

## **WEEK 1: EVERY SPIRITUAL BLESSING IN CHRIST -Read Ephesians 1:1-14-**

### **A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The letter to the Ephesians was written by Paul during his imprisonment in Rome. He had a history with these Christians (Acts 18:18-20). A brief contact, during which he reasoned with the Jews in the synagogue (Acts 19:1-20:1). An extended visit where Paul enlightened a number of disciples who were followers of John the Baptist, spoke boldly in the synagogue for three months until some of the Jews became obstinate, and had daily discussions in the lecture hall of Tyrannus for two years, so that everyone heard the word of the Lord. Many believed and repudiated their former beliefs. Just as Paul was about to leave the area a great riot was stirred up by silversmiths who were losing business. Paul met the Ephesian elders at Miletus, and encouraged them to look after God's flock. He warned them to be on guard because false teachers would come into the church and distort the truth, drawing disciples away with them. In his letters to Timothy, who had oversight of the church at Ephesus, we find that these concerns and warnings were justified.

**Task #1: Read the passages below and list the problems the church was facing.**

-1 Timothy 1:3-10

-1 Timothy 1:19-20

-1 Timothy 6:3-11

-2 Timothy 2:14-26

-Revelation 2:1-7

\*Notice that the large majority of these concerns were about false teachers in the church who were corrupting the truth, and impact of the false teaching on the faith and the lives of the believers.

**Task #2: Discuss the impact that false teaching was having in Ephesus; in your discussion answer these three questions:**

-What impact could false teaching have on what we believe?

-How could false teaching affect the way we live?

**Background Continued:**

As we move into Paul's letter to the Ephesians we become aware that he writes very powerfully about the sheer gift nature of salvation, about the removal of distinctions between Jews and Gentiles, and about the impact knowing Christ should have on the way Christians live. All of this indicates that false teaching was already impacting these Christians when Paul wrote to them, making it necessary for him to remind them of foundational truths, and to strongly encourage them to display a God-honouring lifestyle.

## **IN CHRIST: EVERY SPIRITUAL BLESSING**

**Task #3: Read Ephesians 1:1-14. Make a list of the spiritual blessings mentioned. What does each mean?**

### **Verse 3: Every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms**

This is a powerful verse. It teaches us several important truths:

1. *God has blessed us* : once-for-all, decisive action in the past and continuing on forever.
2. *In Christ*: not in ourselves or because of ourselves or our actions, but in Christ - he is the cause of this blessedness.
3. *With every spiritual blessing*: this indicates that the blessedness of which Paul is writing is not physical or material; not health or wealth or prosperity or freedom from accident. But eternal blessings.
4. *With every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms*: this does not mean that the blessings are not yet ours, that we have to wait till we die to enjoy them; rather it means that God has already blessed us with every spiritual blessing that heaven has to give us.

Paul then goes on to list in verses 4-14 a number of these spiritual blessings which God has given us in Christ.

### **Verse 4: Chosen in Christ before the creation of the world**

These words tell us that the fact that we are saved is not our own doing: it is the result of a choice God made before he created the world. In these words we learn that before we had done anything good or bad God decided to save us 'in Christ' - not in our own name or on the basis of our own performance, but in Christ.

### **Verse 4: Chosen in Christ ... to be holy and blameless in God's sight**

These words express the purpose and result of God choosing us 'in Christ' - this is not talking about how we ought to live [it is in the list of blessings we have already received]; rather, it expresses how God sees every believer 'in Christ' - he no longer sees us in ourselves, standing on our own two feet with our own pitiful handful of goodness; he sees us always, only and ever in Christ - as holy and blameless in his sight as Christ himself.

### **Verse 5: God predestined us to be adopted as his sons**

This teaches us about God's eternal purpose and intention for us: that he would make us his children. There are some important points to keep in mind:

God did it 'in love' ... not as a reward for our own merit.

It is 'through Jesus Christ' ... again, nothing to do with our merit or deserving.

