

Greetings:

The study that Pastor Pat brings on Sunday mornings reflects the study for that week. It represents a lot of research. Not all of what he has prepared is communicated. In an attempt to continue the learning process, he is making available his study notes to the congregation.

These notes are edited, but not “book” ready. To the critical eye, mistakes can possibly be found. Therefore, he asks that you take the material with humility, teach-ability, and charity.

Enjoy and if you should have any questions or corrections, please do not hesitate to email him at [pastorpat@waukeshabible.org](mailto:pastorpat@waukeshabible.org).

**Date:** April 28, 2024

**Sermon Title:** “Blessed in Christ”

Sermon Series: Ephesians

Text: Misc. [Read Romans 5:12-6:11; Ephesians 1:3-14]

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Date: April 28, 2024

Title: Blessed in Christ

Text: Call to worship - Romans 5:12-6:11; Before the study - Ephesians 1:3-14

Theme: The overarching theme in Ephesians is God, through the work of Jesus, reconciling all things unto himself (1:10). That work of reconciliation by Jesus is a work of grace resulting in us being united to Christ. And it is this union with Christ that enables the believing to receive all spiritual blessings.

ILLUSTRATION - Our son, David, was born while Kirsten and I were still in college. We lived in Northern Wisconsin and when Kirsten began having contractions, I took her to a hospital in Iron Mountain, Michigan. Because our son was premature, they told us they did not have the facilities necessary for his care, so they had us drive to Green Bay Wisconsin. The hospital bill was about \$3,000. Now, today, that isn't outrageous. But 40 years ago, we did not have that kind of money. However, sometime earlier my grandparents passed and the amount I inherited was distributed at the same time the bill came due and it was about \$3,000. When we received the inheritance, it matched the bill! It was simply too good to be true, but it was.

Well, the Bible says we have a bill due that we cannot pay. But someone else has paid the bill and because we are beneficiaries of His estate, the bill is paid! That is what it means to be a part of God's family, to be in Christ, to be in union with him.

The Letter to the Ephesians teaches the church why we are in Christ and what the consequences of that union means. It is with joy, I get to explore with you this wonderful truth.

### **Introduction:**

As we have begun to note, the overarching theme in Ephesians is God, through the work of Jesus, reconciling all things unto Himself (1:10). That work of reconciliation by Jesus is a work of grace resulting in us being united to Christ. And it is this union with Christ that enables the believing to receive all spiritual blessings.

Our study explores the lavish nature of God's grace in uniting believers with Christ.

## I. THE GRACE FROM GOD

### A. The word Grace as found in Ephesians

When speaking of the grace of God, we begin by emphatically stating how we would have NOTHING except what God freely and unconditionally gives us. Everything we enjoy in this life and in the life to come is a result of God being gracious.

**"If any word stands out as [a] main word, it is this one [grace], which appears a total of twelve times (1:2,6,7; 2:5,7,8; 3:2,7,8; 4:7,29; 6:24). It is an amazing fact that grace is spoken of more in Ephesians than in any other New Testament book, even more than in Romans! Ephesians has been described as "The Epistle of Grace" and rightly so."**<sup>1</sup>

Now, for a moment, let us trace the word “grace” as it occurs in Ephesians.

### **Charis in Ephesians**

#### **1. Grace is transferable from God to us**

Eph 1:2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

This theme forms bookends to the Letter (6:24).

#### **2. Grace is celebrated by salvation**

Eph 1:6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

#### **3. Salvation is a consequence of the excessive or boundless nature of grace**

Eph 1:7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace,

“God’s grace can be poured out on believers only because of what Christ has done for them. Hence, he bestows his grace on us because we are *in his dearly loved Son.*”<sup>2</sup>

#### **4. The gospel shows another dimension of God’s grace**

Eph 3:2 assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you,

#### **5. The gospel’s proclamation is an expression of God’s grace**

Eph 3:7, 8

<sup>7</sup>Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. <sup>8</sup>To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,

#### **6. The gospel’s outworking in grace is a consequence of God’s grace**

Eph 4:7 But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.

#### **7. God’s grace defines how the church ministers to itself**

Eph 4:29 Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.

#### **8. Grace is transferable from us to others**

Eph 6:24 Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible

Remember how the Letter began (1:2) and now notice how the Letter ends.

ILLUSTRATION - Grace is a one-way action. Consider the idea of a mother's love for her child. She gives everything and the child gives nothing. Now, I know, you'll argue vehemently how much a child gives to the parent, but the child is not actively and consciously giving identity or affirmation or love to the mother. It is in many ways, a one-way love. And the care, love, and attention given to the child is very much a picture of grace. In those early stages of life, the mother expects nothing from the child.

