

# Ephesians 1.3-14

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## *Blessed*

Amington Parish Church

Sunday 26 January 2020

### **Father, Son, and Holy Spirit**

§ A mum and dad invited some people to dinner. At the table, the mum turned to their six-year-old daughter and said, 'Would you like to say the blessing?'

'I wouldn't know what to say,' the girl replied.

'Just say what Mummy says,' said the dad.

The daughter bowed her head and said, 'Lord, why on earth did I invite all these people to dinner?'

Thankfully our passage today is a slightly more edifying blessing than that! It's an amazing opening to the letter – in Greek it's one sentence, from v3 to v14 – Paul is almost breathless in his praise – his words come tumbling out – the blessings and the praise, telling what God has done.

We might want to split the prayer into three sections ¶:

- (1) Look how Paul starts his praise (3): **Praise be to the God and ¶ Father of our Lord**. He begins with the Father, source of all – and ends the section with the reason why God does this (6): **¶ to the praise of his (God's) glorious grace**.
- (2) Next Paul focuses on Jesus (7): **In him** (that is, ¶ Jesus) **we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins**. God's purpose was **made known** in Jesus (9), **put into effect** through Jesus (10), we were **chosen** in Jesus (11), and put our **hope** in Jesus (12) – why? – so (12) **¶ we might be for the praise of his (God's) glory**.
- (3) Finally Paul turns to the ¶ Holy Spirit. All believers are given the Holy Spirit, the **seal** (13) of God's ownership and the **deposit guaranteeing** (14) God's promises. And he tells us why (14): **to the praise of his (God's) glory**.

Here we have Paul praising God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. The prayer might split into three, but things aren't quite that neat. There is one God, working for one purpose – but God is three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Each person is fully God – not a third each. Yet there is one God.

No-one can explain *how* all that works, or give an example to help us understand. It is a mystery – but we can learn a lot from the way Paul talks about God as Trinity quite naturally, the interplay between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. If you're confused it's quite simple: stick to what the Bible says and you won't go far wrong!

## In Christ

The other critical thing about this prayer is that, although it can be split into three sections, there is one little phrase that unites the whole prayer – two words – can anyone tell me what they are?

*Ask the congregation... answer: J 'in Christ' or 'in him'*

J Jesus is named or referred to at least thirteen times in this prayer, and J eleven times Paul uses the phrase 'in him' or 'in Christ'. The Father may be the source, the Holy Spirit may be the seal and the way God is at work within us – but Jesus Christ is at the centre.

For he is God made man. He is like us, he is our leader, the head of the church, he is the willing and perfect sacrifice that pays the price for our sin, he is our risen and exalted Saviour, he is our Lord, he is our brother, he is our friend, he is closer than we could ever be to another person.

But what does it mean to be ‘in’ Christ? Let’s think of some examples ∫.

- (1) Now, it might surprise you to know that I can’t fly. I can flap my arms as much as I like... I can even wear one of those ∫ base jumping suits – but the best I could do is glide down to the ground. But if I get ‘in’ a plane or ∫ helicopter, suddenly I *can* fly; I can do something I’m not able to do otherwise.
- (2) Who likes to swim? ∫ What happens when you jump ‘in’ the water? You get wet... but you are also *surrounded* by the water. You are covered by it, completely enveloped by it.
- (3) How about this one – ∫ most of us are ‘in’ a family. It’s a state of being, it’s about who you *are* – I’m sure you all know the proverb: **you can choose your friends, but you can’t choose your family.**
- (4) If you are ‘in’ a concert or a group or a club or a ∫ sports team, you are part of something bigger than yourself. *Your* story is part of a *bigger* story, involving other people.

All those things – being able to do something we couldn't, being covered and surrounded, a state of being, being part of something bigger – they are all true for those of us who are 'in' Christ.

## Blessed

Let's look at the first time Paul uses the phrase in this passage:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

*Ephesians 1.3 (NIV)*

§ A Baptist pastor loved to place bets on horses at the racetrack. One day he was there, and he noticed a Roman Catholic priest step out onto the track, and bless one of the horses. Even though it was a long shot, the horse won the race! The pastor watched to see what the priest would do in the next race.

Sure enough, as the horses lined up, the priest stepped forward, blessed one of them – and it won, another long shot!

