



God is ... Our source of spiritual blessings (Psalm 128:1-4; Ephesians 1:1-14) Graeme Odgers

The work of the Spirit:

Back in July/August, Becky had been thinking about doing a series on God, a difficult task to tackle. She thought that it would be good for others (re-Bob, Dinesh, Ross and I) to add a personal touch within the series so that we didn't just go down a dry theological path.

This had me reflecting of my Christian walk and what I think about God, so I started by writing down a series of questions to myself. This led to probably the most common question that Christians often ask, "How did you become a Christian?" But a deeper question would be "Why did you become a Christian?"

The **How** question likes to examine a physical event that has taken place in your life, whereas the **Why** question tends examine the inner self, the soul, or your spiritual aspect of life.

I remember the night I became a Christian. I had a strong spiritual challenge to accept Christ as my Saviour and I believe the Holy Spirit brought me to that decision. It was a very strong spiritual experience taking me towards the saving grace of Jesus and having me make a free will public and positive response.

But why did I make a positive response? You can grapple with this mentally a number of ways, for example, the witness of faithful men who spoke with me - which would be true, but what other factors are involved? Paul writes in Romans 8:

The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. (Rom 8:16,17)

Becky has already spoken of God as a personal spirit and our guide and helper, and here Paul tells us that The Spirit, His Spirit, bears witness (testifies NIV) with our spirit that we are His children. This is God's assurance speaking to our spirit personally.

For me on that night some 53 years ago, God's Spirit revealed to me that Jesus Christ took upon himself my sins and made me presentable before God. This was the work of the Spirit

speaking into my life, to which I had to respond. I am now a co-heir of God's kingdom with Christ, as my response was positive.

Despite troubles we face, as believers, we are assured that we will share in Jesus' glory as children of God. What a tremendous blessing we received through accepting our salvation in Christ and responding to the call of the Holy Spirit.

But what is a "blessing"? God's blessing can touch many areas of life. The dictionary describes *blessing* as "a special favour granted by God." In reality, it is "the touch of God." His presence and power graciously steps in to meet our need. Another commentator said "a blessing is a gift bestowed by God for our contentment".

The Blessings of God:

In his letter to Ephesians 1:3-14, Paul describes in some detail the blessings that come from God. He commences this letter with a greeting to those who would receive it:

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To God's holy people in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 1:1,2)

Some manuscripts omit Ephesus and leave a blank space. It is thought that this letter was meant to be distributed more widely than just to those at Ephesus. So we could actually substitute Panania. So it would read:

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To God's holy people in Panania, the faithful in Christ Jesus:

Paul reminds us that he was chosen to be an apostle, this is his given authority, by the will of God, to share the Gospel message and build up the faithful and he writes to us here at Panania.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul completely understood the essential place of **grace** and **peace** from God in the life of a believer, and the work of the Spirit in believers. He knew that receiving God's grace comes *before* a walk in peace with Him, through faith in Jesus as the Spirit testifies to our spirit.

Spiritual Blessings in Christ

This morning I'd like to look at Ephesians 1:3-14 as Paul describes 9 blessings that God has given us as faithful followers of Jesus; this letter being written to all believers.

1. He has blessed us (Eph 1:3).

*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, **who has blessed us** in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.*

Paul praises God first for blessing all believers through His grace (Both Jewish and Gentile believers alike). Blessed here carries the concept that it is God who gives us "praise with worshipping love" in the heavenly realms.

Here Paul describes both the *kind* of blessings and the *location* of those blessings. These are **spiritual** blessings that carry to eternity, which are far better than material blessings. These blessings are ours **in the heavenly places in Christ**, they are higher, better, and more secure than earthly blessings.

2. He has chosen us (Eph 1:4).

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.

This is mind blowing that God chose me and you in Jesus Christ before the creation of the world, showing that God's plan is older than the creation itself – and extends to eternity for us to be holy and blameless in His sight.

3. He has predestined us (Eph 1:5, Eph 1:11).

In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—

God predestined us, that as His chosen people we would enjoy **adoption as sons**. This blessing is God's unfolding plan for us, and it not only includes salvation and personal transformation, but also a warm, confident relationship with the Father as members of His family.

