

Jim's Notes
May 16, 2007
The Letter of St. Paul to the Ephesians

Ephesians 1:3-4

Ephesians 1:3a

St. Jerome (AD 347 – 420):

Now the phrase blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is to be read in a double sense. It first means that God is blessed as the maker of all things, this being the main clause. To this is then added "who is also the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." It means that both God and Father are to be referred in common to our Lord. Blessed is the God of the man who has been assumed and the father of him who was the Word of God with God in the beginning! Not that the assumed one is other than the Word who assumed him, but that he who is one and the same is spoken of now by sublime and now by humble titles, according to what circumstances demand. (Epistle to the Ephesians 1.1.2)

Ambrosiaster [pseudo-Ambrose] (about A.D. 370):

He means not with an earthly but a heavenly blessing, not corruptible but eternal, because Christ's glory is not in earth but in heaven and in Christ. For every gift of God's grace is in Christ. If someone who despises Christ imagines that he is blessed by God he is wrong. Yet God is blessed in one way, humans in another. There is indeed one term blessing, but it should be understood as is proper to the recipient. . . . God is blessed when he is extolled with due praises, but the way in which God blesses human beings is to impart to them the gift of his grace, not according to their merits but according to his mercy. (Epistle to the Ephesians 1.3.1-2)

Ephesians 1:3c

St. Jerome (AD 347 – 420):

Now God has blessed us not with this or that blessing but with every blessing. It is not as though we all obtain them all at once, but singly we obtain particular ones in due time or some of the whole number. Thereby we possess their fullness through these singular blessings. He speaks not only of earthly blessings but of spiritual - there are indeed earthly blessings, as when someone has children, affluence in riches, the pleasure of honor and health. . . . But spiritual blessings are in the heavens because the earth is too small to circumscribe a spiritual blessing. (Epistle to the Ephesians 1.1.3)

Hilary of Poitiers (AD 300 – 367):

Since God reveals himself to be blessed in spiritual and heavenly things, it is not amid these earthly and corporeal things that one should look for that perfect blessedness of the saints. (Treatise on Psalm 127, chap. 8)

Theodoret (AD 392 – 457):

He has conferred on us the gifts of the Holy Spirit. He has given us the hope of resurrection, the good news of immortality, the promise of the kingdom of heaven, the dignity of sonship. These he calls the spiritual blessings And he adds in heavenly places, because these gifts are heavenly. (Epistle to the Ephesians 1.3)

Ephesians 1:4a

St. John Chrysostom (AD 349 – 407):

What he means is this: The one through whom he has blessed us is the one through whom he has elected us. . . . Christ chose us to have faith in him before we came into being, indeed even before the world was founded. The word foundation was well chosen, to indicate that it was laid down from some great height. For great and ineffable is the height of God, not in a particular place but rather in his remoteness from nature. So great is the distance between creature and Creator. (Homily on Ephesians 1.1.4)

St. Jerome (AD 347– 420):

Paul, wishing to show that God made all things out of nothing, ascribed to him not the "composition," the "creation" or the "making" but the *katabole*, that is, the inception of the foundation. (Epistle to the Ephesians 1.1.4)

Ephesians 1:4b

Origen (AD 185 – 251):

One might ask if this is not contradicted by the prophetic saying in your sight shall no living being be justified (Psalm 143:2). . . . One may answer taking refuge in the double meanings of prophecy, that . . . no one is in all respects and throughout his whole life justified in God's sight, since he will of course have sinned at some time. But this would not prevent some from being at times holy and blameless before him if they have become so through correction. (Epistle to the Ephesians)

St. John Chrysostom (AD 349 – 407):

"You have been elected," he says, "in order to be holy and unblemished before his face." . . . He himself has made us saints, but we are called to remain saints. A saint is one who lives in faith, is unblemished and leads a blameless life. . . . The sanctified life is not the effect of our labors or achievements but of God's love. It is not born of love alone or of our own virtue. For if it were from love alone, all ought to be saved. Again, if it were from our virtue his earthly appearing and the whole of his work would be unnecessary. But it is not from love alone or from our virtue but from God through God. . . . Virtue would have saved no one had there been no love. . . . For to become virtuous and to

believe and to advance, this too was the work of the One who called us, even though it is something we can share. (Homily on Ephesians 1.1. 4 & 5)

St. Jerome (AD 347– 420):

Between saintly and unblemished there is this difference, that one who is saintly is *ipso facto* understood also to be unblemished, but one who is at some point unblemished is not by that fact itself saintly. Infants, after all, are spotless because their bodies are pure and they have committed no sin; and yet they are not saintly, because sanctity is not acquired without will and effort. Moreover, he who has done no sin can be called unblemished, but the saintly person is the one who is full of virtues . . . It is asked how anyone can be saintly and unblemished in God's sight . . . We must reply [that] Paul does not say he chose us before the foundation of the world on account of our being saintly and unblemished. He chose us that we might become saintly and unblemished, that is, that we who were not formerly saintly and unblemished should subsequently be so. . . . So understood, it provides a counterargument to one who says that souls were elected before the world came to be because of their sanctity and freedom from any sinful vice. (Epistle to the Ephesians 1.1.4)

Didymus of Alexandria [the Blind] (AD 313 – 398):

The Holy Spirit renews us in baptism through his godhead, which he shares with the Father and the Son. Finding us in a state of deformity, the Spirit restores our original beauty and fills us with his grace, leaving no room for anything unworthy of our love. The Spirit frees us from sin and death, and changes us from the earthly men we were, men of dust and ashes, into spiritual men, sharers in the divine glory, sons and heirs of God the Father who bear a likeness to the Son and are his coheirs and brothers, destined to reign with him and to share his glory. In place of earth the Spirit reopens heaven to us and gladly admits us into paradise, giving us even now greater honor than the angels, and by the holy waters of baptism extinguishing the unquenchable fires of hell.

We men are conceived twice: to the human body we owe our first conception, to the divine Spirit, our second. John says: “To all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God. These were born not by human generation, not by the desire of the flesh, not by the will of man, but of God” (John 1:12-13). All who believed in Christ, he says, “received power to become children of God”, that is, of the Holy Spirit, and to gain kinship with God. To show that their parent was God the Holy Spirit, he adds these words of Christ: “I give you this solemn warning, that without being born of water and the Spirit, no one can enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). Visibly, through the ministry of priests, the font gives symbolic birth to our visible bodies. Invisibly, through the ministry of angels, the Spirit of God, whom even the mind's eye cannot see, baptizes into himself both our souls and bodies, giving them a new birth. Speaking quite literally, and also in harmony with the words of water and the Spirit, John the Baptist says of Christ: “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire” (Matthew 3:11). Since we are only vessels of clay, we must first be cleansed in

water and then hardened by spiritual fire - for God is a consuming fire. We need the Holy Spirit to perfect and renew us, for spiritual fire can cleanse us, and spiritual water can recast us as in a furnace and make us into new men. (*The Treatise on the Trinity*, Lib. 2, 12: PG 39, 667-674)