

“Praise God!” [Part I]

Ephesians 1:1-6

Series: Ephesians [#1]

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Theme: **Praise God For Your Spiritual Blessings.**

## Introduction

Today we begin a new series in the book of Ephesians. Those who have read and studied it cherish it. It’s been called,

- “the most contemporary book in the Bible;”
- “the Alps of the N.T. ... the highest peak of Scriptural truth”;
- “A mini-course on theology, centered on the church”.

This morning we are going to “*Set the Scene*” for our journey, and then begin looking at the grand opening paragraph. Without question, the first 14 verses form one of the greatest introductions to a book in the Bible. These are wonderful truths we all can and should know. Yet, at the same time, they are truths which none of us will fully comprehend here on earth.

The grand opening section can be summarized in two words: “*Praise God!*” ... or, more specifically, “*Praise God For Your Spiritual Blessings.*”

## Setting The Scene.

We begin with the city of Ephesus. Let’s check the maps—on the screen and in the back of your Bible. Ephesus was located on the west coast of Asia Minor in what today is the country of Turkey. It was founded around 2,000 B.C. by the Hittites; taken by the Greeks in 1,000 B.C., and then by the Romans. It was a mix of east and west.

It was an important city. It had long been a seaport and was on a key trade route in and out of Asia Minor. In Paul’s day it was the capital city of the Roman province of Asia. The population was between 400-500,000.

But not all was well for the city. It had been in a long, losing struggle to keep on being a valuable and viable seaport. Uncontrolled logging and some ill-advised engineering around the river and harbour on the sea, allowed silt to flow down and clog the port. The original harbor today is about 6 km inland from the sea.

So, the city had turned to art, culture and tourism, along with trade, commerce and banking. Key to this was the Temple of Diana [Roman] or Artemis [Greek]. The temple was the center for an eastern fertility cult which the Romans had blended into the Greek/Roman religion. With its religious prostitution, tourism and artifacts, it was key to the economy. Paul’s preaching there led to changed lives, which cut into the trade in idols and other religious artifacts. So we can understand why silversmith’s guild started a riot (Acts 19).

The Romans kept developing the temple area and the whole city until a raid by the Goths destroyed it in 263 A.D. Only a few scattered stones of the temple remain, which was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

The church at Ephesus. Paul wanted to go through Asia Minor on his second missionary journey, but the Holy Spirit prevented that (Acts 16). On the way back from that trip, he stopped in Ephesus for a brief time (Acts 18). That was in about the year 52. Paul left Priscilla and Aquila to work with the new believers, and they were later joined by Apollos.

Later, on his third journey, he returned and stayed for about three years. In that time Ephesus became a base for spreading the gospel throughout all of Asia Minor. On Paul's last trip to Jerusalem, he met with the elders from the church at Miletus (about 50 km. south); ca. 57.

We know from 1 Timothy 1:3 that Timothy was placed in charge of the work there for a period of time. Some years later the Apostle John was based there, after his exile to Patmos. The church had a good, solid beginning.

In the last decade of the first century, it is the first of seven churches addressed by Christ in Revelation 2:2-6,

“I know all the things you do. I have seen your hard work and your patient endurance. I know you don't tolerate evil people. You have examined the claims of those who say they are apostles but are not. You have discovered they are liars. You have patiently suffered for me without quitting. But I have this complaint against you. You don't love me or each other as you did at first! Look how far you have fallen from your first love! Turn back to me again and work as you did at first. If you don't, I will come and remove your lampstand from its place among the churches. But there is this about you that is good: You hate the deeds of the immoral Nicolaitans, just as I do.”[NLT]

A century later the church was still praised in records that have survived. It became a center for bishops. An important council was held there in 431. But the church and the city continued to decline and the church died with the city, the warning of their lampstand being removed was fulfilled.

This letter to the church. It was written by the apostle Paul from prison in Rome in 61 or 62—the same time frame as Philippians, Colossians and Philemon. These were final words of encouragement and instruction to the believers centered on of who they were in Jesus Christ.