In Roman law, "When the adoption was complete, the person who had been adopted had all the rights of a legitimate son in his new family and completely lost all rights in his old family. In the eyes of the law he was a new person. So debts and obligations connected with his previous family were abolished as if they had never existed." (Barclay)

A Methodist Minister, Arno Gaebelin, takes the thought of family even further: "Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are not adopted into the family of God; they are born into the family. The word sonship is a translation from the Greek which has only one word 'Sonplace.' We are placed into the position of Sons." This is why Paul doesn't write sons and daughters. But we are equally placed in God's sight through Jesus.

So...

4. He has made us accepted (Eph 1:5,6).

In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of the glory of His grace, in which He has made us accepted in the One having been loved. (MKJV)

As believers we should always be giving praise to God, being overwhelmed by the glory demonstrated by His grace. We have been placed in a relationship to God through Jesus and have become **accepted** (*charito*, "highly favoured" or "full of grace") as a believer because of God's glorious grace.

5. He has redeemed us (Eph 1:7).

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace

Redemption is through Christ's blood, implying a price is paid for the freedom that is

purchased. It uses the ancient Greek word *loutroo*, which means, “to liberate on the receipt of a ransom.” (Arno Gaebelein)

Jesus does not redeem us by His sinless life or His moral example, but only by His death in our place - by **His blood**.

Spurgeon wrote: “Observe, it is not redemption through his power, it is *through his blood*. It is not redemption through his love, it is through his blood.”

Our sins are only forgiven through the blood shed by Jesus on the cross and that through God’s amazing grace.

6. He has lavished on us (Eph 1:7,8).

*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,*

Lavish - bestow on something in generous or extravagant quantities

It cannot be denied that God knew exactly what He was doing in allowing Jesus to take on the sin of the world. It was through God’s wisdom and understanding that He lavished, in such generous and extravagant quantity, such redemption and forgiveness on guilty sinners.

I don’t know about you, but I find it difficult to explain my feelings when I face the fact of what God has done to make it possible for me to become holy in His sight, because every time I fail and sin involves neglect of His overwhelming generosity in sending Jesus as my redeemer.

7. He has made known to us (Eph 1:9).

***he made known to us the mystery of his will** according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ,*

In the *riches of His grace, in His extravagant generosity*, is the knowledge of **the mystery of His will**, God’s great plan and purpose which was once hidden is now revealed to us in Jesus.

Through the Apostle Paul, God calls us to consider the greatness of His great plan for the ages and our place in that plan as **He purposed in Christ**.

8. He has given us an inheritance (Eph1:11,14).

*In him **we were also chosen**, having been **predestined according to the plan of Him** who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will,*

For believers, Jesus is not a judge, but the One in whom we have an inheritance. Believers are predestined for this according to the **counsel of His (God’s) will** - again, the reasons for His choosing reside in Him, not in us.

9. He has sealed us (Eph 1:13,14).

*And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you 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—to the praise of his glory

Verse 13 and 14 finish this long paragraph, that has been changed to numbered verses.

Here we see that God seals the believer with Holy Spirit. It is the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives that acts as a seal which indicates ownership, and which is a **guarantee of our heavenly inheritance**.

The Methodist minister Rev Arno Gaebelein wrote “The seal is therefore the Holy Spirit Himself, and His presence in the believer shows ownership and security in Christ Jesus. The sealing with the Spirit is not an emotional feeling or some mysterious inward experience.”

We are not sealed with the Holy Spirit *before* we believe, and those who demand some assurance from God before they will believe treat God as if His word could not be trusted.

The word **guarantee** (means “down payment”) is used only in the New Testament of the Holy Spirit. He is our *only* down payment of coming glory; nothing else is provided - or *needed*.

Our source of spiritual blessing:

The Psalmist in Psalm 128 describes the person who fears the Lord. This Psalm describes a portrait of a Godly man living in the best days of the Hebrew nation. However, we can see these aspects in those of faithful families through history and today as well. Let’s read these four verses together:

Psalm 128:1-4 (A song of ascents)
*Blessed are all who fear the LORD,
who walk in obedience to him.
You will eat the fruit of your labour;
blessings and prosperity will be yours.
Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house;
your children will be like olive shoots around your table.
Yes, this will be the blessing for the man who fears the LORD.*

Bible commentator, Matthew Henry wrote “It is here again and again laid down as an undoubted truth that *those who are truly holy are truly happy*.”

Today I have not spoken of Christian suffering, or persecution, we have only looked at the blessings we have as believers, that God has placed upon us.

But we must remember what Paul wrote (Rom 8:16,17):

*The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, **provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.***

As Christians we are not free from suffering, but we are elevated by God’s many blessings.

Amen