

A Light in the Valley

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Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:16)

Every Spiritual Blessing...

by: Kris Brewer

Paul, as he began the epistle to the Ephesians (chapter 1), wrote of how they had available to them “every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ...” This begins a powerful section of scripture in which Paul enumerates several (but not all) of these blessings. The importance of this statement is far reaching!

If every spiritual blessing is “in Christ” then that leaves no room for any other source of blessing! This is the same idea that Peter and John conveyed to the Sanhedrin concerning Jesus:

Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. (Acts 4:12)

All spiritual blessing, including that of eternal salvation, is found only in Christ!

Paul, when writing to the Galatian brethren made it clear that there was one way to be in Christ:

*For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.
(Galatians 3:27)*

Only when one is baptized into Christ has he put on Christ. One is not “in Christ” if he has not yet been baptized into Christ!

Paul was, therefore, writing to those in Ephesus who had already been baptized into Christ, and reminding them of the blessings that were available to them in Christ. We can briefly consider the blessings that Paul enumerated for these brethren, and understand that the same blessings are available to those who are baptized into Christ today as well!

We are predestined to adoption.

While the idea of predestination has been vastly misused in the religious world, we can certainly see the importance of it in Paul’s writings. Many think that Paul is declaring that individuals were chosen or predestined by God

before they ever were born. That is, He picked who would be saved and who would be lost before the first person lived. However, that does not fit with all that we know about God's nature. He is not, for example, a respecter of persons (Romans 2:11, ASV), which means that He cannot choose one person over another based solely on His whim!

Paul was declaring that those who chose to be in Christ, through obedience to Him, were predestined to adoption. Anyone who obeys gets to be the child of God, and joint heirs with Jesus Himself (Romans 8:15-17)! God predetermined that all the faithful would get this great spiritual blessing!

We are redeemed. Because of the shedding of the blood of Jesus, we had the opportunity to be redeemed by God, bought back from the sure destruction that is rightfully ours. Of course, Paul wrote that it is "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins..." (Ephesians 1:7). As we have already noted, we are only "in Him" when we are obedient to His instructions, which means being baptized into Him. Paul wrote extensively about being baptized into the death of Christ in Romans chapter 6. It is in baptism that we put the old man of sin to death, and resurrect a new man, walking in newness of life. It is in baptism that God does His work of forgiveness, His work of redemption! We are baptized into Christ, and we are redeemed from a life of sin and death!

We have received the riches of His grace. It is because of the grace of God that we have received the revelation of His will. He did not leave us without any idea of what He expects of us. He has revealed to us "the mystery of His will" (Ephesians 1:9).

In chapter 3 of Ephesians, Paul wrote about the process through which God made this revelation. His Holy Spirit made known the mystery of the will of God to men like Paul, who taught it to others, and also wrote it down so that it might be known for all future generations. That one message was intended for all people, and for all times. This again points to God's fairness. He did not choose certain individuals to be saved or lost. He provided a message that had the potential of saving all. It is up to each individual as to whether he will listen to the message and accept, or choose to reject the grace of the Lord!

We have obtained an inheritance. Not only do we enjoy great blessings in this life, but we have been given an eternal inheritance. It is provided to those who "first trusted in Christ..." God has provided an eternal inheritance for those who

are willing to listen to and obey His son! That inheritance is so sure, it can be spoken of as if it has already been attained by those who are faithful!

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing. (2 Timothy 4:7-8)

Paul could write about the reward that was waiting for him, having confidence that his inheritance was secured. That didn't mean he could cease being obedient, for his faithfulness was important for his eternal salvation:

Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:12-14)

Like Paul, we need to be pressing toward the "prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus," but we can also have confidence that the reward is there and awaiting us!

We are sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. Paul's list of blessings ended with the blessing of the Holy Spirit, given to the one who had trusted in Christ after having heard the "word of truth, the gospel of your salvation." Those who have heard the message of truth and been obedient to it are "sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise." Paul wrote of this seal as being the "guarantee of our inheritance." This idea of a "guarantee" is similar to our use of a "down payment." There is something given, such as money, to ensure the preservation of that thing which is to be purchased (such as a house or a car). Paul said that the Holy Spirit is given as the guarantee, or down payment, of that thing which is to be fully realized at a later date (our eternal inheritance). God has purchased us, and sealed us with His Holy Spirit of promise (Acts 2:38)!

