

Intro:

These blessings are wondrous and beautiful and tremendously amazing, but our tendency is to bask in the blessings instead of worshipping the Blessor! These blessings are not given to us *merely* for our benefit, but to an even greater purpose: that God would be known, praised, and thusly glorified to all the peoples of the earth. In reality, our faith isn't even mentioned here, not because we do not believe, but rather because the emphasis of our salvation is on the activity, purpose, will, and great love of the Father toward us!

"For this reason" is referring to the purpose of the praise of His glory, the eulogy of our merciful and gracious God, the Father who elects and plans and adopts us by His own desire, who gives, reveals the Son's work of redemption to our hearts, and the Spirit who seals us and holds us by the mighty power of God Himself. This is His work! His magnum opus is His redemptive plan for those who humble themselves and trust in the Son, Jesus, and His work of redemption and reconciliation at the Cross!

So, how do we respond to such an eloquent recollection and proclamation of God's great benefits graciously granted to us by the Father, through the Son, and applied by the Holy Spirit? We rejoice in gratitude for their outcome, our faith in Jesus and our love for each other!

As we thank the Lord for His incredible kindness and graciousness toward us in our salvation, we also ask Him that by the power of His Holy Spirit, the great Sealer of our faith and our portion of His presence currently, He would make the great truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ penetrate our hearts to become our controlling reality. What I mean by controlling reality is simply this: What we believe to be ultimately true in any given moment determines how we react, respond, feel, and behave in that moment. Though we know the gospel in our heads, logically, often times its truth does not seize our hearts, so we fear and become anxious. We become proud and arrogant, unloving and unkind. Why do we become arrogant if we know that we are so sinful that Jesus had to die for us? Why do we fear God will leave us if He gave up His only Son for us? Why do we fear the opinion of man so much that we will lie, cheat, and steal to be seen as somebody? Why? Because the truth of the gospel doesn't always penetrate our hearts and become our controlling reality! We need God to burn the gospel truth into our hearts until our worldview lines up with His and our hearts respond in gospel humility and gospel confidence in Jesus. To this end Paul prays for the Ephesian believers in vv15-19.

1. Respond Gratefully to God's Grace

- a. Because of God's gracious blessings "For this reason"
- b. Having heard of their faith and love
 - i. Subordinate clause to "I do not cease giving thanks"
 - ii. Faith in Jesus
 - iii. Love for all the saints
- c. Giving thanks in prayer
 - i. To God
 - ii. God gets the thanks for their faith
 - iii. God gets the thanks for their love
 - iv. Consistent, unstoppable gratitude for God's grace toward brothers and sisters in their faith and in their love for each other
- d. Do we pray like this? Do we pray thanking God for our brothers' and sisters' faith in Him? For their love for each other? For their growth in each of these? This is spiritual prayer.

