

# Our Blessings in Christ

LIFE IN CHRIST #1 - Pastor Gary Combs - September 20, 2026 - Ephesians 1:1-14

**INTRO:** Good morning church! Today, is Back to Church Sunday! And we are starting a new series entitled, “LIFE IN CHRIST: An Exposition of Ephesians.” We’ll be spending the next 6-weeks going through the first 3 chapters, then we’ll take a break for the holidays and come back to it in 2027, Lord willing, to finish up the last 3 chapters.

**The key phrase in Ephesians is “in Christ.”** Paul uses some form of this phrase 36 times in his letter. And remarkably, 11 of them occur in the opening 14 verses! “Ephesians divides naturally into two parts: who we are in Christ (our position), and how we are to live in Christ (our practice).” (Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Ephesians*, p. 15).

Ephesians tells us that the Christian life is not merely life *for Christ* or life *like Christ*. It is **life in Christ**. Everything we have, everything we are, and everything we hope to become flows from our union with Him.

The apostle Paul knew Ephesus well. He had spent three years ministering there around 52–55 AD, longer than he stayed in almost any other city. Then, about seven or eight years later, while imprisoned in Rome, he wrote this magnificent letter reminding the Ephesian believers who they were and what they possessed “in Christ.”

**Need:** Every one of us has to answer one of the most basic questions of life: “Who am I?” And how we answer that question shapes almost everything else about us.

**Traditional identity.** The late Tim Keller often pointed out that historically, people tended to find their identity by looking around them. Your family, your community, your tribe told you who you were. You were a farmer. You were a mother, a father. Your identity came largely from the expectations of the people around you.

**Modern identity.** Modern culture has turned that around. Today we are told not to look around us, but to look within us. Look inside. Discover your deepest desires and feelings. Decide who you are for yourself. “Be true to yourself.”

But there is a problem with both approaches. What happens when the people around us reject us or misunderstand us? And what happens when what we feel within us is a lie or just a phase we’re going through?

**Gospel identity.** The Bible gives us a better way. It tells us neither to look around nor merely to look within, but to look to God. Instead of asking only, “What do others say about me?” or even, “What do I say about myself?” we ask, “What does God say about me?”

**Trans:** And that is exactly what Paul begins to answer in Ephesians. Again and again in these opening verses we encounter the words: “in Christ.” Paul wants believers to understand that our deepest identity is not something we achieve through our performance, inherit from our family, or discover by searching our feelings. Our identity is something we receive by grace because of our union with Jesus Christ.

**BODY:** In Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, he opens up his letter by praising God that He has given every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places to believers in Christ. We can praise God for the spiritual blessings He has given us in Christ. How can we praise God for the spiritual blessings He has given us in Christ? The text gives three ways we can praise God for the spiritual blessings He has given us in Christ.

**Read text:** Ephesians 1:1-14 (ESV) <sup>1</sup> Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus: <sup>2</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>3</sup> 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, <sup>4</sup> even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love <sup>5</sup> he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, <sup>6</sup> to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. <sup>7</sup> In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, <sup>8</sup> which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight <sup>9</sup> making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ <sup>10</sup> as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth in him. <sup>11</sup> In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, <sup>12</sup> so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. <sup>13</sup> In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, <sup>14</sup> who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

## WE CAN PRAISE GOD FOR OUR SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS IN CHRIST...

### 1. By blessing the Father for choosing us.

**EXP:** (1-6) Paul begins where salvation begins, not with our decision for God, but with God’s gracious decision toward us in Christ. Before the foundation of the world, the Father chose us “in him” (4). Paul repeatedly emphasizes the source: “according to the purpose of his will” (5) and “according to the purpose of his grace” (6). Being chosen therefore gives us no ground for boasting. But it gives us every reason for worship. Paul ends the section exactly there: “to the praise of his glorious grace”(6).

**“Paul an apostle”** (1) (ἀπόστολος, *apostolos*) - a delegate, messenger, one sent forth with orders. Paul wrote this letter during his first imprisonment in Rome. He was an apostle “untimely born” (1 Cor. 15:8).

**“Will of God”** (1,5,9,11- 4x) (θέλημα, *thelēma*) - the eternal purpose of God to bless mankind through Christ

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**"Ephesus" (1)** - one of the great cities of the Roman world with an approximate population of 250,000. Located on the western coast of Asia Minor, it was a major port city, commercial center, and the seat of the Roman proconsul. Most of the ruins seen today date from the 1st century. Paul came to Ephesus around 52 AD on his 3rd missionary tour, and Ephesus became a center for spreading Christianity throughout Asia Minor. As recounted in Acts 19-20, during a period of three years, Paul taught in the synagogue and in the hall of Tyrannus. Many of the Ephesians who had become Christians burned their magic books, and as more Ephesians became believers, Demetrius, a silversmith, incited a riot in the 25,000 seat stadium where the crowd shouted "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians." Aquila, Priscilla, and Timothy were there, and church tradition holds that the apostle John lived out his final years in Ephesus.



