

As we begin a New Year of worship and service to God many of us may have made New Year's resolutions about what we will do and how we will behave. Today we will look at our spiritual blessings in God, Christ Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Leroy thought I would get your attention if I started my sermon like Joel Osteen. So hear is part of a sermon about Hope that I heard on New Year's Eve night. Two men when hunting and got lost in the woods. Although they were frightened one said to the other "it will be okay, I have been told if we shoot in the air three times someone will come and find us." So he shot three times, but no one came. He shot three more times, and nothing! As he prepared to shoot a third time, the friend said I hope it works this time because we are down to our last three arrows! You see, sometimes the advice we try to follow does not apply to you! Each book in the Bible has its own special theme and message and audience, even though it may deal with many different topics. Ephesians applies to Christians and in 1:3 states its theme as the Christian's riches in Christ.

Ephesians explains the source of our blessings. God the Father has made us rich in Jesus Christ! When we were born into God's family, we were born rich. Through Christ, we share in the riches of God's grace (Eph. 1:7; 2:7), God's glory (Eph. 1:18; 3:16), God's mercy (Eph. 2:4), and "the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph. 3:8). Our Heavenly Father is rich—and God has made us rich in Christ.

According to a Forbes Magazine article dated March 10, 2010, Carlos Slim Helu and Family from Mexico are the richest family in the world valued at 53.5 billion dollars, with Bill Gates second at 53 billion. Of the 24 richest people in the world the poorest has a net worth of a mere 17.5 billion dollars. But all of this wealth is but "pennies" when compared with the spiritual wealth we have in Christ. In this letter, Paul explains to us what these riches are and how we may draw on them for effective Christian living. He also explains the scope and sphere of our blessings.

The fact that Paul is writing about wealth would be significant to his readers, because Ephesus was considered the bank of Asia. It also housed one of the seven wonders of

the ancient world, the great temple of Diana, a center for idolatrous worship, but also a depository for wealth. Some of the greatest art treasures of the ancient world were housed in this magnificent building.

A cartoon showed a pompous lawyer reading a client's last will and testament to a group of greedy relatives. The caption read: "I, John Jones, being of sound mind and body, spent it all!" However when Jesus Christ wrote His last will and testament for His church, He made it possible for us to share His spiritual riches. Instead of spending it all, Jesus Christ paid it all. His death on the cross and His resurrection make possible our salvation. He wrote us into His will, and then He died so the will would be in force. Then He arose again that He might become the heavenly lawyer to make sure the terms of the will were correctly followed!

In Ephesians, Paul names just a few of the blessings that make up our spiritual wealth.

First, God the Father has chosen us. This is the marvelous doctrine of election and reminds us that salvation begins with God, and not with humans. John reminds us in 15:16 "You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you." Left to our own ways, we would not seek God (Rom. 3:10–11); however, God in love seeks us (Luke 19:10).

Paul said that God chose us even before He created the universe, so that our salvation is wholly of God's grace and not on the basis of anything we ourselves have done. He chose us in Christ, not in ourselves. And He chose us for a purpose: to be holy and without blame.

Second, God the Father has adopted us. Here the word predestination refers to what God does for saved people, God "ordained beforehand, predetermined" our salvation. God has predestined our adoption (Eph. 1:5), and our conformity to Christ (Rom. 8:29–30), as well as our future inheritance (Eph. 1:11).

Adoption is the act of God by which God gives Christians an adult standing in the family, so that we might immediately begin to claim our inheritance and enjoy our

spiritual wealth! A baby cannot legally use this inheritance (Gal. 4:1–7), but an adult child can—and should! This means that you do not have to wait until you are an old saint before you can claim your riches in Christ.

Third, God the Father has accepted us. We cannot make ourselves acceptable to God; but God, by God's grace, makes us accepted in Christ. This is our eternal position which will never change. Because of God's grace in Christ, we are accepted before God.

After explaining our blessings in God the Father Paul tells of our blessings in Christ. First Christ has redeemed us, purchased and set free by paying a price. There were 60 million slaves in the Roman Empire, and often they were bought and sold like pieces of furniture. But a person could purchase a slave and set them free, and this is what Jesus did for us. The price was His own blood (1 Peter 1:18ff). This means that we are free from the Law (Gal. 5:1) and free from slavery to sin (Rom. 6). If we continued as slaves we would be poor, but because we are children of God we are rich!

Second, Christ has forgiven us. Forgive means “to carry away.” This reminds us of the ritual on the Jewish Day of Atonement when the high priest sent the scapegoat into the wilderness (Lev. 16). First the priest killed one of the two goats and sprinkled its blood before God on the mercy seat. Then he confessed Israel's sins over the live goat, and had the goat taken into the wilderness to be lost. Christ died to carry away our sins so they might never again be seen (Ps. 103:12; John 1:29). No written accusation stands against us because our sins have been taken away! Sin made us poor, but grace makes us rich.

