

THE GOSPEL TRANSFORMS

THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS

EPHESIANS 1

The Blessed God Blesses for His Glory: Part 1

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Church Family we are beginning a new sermon series today. We are going to start studying the book of Ephesians. For the next 8-12 weeks, we will be studying, reading, and praying through this book. I am very excited about this series because Ephesians is all about the gospel. My plan was to preach through this book this summer, but I have started this study earlier than expected



because of the book's content. Ephesians 1-3 is all about the gospel, and Ephesians 4-6 is all about the implications of the gospel. In short, we could summarize the book of Ephesians as follows: the gospel transforms. We learn incredible truths about the gospel in this book and these truths lead to incredible transformation. The sermon series is, thus, fittingly titled "The Gospel Transforms."

Today we will be reading and studying Ephesians 1:1-6. The main point of this text and of our sermon today is "The Blessed God Blesses for His Glory: Part 1." My hope for us is that we would enjoy God more fully as we read about him in this text, and I hope is that this joy would lead to more profound praise. Leaving this virtual church service today, I hope that you enjoy God more and thus praise him with richer and more joyous praise.

PAUL'S GREETING (VV. 1-2)

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1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful[a] in Christ Jesus: 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.



Paul begins Ephesians like he does his other letters: with a greeting. In this greeting, we learn the author, audience, and a summary of the message. First, Paul is the author, and notice that he is an apostle. Now, Paul is an apostle to the Gentiles. The gentiles are everyone who is not from the sons of Jacob – that is not Jewish biologically. Paul did not get this apostleship by accident for he says in verse 1 that this is “by the will of God.” This is incredibly important. Paul was not always a Christian. In fact, he once persecuted the church with great zeal. Yet, at the proper time, God set him apart to himself for a special ministry to the nations. And the timing and circumstances of this were not on accident. God’s plan was to save Paul, and God planned many gentiles to be saved through him.

Second, the audience is the church in Ephesus. Now, the book of Acts records two visits with this church. The first is a brief true recorded in Acts 18:19-21. The second, however, is much longer and much more intimate. We read about this in Acts 19-20. At the end of Paul’s time there, the elders of the church of Ephesus weep with Paul before he departs because they know that they will not see his face again in this life. Paul had an intimate relationship with this church. The letter of Ephesians, however, does not allude to this intimate relationship. Notice in Ephesians 1:15 that Paul has



“heard” of their faith. The reason for this may be that the letter is written to newer converts in this church unknown to Paul. More likely, this letter was written to the church of Ephesus, but was to be read in other regional churches too. We see this practice in Colossians 4:16. Thus, this letter is written to the mainly gentile church in Ephesus. The letter was then to be read in neighboring churches.

It is very encouraging that Paul calls these Christians saints, faithful, and in Christ. These Christians are saints – saints is not just a title reserved for “super Christians.” All true Christians are saints. They are holy to God. Moreover, they are faithful. Finally, he says that they are in Christ. This greeting is a pre-taste of what is to come. Here we learn that the blessings of God – holiness and peace – are only realized in Christ

THE BLESSED GOD WORTHY OF PRAISE (3-14)

The next section of the book is found in verses 3-14. In this section, Paul identifies God has blessed and identifies how he blesses his people. he further tells us the purpose of these blessings. Today, we will study verses 3-6.





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,

GOD IS BLESSED (3)

Verse 3 says that God is blessed. This is an vitally important doctrine to us, but one that we are perhaps not familiar with. For example, we know what it means to be blessed by God. It means that God has enriched us with good things. What, then, does it mean that God is blessed? This means that God is perfectly satisfied, delighted, and happy in himself. God lacks nothing good; rather, perfect union of all good things in him. Therefore, he is blessed, happy, and satisfied because he lacks nothing good.