**"Grace alone means that God loves, forgives, and saves us not because of who we are or what we do, but because of the work of Christ.** Our best efforts can never be good enough to earn salvation, but God declares us righteous for Christ's sake. We receive that grace through faith alone. God even gives us the faith that trusts him. We are not saved by obeying a list of do's and don'ts, but by grace through faith in Christ. Our salvation is in God's hands."<sup>3</sup>

The excessive or boundless nature of God's grace links us to the riches of God.

B. The word Riches as found in Ephesians.

"Riches" appears five times in Ephesians, all of which occur in the first half of the book (1:7,18; 2:7; 3:8,16).

- Eph 1:7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to **the riches of his grace,**
- Eph 1:18 having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are **the riches of his glorious inheritance** in the saints,
- Eph 2:7 so that in the coming ages he might show **the immeasurable riches of his grace** in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.
- Eph 3:8 To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles **the unsearchable riches of Christ,**
- Eph 3:16 that **according to the riches of his glory** he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being,

I am not quite sure how we communicate the excessive and lavish nature of God's gracious actions toward us. But let us step back and consider previous examples.

ILLUSTRATION - the goop! When you hold it in your hands, its slimes over everything.

It is the grace of God lavishly dispensed that results in the believer being placed "in Christ." From this over abundant occurrence of grace we are forced to confront our union with Christ.

In Christ is the language of the New Testament. Our Union with Christ is the language of theology.

Let us explore the idea of being “in Christ” or our *union with Christ*.

## II. OUR UNION WITH CHRIST

“Theologian John Murray called it ‘**the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation.**’ Union with Christ is that spiritual reality whereby we as believers are joined to our Lord such that what is true of him becomes true of us. It is central to our understanding of who we are as Christians.”<sup>4</sup>

As we explore the idea of being *in Christ*, there are two ideas we wish to hear.

### A. First, the Father now sees us in Christ (Rom. 6:1-10).

Although the language is simple, the consequences behind this simple statement are immeasurable.

- Eph. 2:13 But now in Christ Jesus **you who once were far off have been brought near** by the blood of Christ.
- Eph. 3:17-20  
<sup>17</sup>**so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith**—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, <sup>18</sup>may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, <sup>19</sup>and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, **that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.** <sup>20</sup>according to the power at work within us.

This vocabulary describes something that we can barely comprehend. Jesus dwells within us so that we would be filled with all the fullness of God. This power working within us is a transforming power.

ILLUSTRATION: - for example, “The closest star is 4.24 light-years away. A light-year is 5.88 trillion miles. That equals 24.9 trillion miles and that is an incredibly large distance. Walking to the nearest star would take 950 million years. If you turned it up and went as fast as Apollo 11 going to the Moon, it would still take 43,000 years.”<sup>5</sup>

I have no way of processing just how big that is. Well, if we think that is immeasurable, how much more so must be what we have in Christ?

“**Paul references union with Christ nearly 200 times in his writings, about forty of those occurrences are found in Ephesians.** Ephesians 1 has the highest concentration of ‘in Christ’ language in the letter, especially Ephesians 1:3–14 which has eleven occurrences. Every spiritual blessing that Christians possess is due to their relationship and union with Christ (Eph. 1:3).

Specifically,

1. we are blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ (1:3)
2. we are chosen “in him” (Eph. 1:4),

3. predestined "in him" (Eph. 1:5),
4. blessed "in the beloved" (Eph. 1:6),
5. redeemed "in him" (Eph. 1:7),
6. united "in him" (Eph. 1:10),
7. granted an inheritance "in him" (Eph. 1:11), and
8. sealed with the Spirit "in him" (Eph. 1:13).

The frequency of union with Christ language in Ephesians demonstrates that it is a central theme in this epistle."<sup>6</sup>

Not only does He see us in Christ, but we have all of the benefits the Son has to His father.

B. Second, all that the Son enjoys, we enjoy (Eph. 1:11).

As I read through Ephesians, I've begun to compile a list of verses communicating our union with Christ. The list continues to grow.

- Eph. 1:5 In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ
- Eph. 2:5 made us alive together with Christ
- Eph. 2:6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,
- Eph. 5:30 we are members of his body.
- Eph. 5:31, 32  
<sup>31</sup> "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." <sup>32</sup> This mystery is profound,

As to our union with Christ, this means all that is His, is ours. Let me try to give an example of what this might look like for our younger audience.

