



A Changed Perspective

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Ephesians 1:3

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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,

(Pastor prays)

You may remember how terribly cold and rainy it was last Sunday. It was a perfect day to come home and have a fire in the fireplace. So, I built a fire; it was a great fire. I kept putting wood on it until it was time for bed. I then added a couple of night logs. Monday morning there were lots of coals. Before 5 AM, I loaded it with wood, and it burned all day and night. I kept this up for 4 days, all the way until Thursday. This routine created a problem: ashes. I shoveled them into an ash bucket and dumped several buckets full into the backyard in the natural area.

I got the fire going again and got on the phone with Gerald Malloy. Before I knew it, the backyard was on fire! I threw down the phone, and ran outside with my son, Mack. From the backyard, it had jumped the fence, was burning through leaves, and was close to the neighbor's workshop. Fortunately, the hose was close by and for twenty-five minutes, we fought the fire and finally put it out. Worn out and having barely averted disaster, Mack says, "Man, Dad, that was cool!" Now...he obviously has a different perspective on life than I do.

A different perspective. When it comes to living, the same sort of thing could be said for those who are in Christ and those who are not in Christ. Those in Christ have a different perspective on life. And Paul, who is in prison, has a

different approach, outlook, understanding, and goal in life. Why? Because he is in Christ! What is true of Paul is true of every one of us here that is in Christ.

Here's the truth:

Life in Christ Changes Your Perspective on Everything

In Christ we have:

A Different Attitude About Life

When you approach this passage, it's good to remember who is writing it and to whom it is written. Also, take into account verses 3-14. This section is one long sentence that all goes together. And the opening words to verse 3 are like an outburst of praise to God the Father. Notice how it starts: *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."* Let's look at the word "blessed." This is not the same word found in the Sermon on the Mount. *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, Blessed are the peace makers"* That word means happy and joyful, which is not what Paul is saying. The word "blessed" here is *"Eulogatos,"* which is the Greek word that gives us the word "eulogy"—a statement of goodness or seeing something that deserves praise and then giving it that praise. So, here at the outset of the letter, Paul is saying how great God is.

Now, I want you to think with me about this for a moment. Who is saying this? Paul, who is in prison because he is a Christian. He has lost his career because he is a Christian. He has lost friends because he is a Christian. And yet, he is able to write, from prison, *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."* Listen, nothing is more appropriate than for God's people to bless God for His great goodness in all things. I've mentioned a little about Paul being in prison because of his faith in Christ, but prison was the least of his struggles. In 2 Corinthians 11, Paul lists some of his hardships. In verses 24-28, he starts the list: *"Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one."* Verse 25: *"Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea."* Verse 26: *"On frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers,*

danger from my own people, danger from the Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers.” Verse 27: “In toil and hardship through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.” Verse 28: “And apart from other things there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.” And now, writing this letter, Paul is in chains. Yet, he is praising and giving thanks to God. Let me tell you something, anybody can praise God when the sun is shining, the kids are healthy, and the bills are paid. It is a different thing altogether to praise Him when the bank account is empty, or the marriage is in danger, or the cancer returned. Last week, we started the service by hearing the Psalmist say, *“From the rising of the sun to its setting, the name of the Lord is to be praised.”* When you’re in Christ, you have a different attitude about life; your life is not your own. You were bought with a price. You have been crucified with Christ. That means you praise Him in the good times. James 1:17 says, *“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of light with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.”* We praise Him in good times, but we also praise Him in bad times. Paul is in prison proclaiming, “blessed.” Even Job said, *“The Lord gives and the Lord takes away, Blessed be the name of the Lord.”* When you are hurt, struggling, poor, or mistreated you are able to bless God. In Christ, Paul reminds us of what our Sovereign God does. Romans 8:28 *“For we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose.”* In Christ, we have a different attitude about life. In Christ, we can praise God at all times; this gives us a different attitude.

A Different Focus for Life

Back in verse 3, notice the drawn-out description of God. As you do, you can feel Paul slowing down to look at every facet of our wonderful God; telling us to just get our focus over here, on this God. It’s almost like he is telling us we have a different attitude *because* we have a different focus. There are five ways he describes God in this one verse. I won’t linger here except to say as believers, each of these titles reveals something to us.

God is Transcendent: Beyond us, His thoughts are not our thoughts, and His ways are not our ways. The Lord truly does work in mysterious ways that are beyond our capability of understanding. We sometimes have to say it's a mystery and believe. If we could figure it out, He wouldn't be God.

God is Father: Picture the story of the Prodigal Son. In this story, even though the child sinned against his father, squandered what his father had given him, and deserved his father's anger and rejection—after the Prodigal Son came to his senses and repented of his sin—the father ran to meet him and celebrated his new faith.

God is Lord: Master, Ruler, Owner. This truth is missed by many people. You think you can have Jesus as Savior and not have Him as Lord, and that's just not true. If your life is not submitted to Him and His Lordship, your life is not safe in Him as Savior.

Jesus: In Matthew, the angel said, *"You will name the child Jesus—He will save His people from their sins."* He came as our substitute to die in our place on the cross.

Christ: The Greek word for Christ means "Anointed One," which corresponds with the Hebrew for Messiah. He is the one that would fulfill every bit of Scripture; every prophesy and type and foreshadowing would bring a new kingdom.

He must be our focus. If the first point is to be true about our attitudes, it comes from a focus on Christ. You are able to bless God—praise and thank God—regardless of the circumstances; and that focus leads to my third point.

Different Values in Life

Let's read it. *"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."*

Now, folks, there is a lot of confusion out there and if you don't get this right, you are prone to believe one of two heresies.

Social Gossip: Most liberal churches are here, doing good humanitarian things but without the Cross. There is no teaching of a Holy God, sinful man, a Savior on the Cross, or a need for faith. This is one heresy. The other is much more damaging.

Prosperity Gospel: Most of us can spot the hard-core Prosperity preachers, such as Benny Hinn and the like. It's tougher, though, because of the insidious strain of soft-core Prosperity preachers out there that mix in enough truth to sound plausible, right, and familiar without giving you the whole Biblical picture of a Holy God, Sinful Man, the Cross, and the need for a Savior, along with faith and repentance. One of the trademarks of soft-core Prosperity Gospel is the understanding of blessing. It's important to get this.

Look what Paul says. He has *"blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places."* Our treasure, our riches, our blessings, our joy is every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places as opposed to the earthly places. In fact, Paul outlines our blessing in the very long sentence from verses 3-14. Verse 4 says that He chose us before the foundation of the world—holy and blameless—before Him in love. In verse 5, He predestined and adopted us. Verse 7, He redeems and forgives us. Verse 9, He reveals Himself to us. Verse 11, He gives us an inheritance. Verse 13, He seals and secures us. All of this to remind us: don't pursue the things on Earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in to steal. Our treasure is in Christ—spiritual blessings.

You will always be frustrated in life as a Christian unless you get this right, because life in Christ changes your perspective on everything: attitude, focus, values. As a part of centering our hearts on Christ, we have the opportunity to celebrate the sacrifice of Christ through the Lord's Supper today. As we do, let the Lord be realigned in your attitude (blessings), your focus (God/Christ), and your values (spiritual blessings).

(Pastor prays)