THE BLESSED GOD BLESSES HIS PEOPLE (3)

Verse 3 further identifies God as the one who blesses his people. This is incredibly important. First, let's notice that God is not stingy with his blessings; he is generous with them (3). In fact, the phrase "Blessed be



the Lord/the God” is found 36 times in the Bible and almost every time the phrase that follows is a declaration of the Lord blessing his people. In other words, the person announcing the fact that God is blessed has done so because God has just blessed him. Wow! Isn't this how gift giving works. You cannot bless someone with something you do not have. When someone gives you a great gift it is because they have that gift themselves. We see here that God blesses us because he himself is blessed. God makes us incredibly happy and joyful because he himself is incredibly happy and joyful. The idea of God being a sharing of his goodness is also found in John 17:26. Here we see God's desire to share the love the Father and Son have experienced for eternity with us! How incredible? We get to be caught up into the love of God when we trust in Jesus. Indeed, we serve a God who shares himself and his infinite perfections with us, and this is absolutely glorious.

Second, let's notice that God blesses us in Christ (3). Again, we read this phrase that will be repeated as a powerful refrain throughout this passage. The blessings of God are only found in Christ. They are not found in us, our hard work, or in any other name. They are found in Christ.

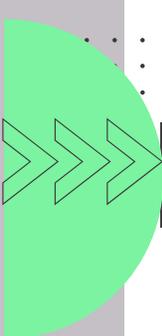


Third, notice that God gives us spiritual blessings, not physical ones. God does not guarantee that we will have physical blessings in this life. Sometimes he does bless his people physically. We can think of Abraham and Job, but this is not always the case. Job, for example, went through a very difficult season. Jesus, himself, the perfect image bearer of the Father suffered intensely. Paul was ship wrecked, bitten by snakes, and imprisoned on many occasions. Physical blessings are not guarantee, but spiritual blessings are a guarantee for his people. Again, notice the generosity of God. He blesses us with every spiritual blessing. These blessings will be discussed in detail in verses 4-14, and we will discuss two of them today: election (4) and adoption (4-5).

Finally, let's notice that God blesses us in the heavenly places (3). This is truly encouraging since this means that our blessings come from God. They come from Jesus and are not of this world. We do not need blessings that derive from this world for those will pass away. We need blessings from God, for us, that are permanent.

Thus, we have learned that our God is blessed – he is infinitely happy, satisfied and delighted in being God because all good things are found in him perfectly. Moreover, we have learned that God shares these blessings with us.





BLESSING #1: ELECTION

The first spiritual blessing that God shares with us is election. Now election is a controversial topic because it is, on the one hand, difficult in some respects to understand. This difficulty leads to differences in opinions which can create controversy. Now we should expect there to be some doctrines that are difficult to understand. Imagine a situation where everything about God made sense. That religion and that God would be not arise beyond your imagination and would not be worthy of worship. Election, however, is controversial for another reason. It is a beautiful doctrine. It is a glorious doctrine that we will learn soon breeds assurance, comfort, and a passionate pursuit of holiness. We should expect the devil to obscure our understanding of this amazing doctrine. Satan attempts to rob you and I of assurance, comfort, and a passionate life of holiness by obscuring this doctrine. But we will not let him. We read passages that talk about these doctrines; we do not shy away from them. We pray for understanding, and I preach from them. Why? So that we might be assured, comforted, and encouraged to live a life of radical obedience to God's glory. Let's jump into this doctrine of election, now.



First, Paul tells us that our election is in Christ (4). Notice, that our election is not in ourselves, in our hard work, or even found in our good decisions. Just as grace and peace is found in Christ (2), so election is found in Christ. God elects us in Christ which indicates that this blessing depends on Christ and not on us.

Second, our election occurred before the foundation of the world (4). Before we even existed or did anything good or evil, God elected his people.

Third, notice that God is the subject of the verb “chose.” “He [God] chose us.” We did not choose him. Romans 3 tells us that no one seeks God; John 3 tells us that those who are in darkness hate the light. God elects us, we do not choose him.

These three points indicate that election depends on God, not us. This fits what we already learned in verse 3. The spiritual blessings that Paul discusses in verses 3-14 derive from heaven. Remember, these are in the “heavenly places” (4). They do not derive from “earthly efforts.” In other words, they come from God, not from us. Moreover, remember that the spiritual blessings – the first that Paul discusses is election – is a blessing that comes to us from God. Verse 3 told us. “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.” We are blessed with election as a gift from God, not as a wage. This is confirmed for us in Ephesians 2:8-9. This verse is famous and loved for its clear and concise depiction of the gospel, and we will discuss this in depth soon. Paul tells us in these verses, “8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” Notice that salvation depends on God, not on us. If it depended on us, salvation would be a work. Salvation, however, is not earned; rather, it is a gift from God given to us according to grace. Faith, then, is a gift given to us from God. Election depends on God, not us.