**"Grace" (2,6,7 - 3X)** (χάρις, *charis*) - grace, God's unmerited favor. Free gift.

**"Blessed" (3,6 - 4x)** (εὐλογητός, *eulogētos*) - blessed, praised. Paul begins his eulogy, his doxology, by blessing God! N.T. Wright calls the 12 verses 3-14 a "shout of praise" that even Paul would find it hard to say in a "single breath" (N.T. Wright, *The Vision of Ephesians*, p.17). Tony Merida writes, "In Greek this is one long (202 words), complex, and glorious sentence that oozes with God-centered worship" (Merida, p.19).

**"Every spiritual blessing (3)** (*en pasē eulogia pneumatikē*) - every, all. When God gave us Christ, He didn't give us one blessing among many. He gave us the One in whom every spiritual blessing is found.

**"Chose us" (4)** (ἐκλέγομαι, *eklegomai*) - to choose, of God the Father; where we get the word election.

**"Before the foundation of the world" (4)** - eternity past, before God created the world.

**"Predestined" (5,11- 2X)** (προορίζω, *proorizō*) - to predetermine, God decreeing from eternity. "Unfortunately this passage has generated a lot of debate because it mentions the concepts of election and predestination. While this discussion in itself is not a bad thing, I think we can miss the spirit of this text. The spirit is one of worship" (Merida, p.20). What has he chosen and predestined us for? To be...

**"Holy and blameless" (4)** (ἄμωμος, *amōmos*) - without blemish; morally: faultless, unblameable. And to...

**"Adoption" (5)** (υἱοθεσία, *huiiothesia*) - adoption, adoption as sons. Made children of God in Christ.

**"Praise of his glorious grace" (6)** (ἐπαῖνος, *epainos*) - approbation, commendation, praise

**ARG:** The idea of God choosing a people to display His glory is not new. He chose Abraham and through him, us ("all the families of the earth").

Genesis 12:1-3 (ESV) Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country ...to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing...and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

**Jesus chose His disciples.**

John 15:16 (ESV) You did not choose me, but I chose you...

**ILL:** In love, some here have chosen to adopt. An adopted child does not earn a place in the family. The parents set their love upon that child and choose to give the child their name, home and inheritance. The child's security rests not in having chosen the family, but in having been chosen and received by the family.

**APP:** Stop grounding your identity in what other think of you, or what you think of yourself. If you are in Christ, the Father has set His gracious love upon you before you've done anything for Him. In Christ, you are chosen. You are holy and blameless. You are God's adopted child!

And let us admit that the doctrine of election is a great "mystery" (9). In this passage, we begin with God choosing us, but we conclude in v.13 with us believing and choosing Him in Christ Jesus. So, instead of dwelling on how to unravel this mystery, let us join Paul in blessing the Father for choosing us in Christ! Let us give praise to God for His "glorious grace with which he has blessed us in the Beloved" (6), in Christ!

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## 2. By glorifying the Son for redeeming us.

**EXP:** (7-12) Paul moves from the Father's eternal purpose to the Son's historical accomplishment: "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses" (7). Redemption is the language of liberation through the payment of a price. Our sin had placed us under a debt and bondage we could never escape ourselves, but Jesus paid the price with His own blood.

"Redemption" (7) (ἀπολύτρωσις, *apolutrōsis*) - a releasing by payment; redemption, deliverance.

"Forgiveness" (7) (ἄφεσις, *aphesis*) - release from bondage or imprisonment; forgiveness.

"Riches of his grace" (7) (πλοῦτος, *ploutos*) - riches, wealth; abundance... of God's unmerited favor.

"Lavished" (8) (περισεύω, *perisseuō*) - to exceed a fixed measure, over and above, abundance.

"Wisdom and insight" (8) (φρόνησις, *phronēsis*) - understanding; knowledge, of the will of God

"Mystery" (9) (μυστήριον, *mystērion*) - hidden thing, secret, mystery. Major theme in Ephesians: a truth once hidden in God's eternal purpose, but now revealed in Christ. In the NT, a "mystery" is not a puzzle we can solve, but a divine secret we could never have known unless God chose to reveal it.

"Purpose" (9) (προτίθημι, *protithēmi*) - to place before, to set forth, to purpose, determine.

"Fullness of time" (10) (καιρός, *kairos*) - refers not merely to chronological time passing, but to an appointed, fitting, or decisive season. It points toward the consummation of God's entire plan in Christ.

"Unite" (10) (ἀνακεφαλαιόω, *anakephalaioō*) - to gather together in one. N.T. Wright calls this "one of the most important lines in the whole letter" (Wright, p.23). All will be one, not only Jew and Gentile, but everything in heaven and earth will be one in the Messiah, Christ Jesus! God's ultimate plan.

"Inheritance" (11) (κληρώω, *klēroō*) - Lit., "to assign by lot;" hence, to receive an allotted inheritance.

