blessed. Unexpected raise? #Blessed. Wonderful family? #Blessed.

As Christians we use that term too, of course. We talk about our blessings, and we thank God for all the ways He's provided wonderful things in our lives. But have you ever thought that perhaps God's greatest blessings are not in fact the material gifts He's given you or the special people He's put in your life? Rather, they are the spiritual blessings that every believer has been given in Christ, regardless of whether you live in affluence or poverty, and regardless of whether you're married and have a wonderful family or you're single and by yourself. There are 112 references in the New Testament to the words “bless, blessing and blessed,” and none of them has to do with material provision.

In the letter Paul writes to the church in Ephesus, he begins his epistle talking about God's spiritual blessings, and he's so pumped up about all these incredible gifts that the whole of this passage is one complete run-on sentence that contains 202 words and covers 12 verses! Paul is so excited that he gets carried away and he simply can't control himself. He goes and goes on and on talking about the spiritual blessings of God until he finally comes up for air in verse 15. Let's take a closer look at what Paul has to say.

There are several different ways we could group these blessings, but I've decided to group them into three areas: God's spiritual blessings in the past; God's spiritual blessings in the present; and God's spiritual blessings in the future.

**I. God's Spiritual Blessings in the Past.**

As I've mentioned, the sentence that begins in verse 3, “*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...*,” is one long run-on sentence, and it picks up steam as it goes. Paul is ecstatic about God's spiritual blessings, and the first ones he emphasizes are God's blessings in the past. Here the apostle focuses on two aspects of God's blessings which have caused a great deal of discussion and debate

in the church over the years. And, lucky me, I get to tackle them today! It has to do with the doctrines of *election* and *predestination*.

Normally, when we hear the word “election,” we think of someone running for office, like to be elected Mayor or President. However, when Paul writes about **election**, he’s not talking about voting for someone running for office. Instead, what he’s talking about is God’s choice, His election of us as followers of Jesus Christ. In verses 4 and 11, Paul writes, “*For He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight....In Him we were chosen....*”

Basically, what Paul is saying is that God picked us. However, He didn’t pick us in the way we usually pick things. For example, it’s not like picking a candidate, or picking fruit at the grocery store, or picking teams to play basketball, or picking a dress at the mall. In each of the situations we pick the candidate, the fruit, the player, or the dress depending on the quality of each. We want the best. Not so with God in His election of us. He didn’t pick us because we were the best. Instead, He chose us based on the very fact that we were the worst – we were lost and in need of salvation. We weren’t chosen because God found us spiritually appealing. He elected us because we needed His help.

To use the basketball metaphor again, it’s like God picking a basketball team, and He has the #1 draft choice. He could pick LeBron James, or Kevin Durant, or Steph Curry. But who does He pick? He selects Claude Klutz, not LeBron, not Kevin and not Steph. He picks the guy who has the least to offer. And God selects Claude not because of what Claude is going to do for God, but because of what God is going to do for Claude.

When did God choose us? Paul says it was before the creation of the world. God thought about you that long ago! And why did He do it? The apostle says so that we might be holy and blameless. Holy means to be set apart to God in order to reflect His purity, and blameless means to be free from any accusation or wrong doing. More about that later.

The second spiritual blessing in the past Paul mentions is **predestination**. That’s a word that’s often associated with Presbyterians, but I think there is a great deal of misunderstanding about what predestination is all about.

In verses 5 and 11 Paul writes, “*In love, He predestined us to be adopted as His sons and daughters through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will....In Him we were also chosen have been predestined according to the plan of Him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will.*”

If you have a problem with predestination, your problem isn’t with John Calvin or Presbyterians. Your problem is with the Bible. The word is right there in Scripture. You’ve got to deal with it. What exactly does it mean?

The first thing to remember when it comes to predestination is that it all starts with love. *“In love He predestined us.”* Any interpretation that detracts from the love of God isn’t biblically faithful. Second, I think it’s important to understand what predestination is not. It isn’t fatalism and it isn’t determinism. There is no love in that. And third, the Bible says that our spiritual destiny to become God’s sons and daughters has been established beforehand, and God is the power behind it all. *Pre-destination.*

I wish we had more time to discuss these spiritual blessings more fully, but I’ll have to leave that for a future sermon. Let me just say now that the doctrines of election and predestination emphasize the sovereignty of God. But God’s sovereignty doesn’t nullify our free will. We are still morally culpable for our choices.