Election depends on God, not on us, and this is good for several reasons. First, this doctrine breeds assurance. Church family, do you want to be assured in the grace of our Lord Jesus? If so, jump into this doctrine, do not run from it. If election depends on us, then we have no assurance. We are unstable, unreliable, and limited. If we think our election depends on us and our performance, however, we define performance – good efforts, good decisions, hard work – we will be wrecked. We will constantly be looking inward analyzing our performance.



We will ask questions like, “Am I doing enough?” “Did I pray to God for forgiveness with enough sincerity?” “Are my works pure enough?” All of these questions look inward and imply that your election is fundamentally rooted in you when it is not. This introspection keeps your eyes focused on yourself and leads to doubt; instead of looking inward, we should look to God and enjoy his grace. Church family, looking inward is not the way to receive a gift. Anyone who receives a great gift and looks inward looking for a reason to justify why they received the gift steals the glory of the gift giver and it undermines the very gift itself. The recipient of a great gift should not look inward but outward. They should not justify why they received the gift and others did not; rather, they should shout “thank you” for the joy of the gift and for the glory of the gift giver. This doctrine breeds assurance because it fixes our eyes on Jesus who is stable and reliable. It anchors our salvation in he who is unchangeable rather than in us who are unreliable. Election is a joy!

Second, the fact that election depends on God, not us, breeds comfort. Paul is writing this letter to a church that is largely made up of gentiles: those who are biologically members of Israel, and they are reading the Old Testament. They are reading about how the gentiles are the enemies of God’s people and harm God’s people.



Of course, God always desired to save the nations but, in the OT, the nations are often the enemy. These gentile believers have to be asking, “Did we get here by accident?” God speaks to those who doubt in the doctrine of election and says, “No! I chose you before the foundation of the world.” Election is a comfort. Listen, no one sneaks into God’s kingdom or gets there by accident. If you trust in Jesus and have repented of your sin, you did not do that by accident regardless of your ancestors or background. You are here on purpose. What a comfort.

Third, the fact that election depends on God, not us motivates a passionately pursuit of holiness. If election did depend on us, then one of two things would happen. Better put, we would oscillate between two awful realities. On the one hand, we would be filled with pride. We would think that we are saved because we made a good decision or worked hard, and we would look down on those who do not have it together. On the other hand, we would be filled with despair. We would know that we do not perform well enough to please God on our own, and we would be severely depressed. Satan does not care if you are destroyed by pride or despair, he just cares that he destroys you.



Now, praise be to God that salvation depends on God, not us. This reality does not lead to pride or despair but to a passionately pursuit of holiness. Notice verse 4. “Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.”

Election (God choosing us) motives holiness. It does because we are safe. Our salvation does not depend on our performance. Election also motivates holiness because it gives us joy. When we are saved because of Christ, we have immense joy. We know that we did not deserve salvation, if not for grace we would be damned. The reality of eternal bliss with God then evokes joy. When we see that the beginning of the Christian life is utterly joyful, we are motivated to pursue God day by day for the joy of our souls. Obedience is joyful when salvation depends on God. Finally, election motivates holiness because election breeds love for God. Again, when we take seriously our sin and God’s grace, we love God. And when we love someone, we begin to be like them. God’s people love God and his grace, and thus, we love showing it. Election motivates holiness.

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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,





BLESSING #2: ADOPTION

The next spiritual blessing that Paul discusses is adoption. We again learn that this blessing is on purpose. Paul tells us in verse 5 that we have been predestined for adoption – this is our destiny. Moreover, this was according to the purpose of God’s will (5). These verses are filled with God’s intentionality. Remember, we learned in verse 1 that Paul was an apostle by the “will of God,” and we learned in verse 4 that we are chosen (elected) in Christ.

