

WEDNESDAY BIBLE FELLOWSHIP

Christ Church, Crouch End Hill

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STUDIES IN THE EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS

No: 59

A LIFE OF SPIRITUAL BLESSING (EPHESIANS 1:1-14)

Introduction

How quickly we forget what is ours when we become followers of Jesus. Paul delighted in reminding the believers at Ephesus about the spiritual blessings that were theirs because they belonged to Christ. But these blessings were not for them as individuals, nor are they for us alone. They belong to the church. Our tendency is to proclaim individual salvation without moving on to the saved community. Christ died to "purify for himself a people that are his very own" (Titus 2:14). Ephesians is the gospel of the church and to the church, God's new society.

- How does being a part of a Christian community help you to see God at work? _____

Read Ephesians 1:1-10. What information does the introduction to this book give (vv1-2)? _____

2. We are told in verse 3 that we are blessed with "every spiritual blessing in Christ." Carefully list each of the blessings in verses 4-8.

3. As you reflect on these blessings, what contributions do you see of each person of the Trinity-the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit?

(Although the Holy Spirit is mentioned by name only in verses 13 and 14, his activity is assumed throughout.)

Verse 3 is the first place Paul uses the remarkable expression "in the heavenly realms," which occurs five times in Ephesians and nowhere else in his letters. "In the heavenly realms" is neither sky nor grace nor glory, nor any literal spatial abode, but rather the unseen world of spiritual reality. The five uses of the expression in Ephesians indicate that this is the sphere in which the "rulers and authorities" continue to operate (3:10; 6:12), in which Christ reigns supreme and his people reign with him (1:20; 2:6), and in which therefore God blesses us with every spiritual blessing in Christ (1:3).

4. How do these blessings relate to the past (v. 4), the present (v. 7) and the future (v. 10)? _____

Mark well the statement: he chose us in him. The juxtaposition of the three pronouns is emphatic. God put us and Christ together in his mind. He determined to make us (who did not yet exist) his own children through the redeeming work of Christ (which had not yet taken place). It was a definite decision. It also arose from his entirely unmerited favour. When he chose us, we were unholy and blameworthy, and therefore deserving not of adoption but of judgment. Further, he made us his children.

5. How are you affected by the fact that God had a plan for you before the world was created? _____

6. What is this purpose of God for the future (v. 10)?

7. What do you think it will mean to have all things under the head of Christ? _____

Summary: At this point it may be wise to pause a moment and consider how much all of us need to develop Paul's broad perspective. Paul was a prisoner in Rome. Not indeed in a cell or dungeon, but still under house arrest and handcuffed to a Roman soldier. Though his wrist was chained and his body was confined, his heart and mind inhabited eternity. He peered back "before the creation of the world" (v. 4) and on to the fullness of time (v. 10), and grasped hold of what "we have" now (v. 7) and ought to be now (v. 4) in the light of those two eternities.

How blinded is our vision in comparison with Paul's! Easily and naturally we slip into a preoccupation with our own petty little affairs. But we need to see time in the light of eternity and our present privileges and obligations in the light of our past election and future perfection. Then, if we shared the apostle's perspective, we would also share his praise. For doctrine leads to doxology as well as to duty. Life would become worship, and we would bless God constantly for having blessed us so richly in Christ

8. Read Ephesians 1: 11-14. In these verses it seems that Paul is alluding to the church as God's "inheritance" and "possession." These words used to be applied exclusively to the one nation of Israel but are now reapplied to an international people whose common factor is that they are all "in Christ." The fact that the same vocabulary is used of both peoples indicates the spiritual continuity between them. How did we become God's possession (w. 5, 9, 11-12)? _____

How does it feel to think of yourself as God's inheritance and possession? _____

9. Describe the Holy Spirit and his role in fulfilling this purpose of God (w. 13-14). _____

10. Notice the repeated phrase, "to the praise of his glory" in verses 5-6, 12, 14. What does this tell you about why God created us? _____

11. What does it mean to live "to the praise of his glory"? _____

Apply

• Everything that we have and are in Christ both comes from God and returns to God. It begins in his will and ends in his glory. Yet such Christian talk comes into violent collision with the human-centeredness and self centeredness of the world. Fallen humanity, imprisoned in its own little ego, has an almost boundless confidence in the power of its own will and an almost insatiable appetite for the praise of its own glory. But the people of God have at least begun to be turned inside out. The new society has new values and new ideals. For God's people are God's possession who live by God's will and for God's glory. How is your life affected by all the spiritual blessings you have received in Christ Jesus?

- How does your life need to change so that you are living to the praise of God's glory?
- How can you influence your Christian community to live for God's glory?

Pray

• In silence reflect on all that we have in Christ Jesus. Praise God for each and all of the spiritual blessings he has given to you, past, present and future. Ask the Holy Spirit to make them a reality in your life.