Paul was not trying to list every blessing that we have in Christ, but he did want us to realize that every spiritual blessing we have is found only in Christ. We have not even tried to list every blessing that Paul wrote of in Ephesians chapter 1! We should, however, have confidence in the blessings that have been given to us. They should serve to encourage us to be obedient to Christ so that we can have those blessings, and remain obedient so that He will continue to provide them to us!

Laid on My Heart

by: Gilbert Alexander

Religious people sometimes attribute to God things and choices that are the product of their own minds. They will tell about how “God laid it on their hearts” to do certain things or to speak a particular message. God, in times past, spoke to prophets and gave them messages to deliver (Exodus 12), but does He do the same thing today? Did God “lay it on my heart” to write this particular article this particular week? I have no evidence that He did, and I am sure that, if He did, He would have given me sure evidence, so that I would know that it was from Him (Judges 6:11-22). Is God pleased with what I am doing? My answer must be this: if I am writing the **truth** and readers are being properly instructed and informed, then I believe that God is pleased with this. Why do I believe this? It is not because of some particular feeling I have, but it is because the word of God gives His people the responsibility to teach others the way of truth. ***This is objective faith*** founded upon a “thus saith the Lord” (II Timothy 2:1, 2; Hebrews 5:12-14).

Within the scope of His will revealed in His word, God has given us room to make personal choices and decisions. We pray that God will help us to make wise choices. Then we look carefully at all of the factors we can see, and **we** make decisions. We cannot always know what the best decision is. Where to live, which congregation of God’s people to assemble and work with, where to go knocking on doors on a given day, which sermon to preach – these are decisions that **we** must make based on our best judgment of the matter. All of these activities are approved by the word of God, and one can say with confidence that he is doing the will of God.

On the other hand, no one can rely on feelings that tell him to do **anything** that is not authorized in the Scriptures or to teach **anything** that the word of God has not revealed. If a man considers whether or not he should become a preacher of the gospel, he must think soberly: “Do I know what I am talking about and do I know the word of God (James 3:1, 2), can I speak so as to be understood, can I arrange my message so that it is clear, and is my motive to save the lost and edify the saints?” He must be sober in his evaluation of himself (Romans 12:3), and he must diligently follow the will of God revealed in His word (I Timothy 4:1-16). Think on these things.

Study Opportunities

Sunday Bible Study: 10:00 AM

Sunday Worship Assembly: 11:00 AM

Meeting At

Homewood Suites of Bozeman

1023 E Baxter Ln,
Bozeman, MT 59715

Everyone Welcome!

Refuge

by: Chadwick Brewer

“Hear my cry, O God, listen to my prayer; from the end of the earth I call to you when my heart is faint. Lead me to the rock that is higher than I, for you have been my refuge, a strong tower against the enemy.” - Psalm 61:1-3

Many things go wrong in our lives. Many of them are simply out of our control. No matter how much we want to control them, we simply cannot. Some of the things that go wrong are under our control.

When things go wrong, we often turn to our coping devices. Some bury themselves in their work. Some lose themselves in a good book or game. Some turn to a bottle or some other substance. Some dive into their emotions and feed the anger, jealousy, or depression. Some turn to friends and/or family.

David shows us a better way. A common refrain throughout Psalms is using God as a refuge. God is the natural source to turn to when things go wrong. He is the God of all comfort. He is the God that can allow peace that surpasses all understanding to guard our hearts and minds. He is also the only one that can truly fix our situations and make us better and stronger. Paul says when we are weak, then we are strong because in our humility we can allow Christ to truly shine through us. Flee to God for refuge!

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So, how do we look forward without looking behind? We must recognize that as Christians, our family consists of those who also commit themselves to serving God. Our spiritual family will work alongside us, encourage us, correct us, and help us reach our goals. Friends and family members who refuse to listen to God’s word will distract us, discourage us, and hinder us from working toward our goals. We must be busy with the work God has given us, and that includes teaching lost souls the gospel. We should continue to teach those who will listen. Unfortunately, there will be some who refuse to see the truth. We must move forward, keep our hand on the plow, and not look back. Our hearts will break, but we must recognize our blessings in Christ and be mindful of all that is gained by being a child of God. Do not choose to focus on sacrifice! Choose to see blessings instead, realizing that God knows our sacrifices, and rewards our faithfulness!

