

DEEP IN SCRIPTURE

Verses & Notes May 23, 2007

Ephesians 1:3-4 (Part 2)

- 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: even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world,
that we should be holy and blameless before him.

INTRODUCTION:

- How do you understand the God who loves you, who created you, who died and rose again for you, that you might be free from sin and death, and experience new life with Him both now and forever? How do you envision God the Father, our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, especially in prayer? And how do explain the relationship of the Trinity to those in your life who either do not understand or refuse to believe? The problem is that often the words of Scripture do not help. This is part of what we will be discussing today on **Deep In Scripture**.
- A. Welcome ...
- B. Continuing where we left off last week with Eph 1:3;
 - We reviewed the dangers of misusing this text as a systematic theological text...
 - Paul from prison writing a homily to newly baptized Gentile believers.
 - He is building upon what he presumes they already know...
- C. As baptized Christians we live in two dimensions:
 - Visible & invisible; horizontal & vertical; physical & spiritual.
 - By baptism...new birth...adoption as sons of God...new citizenship.
 - Though we are now citizens of heaven, we continue to live in this world.
 - DANGER: forgetting this OR never truly understanding or appreciating it!
 - Sadly many baptized Christians never experience the "2nd" conversion!"
 - Far too many people, even Christians, live only in the horizontal, visible world.
 - As a result, never experience growth in faith, hope, & love.
 - We live in a constant onslaught of "voices": the "world, flesh, & the devil."
 - To forget the invisible / vertical / spiritual blessings of God
 - That WE HAVE ALREADY RECEIVED BY BAPTISM!
 - This is what St. Paul is trying to prevent in this opening benediction.
- D. Ephesians 1:3-14 is one long Christian "berakah"
 - Built on a Jewish liturgical prayer of praise called a berakah:
 - The focus of this entire section is praise to God, not on ourselves:
 - The basic theme/summary of this Christian Berakah is:
 - **"Blessed be HE who has blessed us to be a blessing."**
 - All the rest of Eph 1:3-14 elaborates on this,
 - But always with emphasis on God, not primarily on our blessings.
- E. What is meant by "bless"
 - The term is used 3 ways in this verse:
 - "Blessed be God..." who has "blessed us" ...with spiritual "blessings"
 - Sometimes "blessing" is translated as "happy"...i.e., Psalm 1...
 - This is why I prefer "blessed" vs "happy" ...would make no sense here!
 - "Blessed" conveys more than happy; it points to God as the source.
 - How can we bless God?!
 - Essentially this means in the simplest sense: giving God all the credit!
 - Turning our focus completely in His direction, praising & thanking him!

BREAK

F. Who is He who has blessed us?

"the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"