However, what these doctrines teach is that without the illuminating work of God’s Holy Spirit none of us is capable of seeing the light of God’s truth, and everyone who comes to Christ is dependent on the Lord to turn the lights on for them spiritually. That’s why we pray that God will intervene in someone’s life and help them come to Christ. And remember, Jesus told His disciples clearly, *“You did not choose me. I chose you. And I appointed you so that you might bear much fruit” (Jn. 15:16).*

## **II. God’s Spiritual Blessings in the Present.**

Paul continues to talk about God’s spiritual blessings, and he says that some of these are blessings you and I are experiencing right now. The tense of some of the verbs Paul uses in this passage is in what is known as the *present indicative* in the Greek language. It has the emphasis that these are blessings which happened in the past but they continue to impact us now.

The first spiritual blessing in the present Paul mentions is **redemption**. The apostle writes, *“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that He lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding” (Eph. 1:7,8).* The Greek word which is translated “redemption” in this passage had to do with the emancipation of slaves or prisoners. It also came to mean the payment of a ransom in order to secure someone’s freedom. As Paul uses it here, it refers to the price paid for our redemption from the bondage of sin, and he says that the price was Christ’s blood on the cross.

When I was growing up, my mother used to collect S&H green stamps. Do you remember them? When you bought something at the grocery store, they’d give you so many green stamps in proportion to the amount of money you spent, and you’d take these stamps home and put them in a little book. Eventually you’d fill

up the book and take them to the Redemption Center and exchange all those stamps you collected for a lamp or some cookware. It was an exchange.

When you and I come to God, we're given the wonderful blessing of taking all the sin we've accumulated for a lifetime and exchanging it for the royal robes of the righteousness of Christ, all because of what He did on the cross. In this way, we've been redeemed by the blood of Christ.

A second spiritual blessing in the present Paul mentions is related to the first. It's **forgiveness**. The Greek word Paul uses here is *aphesis*, and it means "loosing someone from that which binds them." It comes from a verb which means "to send away," and the idea behind it comes from Leviticus 16. In the Old Testament, we read that the law required that a scapegoat be a part of the sacrifice for the sins of the people on the Day of Atonement. The high priest would lay his hands on the head of the goat, and then goat was sent out into the wilderness, taking with it the sins of the people in a symbolic way. The Bible says that Jesus Christ is our scapegoat and the sins of the whole world were laid on Him. He was crucified outside the city which represents the wilderness. And because of His sacrifice on the cross, we have forgiveness.

The final spiritual blessing in the present Paul mentions is **the revelation of the mystery God's will**. "*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*" (Eph. 1:9,10).

The word mystery is a recurring term in the book of Ephesians, and it appears 5 different times (1:9; 3:3; 4:9; 5:32; and 6:19). It means "a truth once hidden now made known." For those of you were involved in Greek life in college, think about the secret initiation rites that were known only to the members of your fraternity or sorority. Paul says that the mystery of God isn't like that. Instead, God's plan of salvation and the mystery of His love has now been broadcast far and wide, and it's available to everyone in Christ.

The secret plan of God that had been hidden in the past was revealed in Jesus. He is the provision for our salvation to which the Old Testament sacrifices pointed, and He is the fulfillment of the prophecies which the Old Testament prophets had made concerning the coming Messiah. And this mystery of God's love is available to anyone today.

### **III. God's Spiritual Blessings in the Future.**

*"In Him you were chosen as heirs....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, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession...."* (Eph. 1:13,14).

Paul says **we have an inheritance** because we've been adopted into the family of God by our heavenly Father. We've been made sons and daughters of the Lord of the universe, and all that is His will be ours one day. And we will reign with Christ for eternity.