ILLUSTRATION - Many of us are familiar with the cartoon character Spiderman. "The radioactive spider managed to bite a student from Midtown High named Peter Parker. The spider's radioactive venom changes Peter's DNA that give Peter certain abilities of a spider, such as the proportionate strength and agility along with the ability to climb on any surface. He could also react to danger quickly with a sixth sense he denominated as his 'spider-sense'."<sup>7</sup>

Although limited, when we accepted Christ's work in our behalf, our lives merged with His. They were swallowed up in His.

Not only does the Father see us in the righteousness of His one and only Son, but sees us as His sons and daughters. As a consequence of this, we are heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:16, 17; Gal. 4:7).

It is for this reason, 1:11, 14, and 18 speak of an inheritance.

- Eph. 1: 11 In him we have obtained an inheritance

- Eph. 1:14 the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it
- Eph. 1:18 what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints

Whatever Jesus has secured and receives as son, we also participate in as sons and daughters.

How does this work in “real” time? Let me try to illustrate what our union with Christ might look like. Now remember, in doing this, we are trying to comprehend what 24.9 trillion miles looks like.

**ILLUSTRATION** – Let us, for a moment, go back to the indicative and the imperative. The indicative is chapters 1-3 and the imperative are chapters 4-6. The indicative tells me what God has done for me. The imperative describes what we do for one another. The imperative without the indicative is empty and hallow. We must always fill the imperative with the indicative.

Now, let us take our illustration just a pinch further. In Christ, we are like a sponge in a pitcher of water. The sponge isn’t simply in the water, the water is equally in the sponge. That is our position [the indicative]. Now, when we speak of our practice [the imperative], we are not pulling the sponge out of the pitcher and squeezing it dry of all its water with the idea that we must go get a “refill” when our tanks are empty. Unfortunately, the image of water baptism can give a faulty impression as if we were in the water and now, going forward, we are out of the water, although still wet UNTIL we dry ourselves off. Friends, the “tank” is never empty. We are never “dried” of our union with Christ. God’s ordinary means of grace call us to remember who He is and what we are in Him. Believing the indicative of God is what enables us to enjoy the fullness of the imperative. We are pulling the picture forward with the sponge still in it. We are always and forever fully saturated in Christ.

There is a third phrase or idea in Ephesians we will touch on without too much exploration. We will study this idea throughout, but let me introduce us to the idea from 1:3.

### III. HEAVENLY PLACES

“Heavenly places” (or “high places”). Here is a truly fascinating phrase that **appears five times** in this letter and **nowhere else** in the New Testament. Each occurrence is unique. For our study today, we will only consider 1:3.

- **The first occurrence (1:3) tells us that the riches the Christian has in Christ are “in the heavenlies.” The riches we claim are not earthly; they are heavenly.**

Thus, all of the descriptions presented in the Letter of Ephesians vertical and heavenly. This does not mean they have no horizontal or earthly impact. But the shadow we taste and see is not the fullest expression of this truth. The positive statements in chapters 4-6 allow us to taste and see, even if, imperfectly.



ILLUSTRATION – how do we process these dual realities? My mother was a wonderful individual. I loved her dearly and I miss her presence. She was an invested and engaging individual. My mother passed away several years back. There are moments when I am conscious of my mother’s absence and have very fond memories of her connection in my life. I cannot feel her, she is not tangibly here, but she is very much alive with Christ in the heavenlies.

Although you and I see the tangible and concrete, there is a very real intangible and non-concrete world activated all around us. Part of our purpose in gathering and functioning as a church is to taste and see the truths of the vertical, of the heavenly, even if, imperfectly.

**NOW WHAT?** Where do we go from here?

The reality of the vertical becomes tangible in the horizontal as the church gathers and carries out the one another statements of the New Testament.

Without any compelling reason outside of Himself, the Triune God made all necessary provisions for you and me to enjoy the unsearchable riches of his grace. All He does is invite us to come.

Have you come to Jesus and if not, will you come? The table is set. The invitation is extended and now it is only up to you to enjoy.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://expositingephesians.blogspot.com/2011/05/key-words-and-phrases-in-ephesians.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://netbible.org/bible/Ephesians+1>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cui.edu/aboutcui/heritage/grace-alone-faith-alone>

<sup>4</sup> *Union with Christ: The Sum of Our Salvation*, By William L. Kynes on December 1, 2007

<https://www.cslewisinstitute.org/resources/union-with-christ/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/story/how-do-we-know-how-far-away-the-stars-are>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.crossway.org/articles/what-is-distinct-about-the-theology-of-ephesians/>

<sup>7</sup> [https://intothespiderverse.fandom.com/wiki/Radioactive\\_Spider](https://intothespiderverse.fandom.com/wiki/Radioactive_Spider)