Now the pastor started to get excited. When he saw which horse the priest blessed in the next race, he placed a bet on it – and it won! He collected his winnings and waited for the next race.

After winning again, throughout the day he repeated the pattern, placing a bet on whichever horse the Catholic priest had blessed – and the Baptist pastor started to make some real money.

When it came to the last race of the day, he was sure his wildest dreams were going to come true. He went to the cash machine, took out all his savings, and added it to his pile of winnings.

Anxiously, he looked out and waited to see which horse the priest would bless for the last race. Sure enough, out he stepped. He walked over to one of the horses, and anointed its forehead and hooves. The pastor put every penny on that horse.

But, halfway round the track, the horse stumbled, tripped, and collapsed onto the turf. The pastor was devastated.

He made his way down to the paddock, sought out the priest and demanded, ‘What just happened, Father? All day you blessed horses and they won. In the last race, you blessed a horse and he lost! Now, thanks to you, I’ve lost all my savings!’

Nodding wisely, the priest replied, ‘That’s the problem with you Protestants... you can’t tell the difference between a blessing and the Last Rites.’

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

*Ephesians 1.3 (NIV)*

Let's look at some of those blessings §:

§ (4, 11) Chosen in Christ

§ (5, 11) Predestined in Christ

§ (5, 14) Adopted through Christ, given the status of an heir

§ (7, 14) Redeemed through Jesus' blood

§ (7) Forgiven

§ (7-8) Lavished with grace

§ (10) United under Christ

§ (13) Included in Christ

§ (13) Marked with a seal (the Holy Spirit)

Friends, that is quite a list. But why are they § *spiritual blessings*? What makes them **spiritual**? How about I write it with a capital 'S': § **Spiritual blessings**... what do you think *those* might be?

The word for spirit – as in ‘human spirit’ and the word for Spirit – as in ‘Holy Spirit’ – are, unsurprisingly, the same.

Therefore, these blessings are ‘Spiritual’ (big S) – they come to us by the power of the Holy *Spirit*.

But they are also ‘spiritual’ (little s) – they go to the very core of our being. When the Bible talks about our ‘spirit’ it doesn’t mean we are ghosts trapped inside a body or anything like that. By ‘spirit’ the Bible means our sense of ‘self’, who we are, the voice in our head when we think, the emotion in our hearts when we feel.

God’s blessings come from the Holy Spirit, and they touch *our* spirit, the deepest parts of our self.

Let’s recap – we are... **in Christ** and we are **blessed**.

## Chosen

We are also **chosen**.

A vicar once explained to his congregation that the church was in need of some extra money, so he asked them to consider being more generous. He said that whoever gave the most would be able to choose three hymns for the next service.



After the offering plates were passed around, the vicar glanced down and noticed that someone had put a pile of cash worth £500. He was so excited that he immediately shared his joy with his congregation and said he'd like to thank the person who placed the money in the plate, immediately.

A very quiet, elderly, saintly lady at the back of the church shyly raised her hand. The vicar asked her to come to the front, so she slowly she made her way towards him.

The vicar told her how wonderful it was that she had given so much, and in thanks he asked her to choose three hymns.

Her eyes bright as she looked over the congregation, she pointed to the three most handsome men in the church and said, 'I choose him and him and him.'

Friends, much ink – and even some blood – has been spilled over predestination. To some, the idea that God chooses some people – and therefore *doesn't choose* others – is abhorrent.

The thing is, the Bible teaches us, time and again, that God *does choose* certain people. From Abraham, to Joseph, to King David, to the prophets, to the twelve disciples – God *chooses*.

And actually, most of the time the Bible focuses on the positive side of God's choice. It is supposed to be an encouragement to God's people, it is supposed to reassure us, to give us confidence, that our life in Christ doesn't depend on us, but on God.

We see that in three ways in this prayer.

- (1) This is **J** God's initiative. *He* blesses (3), *he* chooses (4), *he* adopts us (5), *he* gives us his grace (6), *he* redeems and forgives (7), *he* lavishes his grace on us (8), *he* reveals his will (9), *he* includes us in Christ (13) and *he* marks and seals us with the Holy Spirit (14).