These words express a further purpose and result of God's saving action in Christ: that he adopted us as his 'sons'. This stands in stark contrast to what we are in ourselves ... slaves of sin [John 8:34].

This blessing of being adopted as God's sons is 'in accordance with his pleasure and will' . Paul here teaches us that this is something that God really wanted to do. It also means that our salvation is rock solid - grounded in the will and the pleasure of God.

This also teaches us that God the Father is not reluctant to save us: it is his will and his pleasure to do so at great cost to himself - it is through the death of his Son that he achieves it.

### **Verse 6: God's grace freely given to us in Christ**

God's grace ... undeserved, unmerited, unearned, uncaused by us . Nothing that we are or have or have done caused God to save us: it is 'freely given' and it is 'in Christ'. We did nothing to gain this grace; we can do nothing to maintain it. It is a gift 'in Christ'. Paul deliberately and repeatedly emphasises that the blessings of salvation are 'in Christ'. This is to keep before us the utter undeservedness of our salvation and the utter security of our salvation. Our salvation simply does not depend on us. Paul mentions this amazing grace several times in this letter; he finds it so impactful that he simply has to talk about it. He knows its power, and he wants every believer to have the same knowledge and the same assurance.

### **Verse 7: Redemption**

Redemption is freedom resulting from the payment of a price . It is seen in the rescue of the Israelite slaves from Egypt [Exodus 12-14]; it is seen in Year of Jubilee [Leviticus 25], in which property or personal freedom forfeited because of debt were restored and the debts cancelled.

In the Christian sense it speaks of the freedom from sin's penalty and enslavement, from Satan's power, and from the condemnation and curse of the Law, that was achieved by the death of Jesus Christ for our sins [Revelation 5:9; 1 Peter 1:18; Colossians 1:13; Galatians 3:13; Mark 10:45]: it is 'through his blood'. Paul's letters to the Romans and Galatians have much to say about liberation from the Law as a means of gaining acceptance by God.

Note that this freedom is something that we 'have': it is our present, permanent possession 'in Christ.' This again affirms the permanence and security of our salvation, reminding us that it is not in our hands, dependent on our actions or our spirituality, it is ours 'in Christ'. It is secure and permanent because it is in him.

### **Verse 7: Forgiveness of sins**

Paul adds 'the forgiveness of sins' as an expansion of 'redemption'. The liberation, the freedom, to which he is referring by 'redemption' is a liberation from sins. He is not teaching that from the point of salvation onwards we will be free from sinning, or from personal sinfulness, or from the presence of sin. What he is teaching is freedom from the penalty and punishment of sins, and from the impact that sin has on the relationship between man and God.

Forgiveness is the removal of the barrier that sin caused/causes between God and man . Like redemption it is our present, permanent possession. Like redemption it is 'in Christ' and it is 'through his blood'. It is not something that varies with our variability.

Paul expands his description of forgiveness with the words 'in accordance with the riches of God's grace': that is, the forgiveness we possess through the blood of Christ is as limitless and as comprehensive as the rich grace of God .

### **Verse 8: God's grace lavished upon us**

This is another powerful verse. It tells us that the grace of God that both enables and measures our salvation has been 'lavished upon us' - an over-abundant, luxury nature and extent: God has done for us in Christ more than we could ever imagine, more than we could ever expect.

Not only is his grace lavished upon us, it is lavished upon us 'with all wisdom and understanding' : God knows what we are like; God knows how great is our need and our inability; God knows how often we sin. He knew before he created us that we would sin; he knew before he saved us, that we would still sin, even after that amazing expression of his love: so he showers us with grace, he splurges it all over us, far and away sufficient, more than sufficient ... because he knows, in a way we will never know, how great is our continuing need.

### **Verse 9-10: Knowledge of the mystery of God's will**

A lot is taught about 'God's will', usually in relation to 'what is God's will for my life'. Paul teaches us here that God has already made known to us the mystery of his will - and he is talking about something far greater than decisions God may or may not want me to make about my life. What Paul is teaching about here is that grand eternal purpose of God, that eternal will of God, to bring all things under the authority of Christ. He has much to say about this later in the letter, especially in relation to the bringing together of Jew and Gentile in Christ.