Second, let’s rejoice in the truth that adoption depends on God. When parents adopt a child, the decision depends on the parent entirely, not the child. Thus, like election, adoption depends completely on the God who decided to adopt us. The privileges of this office (son/daughter) cannot be won by a child, but must be bestowed by a parent.

Third, the blessings of God are incredibly personal. Notice, that it is God’s will to adopt his people. No one forces God to adopt his people, not even his people. It is his will, not ours, that we are adopted. What a blessing! God does not merely save us to serve him – although we are his servants and we must serve him – God saves us to be his children who enjoy him. A child has much more glory than a servant! Praise be to God for his incredibly grace.



THE PURPOSE OF THE SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS

We have learned that God blesses his people with election and adoption. In verse 6, we learn why he does this. He does this for the praise of his glorious grace (6); in other words, God saves us for his glory. God's glory is the display of his infinite value and worth. He displays this glory to himself since he exists in an interpersonal relationship as Trinity. Thus, God is glorious in himself. Moreover, he displays his worth in creation and redemption. The display of God's infinite worth and value is his glory. Thus, it is appropriate to call God "God centered." John Piper and others did not make this up. God is about his glory.

God is about his glory, and this is right. Imagine if God were about promoting us rather than himself. That would be wrong, and we know it. Let me illustrate this truth. Imagine that the worst team in the NBA, a team that did not even make the playoffs, were crowned champions. Would that be right? Imagine I gave a student who got straight As on every assignment in one of my classes a nicely minted F. Would that be right?

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to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.



Imagine that the worst employee got a great promotion at your work and the best employee got fired. Would that be right? These situations would be awful; they would not be right or glorious. Thus, it is right for God to promote himself for all good things are found perfectly in him, and he, himself, is the standard of everything good. In a right world, he is promoted, not us.

God is about his glory, and this is good for us. Let's illustrate this beautiful reality too. Church family, you likely take joy in good things. Not bad things. We are more joyful when we are healthy than sick. Most of us prefer to play games that we are good at rather than games that we are awful at. We all would rather gaze at a beautiful sunset at the beach rather than bake in the 130-degree heat of Death Valley. Do we not all enjoy the smile of our children? We enjoy the smile of our children much more than the sight of a serial killer. You see, when we observe goodness, we are filled with great joy. Compare then for a moment the goodness of our God to other good things. A sunset is good but temporary. A relationship with your children is glorious but tainted. God's goodness though is neither temporary nor tainted. Thus, the display of his glory to us – the self-promotion of his own value – is what is



most delightful for us. When we behold God and his value, we have the most joy. Let's be blunt: our joy depends on God being about his glory! Amen.

Do you every wonder why God created the world? God created the world to magnify his glory, but more specifically, he made it to magnify his glorious grace, and this is good. Imagine a world where Adam and Eve were successful in completing their role in creation. We would know God as powerful creator and as just rewarder, but we would have no idea that he was a gracious savior. We would have no idea that in the complexes and beauty of who God is, he would be slow to anger and profoundly kind to sinners. The world is to magnify God's glorious grace because this increases our joy and his glory.

Do you every wonder why God does not just zap you into perfection? Why has God designed the process of becoming like Christ as a slow process. The purpose of this process, the purpose of it being slow, is that we would experience God's grace more fully. As we do that, our capacities for joy are deepened and our joy in beholding God's infinite glory is intensified. God created the world to magnify his grace and God's designed the Christian life to magnify his grace. Beholding out gracious God is the utmost blessing.





CONCLUSION

God has blessed us with himself (in Christ; in him) for our joy in his glorious grace! Church family, delight in the God who is blessed and who desires to share his blessings with us. Know that God is happy being God and is happy to overwhelm you with his blessings. Non-Christian friend, would you come to Jesus today Trust that he is the blessed God and that he desires to bless you. If you would trust in him and turn from you sins, you will experience his glorious grace. Utmost joy awaits anyone who would call out to this amazing God.



LET'S PRAY

Oh God, we have read your word and heard it preached, would you do the work that only you can do. Increase our capacities to enjoy you for your glory; draw the lost to you for their joy. We pray these things in Jesus' name, Amen.