In the meantime, **we've been given a guarantee from God**, and Paul says we've been marked with a *seal*, which is God's Holy Spirit. In antiquity, a seal was affixed to a document to guarantee that it was genuine. It was also put on goods in transit to indicate ownership and ensure protection. And it represented a designation of office in the service of the State. Authentication, ownership, and protection – Paul says the Holy Spirit is all of these for us in Christ.

But the apostle also says that God has given us the Holy Spirit as a *deposit* of the good things that are to come in the future. In a manner of speaking the Holy Spirit is spiritual earnest money God has put down. Earnest money is a deposit or the first installment when you buy something like a house. It serves as a token payment that assures the full amount will eventually follow. Paul says that the Holy Spirit is the first installment of the Christian's inheritance, and at the end of time God will completely fulfill His pledge to open the treasures of heaven to everyone in Christ. In the meantime, the Holy Spirit gives us the assurance that all these things will be ours one day.

The final spiritual blessing we'll fully enjoy in the future is fully knowing that **we belong to God**. Paul describes it as the "*redemption of those who are God's own possession*" (1:14). We are not our own. We've been bought with a price, the price of Christ's own shed blood, and we belong to Him.

The first question of the Heidelberg Catechism asks, "What is your only comfort in life and in death?" And the answer is that "I am not my own, but belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with His precious blood, and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil.

The story is told of a little boy who made a toy boat. But one day while sailing it on a lake, it floated away. Weeks later he saw it in the window of a pawn shop. Someone had found it, and sold it to the shop keeper. The little boy went inside and asked how much money the boat would cost to buy it. The owner told him \$20.

The little boy worked for several weeks and finally earned enough money to buy the boat back, and he went to the store and paid the money. And as he walked home with his prized possession in his arms, he was heard to say, "Little boat, you are now twice mine. I made you, and I bought you. You belong to me!" The same could be said by God of us. He made us and He bought us with the blood of Christ. We belong to Him.

**Conclusion.**

A friend of mine who is the pastor of a church in another part of the country conducted an informal survey once of several members of his congregation. And he asked them, “What do you think God’s opinion is of you?” 80% of the people he asked said they thought God was disappointed in them – that they hadn’t been as good a Christian as they should be, or they had messed up somewhere along the way, or they weren’t as loving toward their family as God wanted them to be. 80% felt like God was disappointed in them, and as a result they didn’t sense His favor.

I wonder what the results would be if I asked all of you that same question today. I suspect the results would be similar in our church to what my friend found in his congregation. Many of us feel like God doesn’t approve of us, that He’s disappointed in us somehow, and that He isn’t very fond of us.

But if you think that, you couldn’t be further from the truth. This passage in Ephesians reminds us of God unfailing and unconditional love and affection. It assures us that His grace has been given to us in Christ, and we’ve been adopted into God’s forever family. He loved us before the creation of the world, and His love for us will continue to the end of time and beyond, and all the way into eternity. And there is nothing you can do to make God love you more or make God love you less than He does right now.

I have here a present. It’s a box that is brightly wrapped with beautiful paper and a big bow on top. It represents all the spiritual blessings God has given you as a gift which Paul writes about in this passage. But like any gift, it can’t been fully appreciated or experienced until you actually receive it. If all of God’s spiritual blessings just stay in this box, you’ll never experience the wonder, beauty and warmth of the loving embrace of God. Hear me when I say, “He is very fond of you, and He wants to shower you with His love and His blessing. Will you receive it?”

I want to ask you to do something. As a gesture of acceptance, I want you to extend your hands with your palms facing up. And as I reach out toward you with this present, I want you to imagine receiving God spiritual blessings mentioned in this passage as a gift. Go ahead, take it. Redemption. Forgiveness. The mystery of God’s plan of salvation. The guarantee of your inheritance in Christ. Election. Predestination. And the fact that you belong to God. Now bring your hands to your heart and imagine taking all these blessings into your soul. God’s gifts are for you. His spiritual blessings are yours. God is so very fond of you. Receive His blessing.

Now, if you go home today and get on Facebook or Twitter, I’ll understand if you make a post this afternoon that says, “#Blessed!” We really are, aren’t we? Thanks be to God!