This knowledge of the hidden mysteries or secrets of God is also mentioned in 1 Corinthians 2:6-16 and Colossians 1:24 - 2:5; in both of these Paul makes it clear that what was previously a 'mystery' or 'secret' is now made known and brought out into the open in Christ. While the religions and cults of men, and even the man-made corruptions of Biblical truth, tell us that we must do something to gain and maintain 'salvation' or 'union with the divine', God's will, God's mystery, God's secret, God's plan of salvation, always true, always there, always known to the eyes of true faith, is now brought out into the open: salvation is God's sheer gift in Christ, and because it is sheer gift and in Christ it abolishes all distinctions that divide one man from another. In him each one is equally accepted, equally loved, equally saved, equally his child. There is no difference [see Romans 3:19-24].

### **Verse 11: Chosen in Christ and predestined according to God's plan**

This verse picks up the thought expressed in verse 4, and again refers our salvation to the plan, purpose, choice and will of God. Paul mentions this to give his readers a great sense of the security of their salvation - it is God's hands, not theirs.

### **Verse 13: Included in Christ**

Paul states that his readers were included in Christ when they heard the Gospel and 'believed'. All who believe in Christ [that is, all who believe that he is indeed the Lord, the God of all] are automatically 'included in Christ' - they are automatically granted all the spiritual blessings that were purchased through his death. This assures us that every believer possesses at this very moment all of the blessings that God has for us in his Son - all that his death achieved, all that his righteous life achieved, all that his resurrection and ascension achieved - is the present and permanent possession of every believer.

### **Verse 13: Sealed with the Holy Spirit**

This, Paul states, happened when they heard and believed the word of truth . At that point of acknowledgement that Jesus Christ is who he claimed to be, the Spirit of God came to them, verifying and certifying and identifying them as true believers. Paul states that this happened 'in him' - in Christ; this means that the coming of the Holy Spirit to indwell the believer is one of the blessings that every believer has in Christ from the moment of genuine faith. This is neither a second nor a subsequent blessing acquired at some later point and separate and distinguishable from salvation. It is part of the complete package that every believer has in Christ.

Notice that in this one verse Paul includes reference to: [1] the fact that the believer is included 'in Christ', that is, we are in Christ; and [2] the Holy Spirit is in the believer. Both of these are blessings given to every believer by God the Father [verse 3], identifying the believer as the

possession of God the Father [verse 14], resulting in his praise and glory [verse 14]. Thus the three persons of the Triune God are involved in our salvation.

### **Verse 14: God's guarantee**

The indwelling Holy Spirit is the promise of more to come; we are saved now; we have all the spiritual blessings that heaven has for us now; but, because we still are sinners, because we live among sinners, because we live in a sin-cursed world, because Satan, though conquered, still shouts his accusations at us and lures us with his destructive deceptions, we do not experience the fullness of the salvation that is actually ours in Christ. The Holy Spirit within guarantees that there's something better to come, and that it will come.

[He also assures us that we are indeed God's children, even though we are at this moment caught in the agonizing space between the 'already' of our present salvation and the 'not yet' of the perfection of heaven [Romans 8:12-27; Galatians 4:6-7; 1 John 3:1-2].

### **BIG QUESTIONS:**

#### **WHY AND HOW DID GOD SAVE US?**

- When did we first appear in God's plan of salvation? (Verse 4)
- What are three initiating causes of our salvation? (Verse 4,5)
- What is the necessitating cause of our salvation? (Verse 7)
- What is the legal and effective cause of our salvation? (Verse 7)
- What is the guarantee of our salvation?  
(Verses 13,4)
- What is the measure of the salvation God has given us? (Verses 7,8)

#### **Task #4: Identify the truths from Ephesians 1:1-14 that are most impactful to you:**