

The Riches of God's Grace

Ephesians 1:3-14

Spiritual Blessings in Christ

³ 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, ⁴ just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. ⁵ He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace ⁸ that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight ⁹ he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. ¹¹ In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, ¹² so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. ¹³ In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; ¹⁴ this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory. ¹

What did you get for Christmas is usually the first question we hear on December 26th of each year? If you didn't get anything or can't remember, it's okay because it wasn't your birthday anyway! However, the day of your baptism was your birthday of becoming a Christian and with it came gifts from God! The riches of God's Grace has given us every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. So let's examine our gifts. Let's imagine they came in boxes.

In the first box we discover that we are the chosen of God (Ephesians 1:3, 4). Paul never thought of himself as having chosen to do God's work, but he always understood that God had chosen him and us. Jesus said to his disciples: "You did not choose me, but I chose you" (John 15:16). It would not be so wonderful that humans should choose God; the wonder is that God should choose humans. God

¹ *The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. Nashville : Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989, S. Eph 1:3-14

chose us to bless us with the blessings which are to be found only in heaven. There are certain things which we can discover for ourselves; but there are others which are beyond our obtaining. A person by themselves can acquire a certain skill, can achieve a certain position, can amass a certain amount of this world's goods; but by ourselves we can never attain to goodness or to peace of mind. God chose us to give us those things which He alone can give. With the choosing, God chose us that we should be holy and blameless. Holy is the Greek word which always has in it the idea of difference and of separation. A temple is holy because it is different from other buildings; a priest is holy because he is different from ordinary men; God is supremely holy because He is different from humans; the Sabbath is holy because it is different from other days. So, then, God chose Christians that we should be different from other people.

This difference on which Christ insists is not one which takes a person out of the world; it makes him or her different within the world. It should be possible to identify the Christian in the school, the shop, the factory, the office, the hospital ward, everywhere. And the difference is that the Christian behaves according to the law of Christ rather than what the earth dictates that he or she must do. A Christian teacher is out to satisfy the regulations not of the board of education or the superintendent but of Christ; and that will mean a very different attitude to the pupils under their charge. A Christian worker is out to satisfy the regulations not of a Trades Union but of Jesus Christ. A Christian doctor will never regard a sick person as a case, but always as a person. A Christian employer will be concerned with more than the payment of minimum wages or the creation of minimum working conditions.

We are also blameless, which is a sacrificial word. Under Jewish law before an animal could be offered as a sacrifice it must be inspected; and if any blemish was

found it must be rejected as unfit. Only the best was fit to offer to God. Blameless applies to the whole person and includes every part of our life, work, pleasure, sport, home life, personal relationships, and making them all so they can be offered to God. Blameless means that the Christian must not second bests; it means that the Christian standard is nothing less than perfection. The riches of God's grace!

In our next box we find that we have been given the plan of God (Ephesians 1:5, 6) of adoption (cf. Romans 8:23; Galatians 4:5). God adopted us as sons into his family.

In the ancient world, where Roman law prevailed, a father had absolute power over his children so long as he and they lived. There was a formal ritual for the adoption ceremony and it was no entered into lightly. The person who had been adopted had all the rights of a legitimate son in his new family and completely lost all rights in his old family. In the eyes of the law he was a new person. So all debts and obligations connected with his previous family were abolished as if they had never existed.

That is what Paul says that God has done for us. We were absolutely in the power of sin and of the world; God, through Jesus, took us out of that power into his; and that adoption wipes out the past and makes us new. The riches of God's grace!

In our third box we receive the gifts of God (Ephesians 1:7, 8). It is like those popcorn tins where you get three (3) favors of popcorn in their separate sections. One section has redemption. The word used means to ransom. It is the word used for ransoming a man who is a prisoner of war or a slave; for freeing a man from the penalty of death; for God's deliverance of the children of Israel from their slavery in Egypt; for God's continual rescuing of his people in the time of their trouble. In every case the conception is the delivering of a person from a situation

from which he or she was powerless to liberate themselves or from a penalty which they could never have paid.

So, Paul says that God redeemed humans from a situation from which they could never have delivered themselves. When Christianity came into this world humans were haunted by the sense of their own powerlessness. They knew the wrongness of the life which they were living; and also that they were powerless to do anything about it.