There are a number of great themes in this letter:

- the believer's calling, being chosen by God;
- God's great love and grace;

- Christ’s authority and leadership over His church;
- the church’s unity in diversity—Jews, Gentiles, differing backgrounds and gifts—designed by God to fit together like a building, like a temple.
- responsibilities of believers in the church, home, society;
- God’s provision for victory in the spiritual conflict which engages every believer.
- It gives us both solid doctrine and important practical truths for everyday life.

### **God Has Blessed You With Every Spiritual Blessing.**

In the first verse Paul tells us he is writing to “the saints who are at Ephesus,” and in verse three he tells us that these “*saints*” “have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.”

First, I should note that some early manuscripts do not have the words “in Ephesus”, leaving us with a grammatically awkward sentence. So, some suggest this letter was a general letter to all of the churches in Asia Minor. But, while it *was* circulated throughout the region, the large number of fairly early manuscripts with “in Ephesus,” and no other named greeting in any copies, I believe the reading we have is the best, is correct.

But our focus here begins with that word “*saints*.” This word has suffered a fair bit of abuse and corruption down through the years. Its basic meaning is “*one who is set apart*,” not some “*super-spiritual person*.” When it is used in the Bible of believers, it refers to all believers, who are set apart to and for God. But many still ask ...

“*Who? Me?*” If you are a Christian, you *are* a *saint*. Paul describes these *saints* as the “*faithful*”—i.e., those who are people of faith, who have placed their faith in Christ. At the end of the first verse he further describes these *saints* as those who are “in Christ.” So, the answer is, “*Yes! You!*”

If you have recognized your sinfulness and inability to settle it with God, and have placed your faith in Jesus Christ who died and was raised to pay for your sins ... then **you** are a saint. James Montgomery Boice, “Every Christian is a saint, and every saint is a Christian.”

And you “*have been* blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.” This truth is what excited the apostle Paul here. It is the truth for which he was praising God, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...” He is praising God and telling the Ephesian believers, is telling us today, “*Praise God for your spiritual blessings!*”

God’s blessings are in Christ. Look at verse 3 again,

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.”

All spiritual blessings, privileges and standing are “*in Christ*”— there is no other source or way.

Just to make sure we get the point, Christ is named at least 15 times in the first 14 verses, counting the personal pronouns such as “in Him”, etc. And, more than that, the phrases “*in Christ*,” “in Him,” and “in the Beloved”, occur at least 11 times in these verses. Everyone of our God’s spiritual blessings to us is in Jesus. You can’t receive them unless you receive Him. If you receive Him, you receive them. Paul uses repetition of those key phrases to drive the point home: all that we are, all that we hope to be, all that we will be is “*in Christ*.” Again, It is ***all*** from and in Him.

God’s blessings are complete for each believer. God “has blessed us with ***every*** spiritual blessing...”

- “*us*” = every saint, every believer.
- “*has blessed*” = it has already been done.

Let’s stop and try to get our minds around this, especially that “*every spiritual blessing*” part. It’s there “*in black and white*,” but what does it mean?

One of our first steps is look at the setting, the verses around this statement to see if they help, *and they do!* Paul gives us examples that follow on through verse 14,

- God’s choosing of us;
- His great grace to us;
- His redemption of us;
- His revelation of His will for us;
- His making us and giving us an inheritance;
- His giving us and sealing us with the Holy Spirit.

We look beyond this section, to Colossians 2:9-10, “For in Him [Christ] all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and *in Him you have been made complete...*”

When God saved you, you were made complete in Christ— there is no second, third or fourth level of blessing to be attained. Everything has been given to you. And note, Paul is not talking about the physical blessings God showers on us daily. He is not talking about the miraculous blessings of God’s intervention and provision. He is talking about “*spiritual blessings*”—the blessings of being accepted by God. Assurance, experience of God’s love and hope, and growth in being like Christ does not come by “*receiving more of, or more from God*,” but accepting what God has given us and living based on, out of it.

As we move through the rest of this opening paragraph (Paul wrote verses 3-14 as one sentence of 202 words!), we will focus on the specifics he gives us. One today.