Third, Christ has revealed God's will to us. The word mystery means a “sacred secret, once hidden but now revealed to God's people.” We Christians are a part of God's “inner circle.” We are able to share in the secret that God will one day unite everything in Christ. Currently sin is tearing everything apart, but in Christ, God will gather everything together and we are a part of this great eternal program.

Fourth, Christ has made us an inheritance. We are valuable to Christ. Think of the price God paid to purchase us and make us part of His inheritance! God the Son is the Father's love gift to us; and we are the Father's love gift to His Son. We are "joint-heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:17), which means that He will not claim His inheritance apart from us!

Lastly, Paul explained our blessings from God the Holy Spirit. Paul gives us the entire process of salvation. First, we hear the Gospel of salvation. This is the good news that Christ died for our sins, was buried and rose again (1 Cor. 15:1ff). Having heard the Word, we believed; and it is this faith that brought salvation (Eph. 2:8-9). When the Ephesians believed, they were "sealed with the Spirit," and the same is true for us. Our sealing by the Holy Spirit speaks of a finished transaction. Even today, when important legal documents are processed, they are stamped with the official seal to signify the completion of the transaction. This sealing also implies ownership: God has put his seal on us because He has purchased us to be His own (1 Cor. 6:19-20). It also means security and protection. So, we, believers belong to God, and are safe and protected because we are part of a finished transaction. The Holy Spirit abides with the believer forever (John 14:16-17). It is possible for us to grieve the Spirit and thereby lose the blessings of His ministry (Eph. 4:30). But the Holy Spirit does not leave us.

Another use for the seal is as a mark of authenticity. Just as a signature on a letter attests to the genuineness of the document, so the presence of the Holy Spirit proves the Christian is genuine. "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His" (Rom. 8:9). It is not simply our lip profession, our religious activity, or our good works, but the witness of the Spirit that makes our profession authentic.

The Holy Spirit He has given us a pledge. In Paul's day, a pledge meant "the down payment to guarantee the final purchase of some commodity or piece of property." The Holy Spirit is God's first installment to guarantee to us that God will finish God's work and eventually bring us to glory. For the Christian, we have been redeemed through

faith in Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:7); we are being redeemed as the Spirit works in our lives to make us more like Christ (Rom. 8:1–4); and we shall be redeemed when Christ returns and we become like Him.

But the word translated pledge also means “engagement ring,” which is an assurance—a guarantee—that the promises made will be kept. Our relationship to God through Christ is a personal experience of love. Christ is the Bridegroom and the Church is the bride. We know that Christ will come and claim His bride because He has given us His promise and the Holy Spirit as the “engagement ring.” What greater assurance could we want?

Now we can go forth in this New Year with the assurance that we are rich.

1. We remember that true riches come from God. It is a source of great encouragement to know that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all working on our behalf to make us rich. God not only gives us “richly all things to enjoy” (1 Tim. 6:17), but God gives us eternal riches without which all other wealth is valueless.

A distraught wife sought out a Christian marriage counselor and told her sad story of a marriage about to dissolve. “But we have so much!” she kept saying. “Look at this diamond ring on my finger. Why, it’s worth thousands! We have an expensive mansion in an exclusive area. We have three cars, and even a cabin in the mountains. Why, we have everything money can buy!”

The counselor replied: “It’s good to have the things money can buy provided you don’t lose the things money can’t buy. What good is an expensive house if there’s no home? Or an expensive ring if there’s no love?”

In Christ, you and I have “what money can’t buy,” and these spiritual riches open up to us all the wealth of God’s vast creation. We enjoy the gifts because we know and love the Giver.

2. All of these riches come by God’s grace and for God’s glory. Did you notice that after each of the main sections in Ephesians 1:4–14, Paul has added the purpose behind

these gifts? Why has God the Father chosen us, adopted us, and accepted us? “To the praise of his glorious grace” (Eph. 1:6). Why has the Son redeemed us, forgiven us, revealed God’s will to us, and made us part of God’s inheritance? “That we might live for the praise of his glory” (Eph. 1:12). Why has God the Spirit sealed us and become the guarantee of our future blessing? “To the praise of his glory” (Eph. 1:14).

We often have the idea that God saves us mainly because God pities us, or wants to rescue us from eternal judgment, but God’s main purpose is that God might be glorified. God’s creation reveals God’s wisdom and power, but God’s church reveals God’s love and grace. We cannot deserve or earn these spiritual riches; we can only receive them by grace, through faith.

3. These riches are only the beginning! There is always more spiritual wealth to claim from the Lord as we walk with God. The Bible is our guidebook; the Holy Spirit is our Teacher. As we search the Word of God, we discover more and more of the riches we have in Christ. These riches were planned by the Father, purchased by the Son, and presented by the Spirit. There is really no need for us to live in poverty this year when all of God’s wealth is at our disposal! ^{1 2} Let us praise his glory for his riches!³ Amen

¹Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Eph 1:3

²Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:616

³Bratcher, Robert G. ; Nida, Eugene Albert: *A Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Ephesians*. New York : United Bible Societies, 1993 (UBS Handbook Series; Helps for Translators), S. 9