2. Request Heart-Knowledge of God's Grace

- a. Give a spirit of wisdom and revelation
 - i. Wisdom

- ii. Revelation
- iii. Concerning knowledge of Him
- b. Open the eyes of their heart TO KNOW
 - i. How can Paul ask that the Lord will give us what Paul has already said that God has given us? (He does it again in Chapter 3:16-21)
 - 1. Wisdom and Mystery revealed in knowledge(v8-9) – that we would know in wisdom and knowledge (v17)
 - 2. We who hope in Christ (v12) – that we would know the hope (v18)
 - 3. Obtained an inheritance (v11) – that we would know the riches of that inheritance (v18)
 - ii. We have these blessings, but we live as if we don't
 - 1. We know in our heads, but we don't experience the intimacy with Christ or the hope that is given to us by God *functionally*
 - a. Our *foundational* faith is the undergirding of trusting God's salvation in Jesus Christ alone. It is the knowledge of the REALITY of our sinfulness and undeserving state of guilt before God (humility of our desperate need of a complete Savior) AND the REALITY of God's grace in Jesus Christ and His complete salvation (confidence that Jesus alone meets that need and our ensuing rest in His provision)
 - i. In a sense, it is the "giving up of our righteousness as the means of salvation" (repentance) and the "receiving of Christ's work on our behalf" (faith in Jesus)
 - ii. This is the foundational faith that trusts Jesus to save us from the righteous wrath of God and to give us all the ensuing blessings
 - iii. We KNOW this in our heads
 - b. *Functional* faith is how our lives are actually grounded at any point in time.
 - i. Example #1: When I look down on another person (child abuser, drug abuser, political enemy), I am not functionally believing that it is my sin for which Jesus came to die. I do not functionally believe that I desperately needed a complete Savior. This is *functionally* not believing the gospel.
 - 1. Leads to a lack of love
 - 2. Leads to arrogance and spite
 - 3. Look at Peter in Galatians 2:11-21 and how he was not walking "in line with the gospel" (v14)
 - ii. Example #2: when I become anxious over finances, am I trusting that Jesus has given me all that I need? Sometime, no, I trust my money or wealth instead. This is *functionally* not believing the gospel.
 - 1. Leads to stealing and/or cheating
 - 2. Leads to lack of generosity
 - iii. Example #2: Somebody at work teases me because I said something stupid (never actually happens, wink-wink). Do I respond defensively or accusingly? Or, do I respond fearfully and silently bitter? At that moment am I functionally believing that I am God's heritage; that I am a son/daughter of God? Do I really need someone else's approval of me?
 - 1. Leads to gossip and slander
 - 2. Leads to malicious bitterness and lack of love
 - iv. When we respond in fear/anxiety or in pride/arrogance, it reveals that we are *functionally* not believing either:
 - 1. I am so desperately sinful that Jesus had to die for me (I am not humble).
 - 2. I am so loved by God that Jesus did die for me and calls me His own heritage (I am deeply secure).

3. Though we know these things in our head, they have not penetrated our hearts to the extent where we respond in humble faith which praises God in the midst of these circumstances.
- c. To know in our hearts three things
- i. To know the hope of *His calling*
 1. His calling
 - a. The Father's Choice of You
 - b. The Son's Redemption of You
 - c. The Spirit's Seal of You
 2. Because God has effectually called us we have great confidence (hope)
 - a. He chose us, adopted us, redeemed us by forgiving us completely through Jesus, revealed His greatness of the gospel, heritaged us, and sealed us with His Spirit
 - b. We cannot fail where God has accomplished for us by His grace!
 - i. APP: Where there is anxiety in our lives that makes us lose hope, are we believing that God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing? Where there is fear? Where there is anger and bitterness toward others?
 - ii. Remember the gospel and seek it for your heart!
 3. When we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself (2 Tim)
 - ii. To know the riches of His inheritance
 1. In the saints
 2. You are God's cherished inheritance!!!
 - a. When the world belittles you and attempts to destroy you, remember (know) that you are God's cherished inheritance!
 - b. God loves you and considers you His heritage! What a God! What a blessing! You, O saints of God, are precious to Him and your Savior has purchased you for His glorious heritage.
 - c. Isaiah 62:11-12
 - iii. To know His power toward them
 1. Immeasurable
 2. Greatness
 3. Toward believers
 - a. What God has revealed about Himself is REAL!! If He has said that your sin is heinous and such a serious affront to His holiness that Jesus had to die for you, then do you functionally believe that is true? Are you humbly repentant today?
 - b. What God has revealed about His grace is REAL!!! If He has said that you are completely forgiven in Jesus and that you are His son/daughter and His heritage, then do you functionally believe that it is true? Are you resting in His goodness, content in His covenant love?
- d. This reality, the presence of God's sealing Spirit within us, and the promises contained in the gospel must penetrate *our hearts* and become our controlling reality.
- i. Ephesians 3:16-19
 1. To know what surpasses knowledge
 2. To KNOW the love of Christ *in the heart*, until it becomes our all in all, the controlling reality of our lives
 - a. We all live by a controlling reality, what we ultimately believe to be true