## God Has Chosen Each Believer As His Child.

The truth. Go to verse 4,

“just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. “ (4-6)

Here we come to a wonderful truth, but one that often raises serious questions, deep feelings and strong disagreements. One cause of this is trying to understand God’s sovereignty and the free choices we have. The Bible tells us clearly that God is over all His creation. Everything that occurs is in His sovereign plan, yet He is never touched by or responsible for evil or sin. We have freedom to make real choices, without coercion. If not, we would not be responsible for our choices.

To overemphasize God’s sovereignty leads to fatalism, “What will be will be, no matter what I do.” To overemphasize our freedom limits God, and so “*destroys*,” or violates the truth of His sovereignty.

The correct balance is one in which we describe all of this to some extent, but also realize we can never fully comprehend it, because it is beyond us. Only God can completely understand how it all fits together—and *it does fit together!* Pushing for a complete understanding *always* leads us to error and, beyond that, is *arrogant*. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones put it bluntly,

“...you are assuming that your little mind is capable of understanding what God does ... that you, simple creature as you are, small and petty as you often are in your human relationships, you who listened to the devil and brought ruin upon yourself—realize that you are claiming that your pigmy mind is able to understand the infinite and inscrutable mind of the eternal God.”

God’s absolute sovereignty and our true freedom go together. As one writer put it, “Nothing God planned interferes with human freedom...nothing humans do frustrates God’s sovereign plan.”

Now, let’s move on to a basic review of this truth: God has chosen us—each believer individually—as His own. The force of the first phrase “just as He chose us,” from the structure, has the meaning “just as He chose us *for Himself*.” And ultimately, vs. 5-6 tell us, it is for His glory. Each believer has been chosen by God for Himself “before the foundation of the world.” Before God created time and space He chose you for Himself! To be with Him! *Now, if that doesn’t excite you, I don’t know what will!*

Remember Jesus has told us, “You did not choose Me, but I chose you” (John 15:16). He chose us to be with Him, to be like Him, “that we would be holy and blameless before Him.”

There are three different aspects of our holiness described in the Bible:

- *Positional* — at the moment of salvation every believer stands holy *in Christ* before God.
- *Progressive* — growing in being like Christ, in conquering sin and pleasing God.
- *Ultimate* — when we see Christ as He is in heaven and are like Him. No more sin in thought or action, no more sin nature at all.

What Paul describes here is our future, ultimate state of being holy and blameless—God has chosen, saved, recreated us for this purpose.

“In love He predestined us to adoption as sons” (4 b - 5). The word “*predestined*” used here and again in verse 11, means “*to decide beforehand.*” Before time began, God chose us, He chose each one who will be His child and be with Him forever.

Listen to a few similar statements in Scripture.

**2 Thess. 2:13-14**, “...God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14)

[We were *chosen* before time; *called* at the pt. of salvation.]

In 1 Peter 1:1 b - 2, Peter is writing to those “...who are *chosen* according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood...”

God has planned and knows all things. God chose us for Himself “*in love*”—not on the basis of who we are or what we have done, or will do.

There are some practical implications that flow from this. First, God’s choosing of us, our salvation, is an act of His *grace*. Later, in chapter 2, Paul writes, “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.” There is nothing we have done or could ever do to earn God’s forgiveness and salvation.

Then, God’s choosing is an act of His sovereign will. It is not God looking, as it were, through a telescope of time to see who would respond and then choosing them. If that the case, God would be dependent on us *and* He would not be sovereign. Yes, there is much that we do not understand, but God tells us that His choosing is an act of His sovereign will.

Also, because God has chosen us, that choice carries the full force, the full effectiveness of His sovereignty—it is full, complete, certain and secure!

- Freedom from doubts—*God has saved us!*
- Freedom from worry—if God has saved us, He has done it completely and forever!

## Conclusion.

It was not a formality or *stock phrase* that Paul used to open verse 3, “*Blessed* be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” As he reflected on this wonderful truth God had revealed to him, He burst into *praise*. “*Praise God!*” “*Praise God for your spiritual blessings!*”

In these next few moments that you spend with God,

- Worship, thank, praise Him for blessing you with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.
- Thank Him that in His love and grace He chose you, holds you
- Determine to live your life to fulfill what He has given you, to live for the praise of His glory.

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