It was liberation which Jesus Christ brought to humans. It is still true that He can liberate humans from helpless slavery to the things which attract and disgust us at one and the same time. To put it at its simplest, Jesus can still make bad people good.

The second section in the tin is forgiveness. The ancient world was haunted by the sense of sin. The whole Old Testament is an expansion of the saying, "The soul that sins shall die" (Ezekiel 18:4). People were conscious of their own guilt and stood in terror of their god or gods. Jesus changed all that. He taught us, not of the hate, but of the love of God. Because Jesus came into the world, people, even in their sin, discovered God's love.

In the third section of the tin are wisdom and insight. Christ brought both in them to us. If a person had both, he or she was perfectly equipped for life.

One is intellectual knowledge which satisfies the mind, and the other is the practical knowledge which enables us to handle the day to day problems of practical life and living. There is a type of person who is at home in the library, who moves familiarly among the theological and philosophical problems, but who is helpless and impractical in the ordinary everyday affairs of life. There is another kind of person who claims that they are practical, so engaged with the business of

living that they have no time to concern themselves with the ultimate things. In the light of the gifts of God through Christ, both of these persons are imperfect. Christ brings to us wisdom and insight to enhance our Christian character. The riches of God's grace!

Another box has the gospel. We receive the Christian message through from Christian preachers and the written word of God. This is the word of truth; which brought us the truth about God; about the world in which we live; and about ourselves. Second, it is good news; it is the message of the love and of the grace of God. The riches of God's grace!

In the last box we have a two part gift from the Holy Spirit. First we are sealed with the Holy Spirit. In the ancient world—it is a custom still followed—when a sack, or a crate, or a package was dispatched, it was sealed with a seal, in order to indicate from where it had come and to whom it belonged. The possession of the Holy Spirit is the seal which shows that a person belongs to God. The Holy Spirit both shows us God's will and enables us to do it.

For the second part of this gift Paul says the Holy Spirit is the pledge of our redemption. In the Greek business world it was a part of the purchase price of anything, paid in advance as a guarantee that the rest would be paid. There are many Greek commercial documents still in existence that tell of this practice. A woman sells a cow and receives so many coins as pledge. Some dancing girls are engaged for a public entertainment and are paid so much in advance. What Paul is saying is that the experience of the Holy Spirit which we have in this world is a foretaste of the blessedness of heaven; and it is the guarantee that some day we will enter into full possession of the blessedness of God. The highest experiences of Christian peace and joy which this world can offer are only faint foretastes of the joy into which we will one day enter. It is as if God had given us enough to whet

our appetites for more and enough to make us certain that some day He will give us all.^{2 3}

Each book in the Bible has its own special theme and message, even though it may deal with many different topics. Ephesians theme is the Christian's riches in Christ. God has blessed us with all the riches of heaven. Many people make the richest people in the world list every year, but all of their wealth is like "pennies" when compared with the spiritual wealth we have in Christ. God promises to supply all our needs "according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19). The Father has given us every blessing of the Spirit, everything we need for a successful, satisfying Christian life. The spiritual is far more important than the material.

When she was young, Victoria was shielded from the fact that she would be the next ruling monarch of England for fear this knowledge spoil her. When her teacher finally did let her discover for herself that she would one day be Queen of England, Victoria's response was, "Then I will be good!" Her life would be controlled by her position. No matter where she was, Victoria was governed by the fact that she sat on the throne of England. We must say like Victoria, then I will be a good Christian.

God has given us all the gifts we need. God has blessed us; chosen us; adopted us; accepted us; redeemed us; forgiven us; revealed His will to us; made us an inheritance; sealed us; and given us a pledge. True riches come from God.

² Barclay, William, lecturer in the University of Glasgow (Hrsg.): *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*. Philadelphia : The Westminster Press, 2000, c1976 (The Daily Study Bible Series, Rev. Ed), S. 73

³Walvoord, 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

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.

These gifts are only the beginning! There is always more spiritual wealth to claim from the Lord as we walk with Him. 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 when all of God’s wealth is at our disposal! ⁴ Oh, the riches of God’s grace!

⁴Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Eph 1:3