In this prayer, God's people do very little, to be honest, except receive what *God* does and what *God* gives.

- (2) It is **J** God's will *and pleasure* that he chooses and gives us all these things. Look in v9 with me: **he has made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure.**

Have you ever heard of 'imposter syndrome'? It's where we feel we don't belong – but everyone else does. We feel as though *we* don't belong, *we* are the 'odd ones out'.

To that feeling, Paul says a big, resounding, ‘No!’ God chose his family **before the creation of the world** (4), **according to his plan** (11). When we believe, when God brings us into his family, *it’s no accident*. God chose *you* to be here.

- (3) All this truth about God, what God has done in Jesus, the blessings he lavishes upon us – **¶** *we need to be told*. We can’t work it out for ourselves; so Paul calls it a **mystery** (9), a **mystery** God has **now made known** – to whom? – **to us**.

We can do our best, and get quite a lot of the way there. This is how I understand other religions. There is much truth and good in them, for (as the Bible says) God’s existence and power can be plainly seen and known in creation. But **the mystery of his will**, the redemption and forgiveness of our sins – in other words, Jesus Christ and his salvation – this we *need to be told* by God, and this we *need to believe*.

In Acts 4.12 Peter says **¶**, **‘Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.’** And in John 14.6 Jesus himself says **¶**, **‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’** There are *not* many ways to God, there is only one, and his name is Jesus.

This is why Paul repeats this phrase ‘in him’ time and again. He is singing God’s praise for this wonderful truth, this wonderful gift, this wonderful salvation that we have... ‘in him’, and no other.

Let’s recap – we are **in Christ**, we are **blessed**, and we are **chosen**.

## Included

And, we are **included** §:

You also were included in Christ **when you heard** the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. **When you believed**, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.

*Ephesians 1.13 (NIV)*

We are **included in Christ** when we hear the **gospel**, the true good news story of **salvation** in Jesus – *and when we believe*.

Belief is *more* than agreeing something is true, it is *leaning our whole weight on it*. Belief means depending on God continuously, like a small child depends on her parents to look after her. This is what Jesus taught: ‘**unless you become like little children** – that is, continuously dependent on our heavenly Father – **you will never enter the kingdom of heaven**’ (Matthew 18.3). We might say belief is putting our life where our mouth is.

Probably the greatest tightrope walker in the world was a man called **J** Charles Blondin. On 30 June 1859, he became the first man in history to walk on a tightrope across the Niagara Falls.

Over 25,000 people gathered to watch him walk on a tiny rope 1,100 feet long and 160 feet above the raging waters. He worked without a net or safety harness of any kind; the slightest slip would prove fatal. When he safely reached the Canadian side, the crowd burst into a mighty roar.

In the days that followed, he walked across the Falls many times: on stilts, blindfolded, with a wheelbarrow full of concrete, with his manager on his back... Once he took a chair and a stove with him, sat down in the middle, cooked an omelette, and ate it!

On another occasion he asked the cheering spectators if they thought he could push a *man* across sitting in a wheelbarrow. A mighty roar of approval rose from the crowd. Spying a man cheering loudly, Blondin asked him, 'Sir, do *you* think I could safely carry a man across in this wheelbarrow?'

'Yes, of course,' the man cheered. 'Are you sure?' asked Blondin.

'Yes, you are the Great Blondin!'

'OK then,' Blondin replied, 'Get in.'

Would you?

What do we *really* rely on? Do we rely on God, or on other things – maybe our family, or our work, or our finances, or a sense of power or authority?

Another way of putting it is this: what is our highest priority? Because the thing that's our highest priority – that's probably the thing we rely on (or want to rely on, if we don't have it yet).

However, good though some of these things might be, they don't provide the security we're looking for. And they aren't a patch on the wonderful blessings God has for those who are in Christ **J**.

If you feel like your life is wobbling, like you're about to fall off the tightrope into the raging waters – stop trying to look for security in the wrong places, and instead come to your heavenly Father through Jesus. Then you will be **blessed, chosen, included** – and all these other blessings.

No-one can take them away from God's adopted children. No-one. And the more we trust God, the more we allow his Upper Story to guide our Lower Story, the more we listen to him and depend on him, – the more we'll know these blessings in our lives.

So – will you get in the wheelbarrow?