"Counsel" (11) (βουλή, *boulē*) - volition, purpose, advise, counsel, will

"First to hope" (12) (προελπίζω, *proelpizō*) - to hope beforehand; likely referring here to Jewish believers who first placed their hope in the promised Messiah, followed by the Gentile believers of verse 13.

**ARG:** As Paul wrote to the Colossians:

Colossians 1:13-14 (ESV) <sup>13</sup> He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, <sup>14</sup> in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

**ILL:** The ancient picture of redemption is that of a slave whose freedom had to be purchased. We see it in the Exodus story and in the story of Ruth and Boaz, her *Goel* ("kinsman-redeemer).

**APP:** Some believers still punish themselves for sins that Christ has forgiven. Others try to establish their worth through religious performance. But Paul says, "In him we have redemption." Not "we might have," not "we are working toward." We have it. It is ours in Christ. Confess your sin, receive His forgiveness, and glorify the Son who purchased you with His blood.

## 3. By rejoicing in the Spirit for sealing us.

**EXP:** (13-14) Paul now turns to the Holy Spirit. The Ephesians heard the word of truth, believed in Christ, and were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit (13). A seal in the ancient world could signify ownership, authenticity, and security. God has placed His own Spirit in every believer for our assurance of salvation.

"You heard" (13) (ἀκούω, *akouō*) - to hear or receive what is spoken. Here it refers to hearing the gospel message that brought them to faith in Christ, probably the Gentiles are view, using the "you."

"Word of truth" (13) (ἀλήθεια, *alētheia*) - objectively: what is true. Here, the gospel of Jesus.

"Gospel of your salvation" (13) (εὐαγγέλιον, *euangelion*) - good news or message; the gospel.

"Believed in him" (13) (πιστεύω, *pisteuō*) - to be persuaded of, place confidence in; believed, to trust.

"Sealed" (13) (σφραγίζω, *sphragizō*) - to set a seal, by the impress of a seal or a stamp; authenticate.

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**“Promised Holy Spirit” (13)** (ἐπαγγελία, *epangelia*) - promise. The Spirit whom God promised through the prophets, whom Jesus promised to send, and whom the Father poured out at Pentecost.

**“Guarantee” (14)** (ἀρραβών, *arrabōn*) - an earnest; money which in purchases is given as a pledge or downpayment that the full amount will subsequently be paid. The Holy Spirit is heaven's down payment, God's present pledge that everything He has promised us in Christ will one day be fully ours.

**“Inheritance” (14)** (κληρονομία, *klēronomia*) – an inheritance, possession, or property received by an heir.

**“Acquire possession” (14)** (περιποίησις, *peripoiēsis*) - acquisition or possession; here, the final securing of what belongs to God and the full realization of the believer's inheritance.

**ARG:** **The Spirit is our assurance and our guarantee, that we are “fellow heirs with Christ.”**

Romans 8:16-17 (ESV) <sup>16</sup> The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, <sup>17</sup> and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ...

**ILL:** **Purchasing a house.** When you put earnest money down on a house, that payment is not the whole purchase, but it is a pledge that the rest is coming. God has given us something infinitely greater than earnest money. He has given us Himself. The indwelling Spirit is heaven's down payment on the inheritance God has promised us.

**APP:** Our assurance does not rest on how we feel, but on what God has done. If we've heard the gospel and believed in Christ, God has placed His Spirit within us as His seal and pledge. So when feelings fluctuate, circumstances change, or the future seems uncertain, we can rejoice that God finishes what He starts. The Spirit within us is the guarantee that one day we will fully possess everything God has promised us in Christ.

**CONCLUSION:** So who are you? If you are in Christ, you are not defined by what others have said about you. You are not defined by your failures, your successes, your past, your possessions, or even by what you feel about yourself today. You are who God says you are in Christ.

The Father says, “I chose you.” The Son says, “I redeemed you.” The Spirit says, “I have sealed you.”

None of this begins with what we have done for God. It begins with what God has done for us. That is grace.

We were sinners who could never make ourselves holy and blameless. We were slaves who could never pay the price for our own freedom. We were spiritually dead and powerless to secure our own inheritance.

So Jesus Christ came for us. He lived the life we could not live. He went to the cross and shed His blood for the forgiveness of our trespasses. He was buried, but on the third day He rose from the grave, defeating sin and death. He ascended to the Father, where He reigns today. And one day, in the fullness of time, He is coming again to unite all things under His rule, things in heaven and things on earth.

Until that day, He has given us His Holy Spirit as the guarantee that everything He has promised will surely be ours. So Christian, bless the Father who chose you. Glorify the Son who redeemed you. Rejoice in the Spirit who sealed you.

And if you have never trusted in Christ, notice what Paul says: “You heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him.”

That invitation still stands. You do not earn these blessings. You do not deserve them. You do not achieve them.

You receive them by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

Turn from your sin and place your faith in the One who was crucified for you, raised for you, and is coming again.

Because every spiritual blessing God has for His children is found in one place: In Christ.

Let's pray.