Look Forward, Not Behind

Ladies

Corner

by: Machella Goad

Leaving the past behind seems impossible when it involves people we love. However, there is no denying that when we choose to serve God, many times we must also choose to loosen the ties with our loved ones who refuse to accept God's truth. For Christians who do not come from a faithful Christian family, this is a tough reality. It is a battle that, often, feels unfair. Choosing between God and physical family may be hard, but examining God's word will help us understand that in growing closer to Him, we move farther away from sin. Unfortunately, that will include family and friends who stubbornly refuse to give up the sin that separates them from God. Seeing our loved ones choose to remain entangled in sin is heart breaking, but we must continue looking forward to the goal.

First, we should remember that when we submit to God's plan of salvation, we become part of His family, and that is a tremendous blessing!

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. (Galatians 3:26-29)

Also, Jesus declared that His family members are those who do the will of the Father:

While He was still talking to the multitudes, behold, His mother and brothers stood outside, seeking to speak with Him. Then one said to Him, "Look, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, seeking to speak with You." But He answered and said to the one who told Him, "Who is My mother and who are My brothers?" And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother." (Matthew 12:46-50)

Therefore, becoming a child of God offers the blessing of spiritual family. Much comfort can be gained in this blessing as we struggle with the harsh reality of losing physical family to sin. Our perspective is critical! Too often we tend to focus on what we "give up" instead of recognizing the multitude of blessings we "gain" in Christ. Jesus reassures us that when we choose to sacrifice earthly and physical things, even relationships, for His sake, He is aware of that choice, and will reward us spiritually!

Then Peter began to say to Him, "See, we have left all and followed You." So Jesus answered and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and

the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time--houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions--and in the age to come, eternal life." (Mark 10:28-30)

Consider the account of Lot's wife. You are probably very familiar with the mistake Lot's wife made in looking back at the city as she was fleeing from destruction to safety (Genesis 19:12-29). Lot and his family were given an opportunity to escape the punishment of God, but it must have been very difficult for his wife to leave behind her home, and possibly other family members. Although we usually criticize her sharply for that choice, how many times do we struggle with the same thing? God has given us an opportunity to escape eternal punishment, but it is not easy for us to forget about what, or whom, we are leaving behind. However, we know that if we continue to look back at destructive ways and the people who refuse to submit to God's commands, it will be impossible for us to effectively work toward our goal. Jesus emphasizes this when several disciples declare they will follow Him, but their actions give priority to the physical.

And another also said, "Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house. But Jesus said to him, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." (Luke 9:61-62)

In submitting to God, we have put our hand to the plow. We have committed to work in His kingdom and serve Him faithfully. We must not look back at what is behind, or we will face the devastating consequence.

Now consider the inspiring life of Ruth, which is recorded for us in the Old Testament book bearing her name. She is a beautiful example of moving forward without looking back. As a Moabite woman, she was brought up amid pagan worship. Famine in the land of Judah brought an Israelite family to her country, and Ruth eventually married into that family. This allowed opportunity for her to learn about the true God. Ruth's mother-in-law became a widow while living in Moab, and also lost her two sons, leaving Ruth a widow as well. When Naomi decided to go back to her home in Judah, Ruth insisted on going with her. Ruth's desire to serve Naomi and God was stronger than her desire to stay in her own country with her own family.

But Ruth said: "Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. The Lord do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts you and me." (Ruth 1:16-17)

Ruth left everything behind... her family, friends, pagan worship, and home country. She worked hard to provide for her mother-in-law, all the while, bearing good fruit. It was Ruth's kindness, devotion, and dedicated labor which led to many blessings from God. She was noticed by a man named Boaz, who later became her husband, and Ruth was even blessed to be in the lineage of Christ (Matthew 1:1-17)!

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Daily Bible Reading

April 2017

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| April 3 | Galatians 1 | April 17 | Ephesians 6 |
| April 4 | Galatians 2 | April 18 | Philippians 1 |
| April 5 | Galatians 3:1-4:7 | April 19 | Philippians 2 |
| April 6 | Galatians 4:8-5:6 | April 20 | Philippians 3-4 |
| April 7 | Galatians 5:7-6:18 | April 21 | Colossians 1 |
| April 10 | Ephesians 1 | April 24 | Colossians 2:1-3:11 |
| April 11 | Ephesians 2:1-3:7 | April 25 | Colossians 3:12-4:18 |
| April 12 | Ephesians 3:8-4:6 | April 26 | 1 Thessalonians 1-2 |
| April 13 | Ephesians 4:7-32 | April 27 | 1 Thessalonians 3:1-4:8 |
| April 14 | Ephesians 5 | April 28 | 1 Thessalonians 4:9-5:28 |

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