- b. This perception of what is REAL will determine how we respond, how we feel, how we behave
 - i. If I functionally believe that my wife can't really love me (because I'm either unloveable or she's not loving enough) I will feel anxiety/fear, respond in fear/anger, and act out in bitterness/fear/gossip
 - ii. If I functionally believe that my career success determines my goodness, then I will feel pressured/anxiety/fear, respond in pride/shame/guilt, and behave arrogantly/cowardly/angrily
 - iii. If I functionally believe that my present sin is not that big of a deal to God (God just sweeps it under the rug; as opposed to repentance and seeing the cross of Jesus gratefully), then I respond in pride/arrogance/anger, even violence
- ii. Joy, hope, and power come from intimacy and the indwelling of Christ in the soul, experienced, felt, changed by the very Spirit of Christ
 - 3. Many people have told you over the years who the real you is. You've heard from family, friends, teachers, etc. But which one penetrated your spirit to be the controlling reality to you? Paul is praying that the presence of the Spirit, by His power, we would be changed in our inner person to *really hope* in the promises of Christ. To see what we already have in Him so that it becomes our controlling reality, so that we never respond like an orphan, a rejected person, or a desperate defeated insignificant person, but that we worship a Great Savior and rest in His perfect righteousness passively applied.

3. Remember the Power of God's Grace

- a. God of Relationship
 - i. "God of our Lord Jesus Christ"
 - ii. Perfect relationship/knowledge, Perfect intimacy
 - iii. Rooted in the Lordship of Jesus Christ and His cross!
 - 1. I am a heritage b/c of Jesus!
 - 2. I am chosen b/c of God's severe kindness!
 - 3. I am redeemed b/c JESUS DIED FOR ME!
 - 4. GRATEFUL, HUMBLE, LOVING WORSHIP OF JESUS CHRIST!!!
- b. Father of glory (v17)
 - i. No human can see His glory now (Ex 33:20; and 1 Tim 6:16)
 - ii. Psalm 17:15, satisfied by seeing your likeness in righteousness
 - iii. Promise of seeing Jesus as He is (1 John 3:2)
 - iv. We have been given this foretaste of seeing the glory of God face to face
- c. Greatness of His power (v19)
 - i. The Father's election, The Son's Redemption, and the Spirit's seal are in His strength
 - ii. Secure, loved, graced, known by God (sealed)
 - iii. His Power is shown most in the sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus (v19-21)
- d. The Spirit makes the blessings of God stick (silver chloride on photo paper)
 - i. He has given us a foretaste of this inheritance, fulfillment in the Holy Spirit.
 - 1. No one can see God's glory on this earth, but that is what we're in for and we've been given a foretaste now
 - ii. It's incomplete, but it's real
 - iii. Do we *know* His presence? Do we taste this fullness? Do we feel and live as sons and daughters of God or are we content to live as orphans: with a peace and joy beyond understanding, but slowly dying because we live as spiritual paupers?
- e. WHAT HAVE YOU SETTLED FOR?

4. Run After Jesus

- a. SEEK JESUS!!

- i. 1 John 3:2-3
- ii. Our hope of seeing Him face to face *purifies us*, changes our hearts and our lives now
- iii. This experience of hope, the presence and intimacy of the Holy Spirit, is what alters our lives
- iv. How do we get it?
- b. Seek Him Through Prayer
 - i. God reveals, enlightens, heart knowledge
 - 1. Why pray, if God loves us and knows all we need before we pray? “What if he knows prayer to be the thing we need first and most? What if the main object in God’s idea of prayer be the supplying of our great, our endless need—the need of himself? What if the good of all our smaller and lower needs lies in this, that they help drive us to God? Communion with God is the one need of the soul beyond all other needs; prayer is the beginning of that communion. George MacDonald, *Liberating Ministry From The Success Syndrome*, K Hughes, Tyndale, 1988, p. 72
 - ii. Note that Paul’s reason for thanking God in prayer is BECAUSE of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer
 - iii. We’re so stuck in a “doing” paradigm that we don’t know how to simply “be” in His presence, to gaze upon Him. We want to know what to do!
 - 1. Go after God, not things from God
 - 2. The greater our view of how MAJESTICALLY GLORIOUS AND BEAUTIFUL God is, the greater is our desire for Him and His desires, the greater our trust of Him and His Word, the greater our rest in His powerful and gracious hands.
 - iv. We have been given the down payment of the Holy Spirit, His presence within us, so slow down and draw near to Him, meditate upon how God has revealed Who He is in His Word, in order to see Him as He is.
- c. Seek Him for the heart
 - i. Pray for your heart, not merely for externals
 - ii. Challenge your heart
 - iii. Adoration and Confession
- d. Seek Him intelligently
 - i. never without reason, but yet beyond reason
 - 1. The great prayers in Scripture are rooted in the revealed grandeur of God (Neh 1:4-11; Dan 9:4-20; 1 Sam 2:1-10)
 - 2. Paul is praying for *knowledge*
 - a. One cannot truly believe what one does not know (not necessarily fully comprehend, but knows how God has revealed Himself to be)
 - b. Not merely a mystical feeling, but a confrontation with the Spirit through truth of His Word
 - c. The Spirit reaches the heart through the mind.
 - ii. Reflect on the Truth of God’s Promises in the Gospel
 - 1. Read and Meditate, Pray and Contemplate
 - 2. Study the promises until it explodes from your heart and breaks through your world
 - 3. Three things which give us hope:
 - a. The Father’s Election
 - b. The Son’s Redemption
 - c. The Spirit’s Seal

Conclusion:

Are you experiencing the hope of the presence of God in your life? You may know of heaven, but do you know the person of Jesus Christ? Does your heart center itself on Him? Are you with Him every day, adoring Him and loving the intimacy that comes through His Spirit? If you want to be like Jesus, to know Him more, to love Him more, to proclaim Him more, then we must be changed by the Holy Spirit from the inside out as He makes God’s Word, the Bible, become our foundation. It is here that we experience hope and this dependant hope will change the way we feel, the way we think, the way we react to others, the way that we live. We can repent without trepidation, give without receiving, love without return, work without reward, reconcile without revenge, and build relationships without

requirements, all because we have an ultimate hope, an infinite future, and a glorious eternity in the very presence of the Almighty God, in whose presence there is complete joy. Not because we are more virtuous than others, but solely because of His kind and gracious heart shown toward us in Jesus Christ. Place your hope in the unfailing and truly gracious One, Jesus the Bringer and Sustainer of our hope.

Pray for each other! Ask the Lord because He is only one powerful enough to work on your spirit, to speak the spiritual Pray that the truth of the gospel would penetrate our hearts, so that our great and glorious view of the great and Truth to your spirit. He is good! He has proven that by His grace toward us! So, ask that your powerful and glorious God would become our controlling reality of hope, rest, peace, and the obedience to the praise of His glory!

QUESTIONS:

1. Where do you struggle with functionally believing the gospel? Where is there usually fear or anxiety in your life? Pride and anger? Are there certain people that you look down on? How about people whose opinion of you is too important?
2. In those moments where you struggle to functionally believe the gospel, what are you a) functionally believing to give you peace? B) functionally relying on to make you somebody? c) functionally believing that you need that Jesus does not or will not give you?
3. Given the two aspects of the gospel (I am more sinful than I even know, and Jesus loves me more greatly than I can even imagine), which one do you struggle with most to functionally believe?
4. If we struggle with functionally believing the gospel, and Jesus has promised to complete the work He started, how does this make your view of Jesus grow? Your love for Him?
5. We must beware falling out of line with the gospel in two primary areas: 1) seeing our sin as unimportant, and 2) see Jesus' provision as inadequate. Both errors imply that we don't really need Jesus and are ways of getting rid of Him as the complete Savior. If my sin is something that God just sweeps under the rug and I don't want to talk about it, then why should I see Jesus? If God's love is nice, but I feel that I must work to attain a level of goodness so that I am OK with God, then why do I need a complete Savior? Meditate on why you should seek Jesus, then seek Him together and pray for the heart's grasping of the truth of the gospel.