- God the Father is the constant title Paul uses for God throughout Ephesians:
 - 1:17 *"that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge him"*
 - 3:14-15 *"For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named"*
 - 4:4-6 *"There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all."*
 - 5:20 *"always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father."*
 - 6:23 *"Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."*
- A bit like being introduced as "Marcus, the husband of Marilyn"
 - A new, balanced understanding of their relationship to God their creator:
 - Jews: "God the father of A, I, and J" or "Creator of Heaven and Earth"
 - Gentiles: their many pagan gods;
 - Imbalanced: shift from both to Jesus alone!
 - Balanced: To God the Father through our Lord Jesus Christ by power of Holy Spirit.
- The danger of *sola Scriptura*: St. Paul nowhere describes the Trinitarian relationship!
 - Either presumes they already understand through oral tradition,
 - or the issue just has not arisen!
 - Early "Christian" heresies:
 - Gnostics: (Valentinus, Marcion) combined Christian ideas with mystical religious ideas: imposed their ideas upon Scripture;
 - Subordinationism: denied that the Son / the *Logos* existed from all eternity, equal with the Father; Christ was created & less than the Father.
 - Adoptionism: denied divinity of Christ
 - Modalism: the name Father, Jesus, & Holy Spirit were different names for the same person.
 - Arianism: Jesus, God's Son, was not one-in-being with the Father; he was not truly divine, but simply the first & greatest of God's creatures.
 - Tritheism: Three separate Gods.
 - All of these were believing men who were trying to explain the Scriptural relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
 - The early bishops & Councils of bishops increasingly had to address these problems:
 - St. Theophilus of Antioch, 7th bishop of Antioch, Ltr to Autolytus (AD 181) *"The three days before the luminaries were created are types of the Trinity [Triados]: God, His Word, and His Wisdom."* [1st recorded use of Trias in reference to Godhead.]
 - St. Dionysius (pope, 259-268), *Epistle against the Tritheists & Sabellians*.
 - Once the authority of the Church & Sacred tradition were rejected, leaving *sola Scriptura*, these & other heresies arose & continue today!
 - Unitarianism, Oneness Pentecostalism, Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Science, etc.
 - **Catechism, 232-267**
***234** The mystery of the Most Holy Trinity is the central mystery of Christian faith and life. It is the mystery of God in himself. It is therefore the source of all the other mysteries of faith, the light that enlightens them. It is the most fundamental and essential teaching in the "hierarchy of the truths of faith".⁵⁶ The whole history of salvation is identical with the history of the way and the means by which the one true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, reveals himself to men "and reconciles and unites with himself those who turn away from sin".⁵⁷*

261 The mystery of the Most Holy Trinity is the central mystery of the Christian faith and of Christian life. God alone can make it known to us by revealing himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

262 The Incarnation of God's Son reveals that God is the eternal Father and that the Son is consubstantial with the Father, which means that, in the Father and with the Father the Son is one and the same God.

263 The mission of the Holy Spirit, sent by the Father in the name of the Son (Jn 14:26) and by the Son "from the Father" (Jn 15:26), reveals that, with them, the Spirit is one and the same God. "With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified" (Nicene Creed).

264 "The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father as the first principle and, by the eternal gift of this to the Son, from the communion of both the Father and the Son" (St. Augustine, *De Trin.* 15, 26, 47: PL 42, 1095).

265 By the grace of Baptism "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit", we are called to share in the life of the Blessed Trinity, here on earth in the obscurity of faith, and after death in eternal light (cf. Paul VI, CPG § 9).

266 "Now this is the Catholic faith: We worship one God in the Trinity and the Trinity in unity, without either confusing the persons or dividing the substance; for the person of the Father is one, the Son's is another, the Holy Spirit's another; but the Godhead of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is one, their glory equal, their majesty coeternal" (Athanasian Creed: DS 75; ND 16).

267 Inseparable in what they are, the divine persons are also inseparable in what they do. But within the single divine operation each shows forth what is proper to him in the Trinity, especially in the divine missions of the Son's Incarnation and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

- With this understanding, we can approach Scripture confidently:

1:3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ..."

1:17 "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge him"

G. How has He blessed us?

"who has blessed us in Christ

with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places..."

- The rest of this invocation is Paul's answer to this, not as a list but as praise.
- **"He has blessed us"** Past tense: already received through baptism;
- **"in Christ"** A very common phrase, with many shades of meaning:
 - They would have been used to him & their teachers saying this;
 - Summarizes their new status through baptism: 2 Cor 5:16,17, "From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once regarded Christ from a human point of view, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation"
- **"with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places..."**
 - What could he possibly mean by this?
 - How many of us, when we examine our Christian lives, would, at least inwardly, wonder whether this applies to us?
 - Remember, Paul focus is upon God, praising and blessing Him!
 - God has given us far more than we can ever realize!
 - He has given us & continues to give us all we need!
 - We mostly miss His blessings by sin & ignorance;
 - **"Spiritual"** because they come from more than natural causes;
 - Our new life / sonship is a gift of grace.
 - He is emphasizing that life is more than the horizontal!
 - **"In the heavenly places"**
 - Our true home, where Christ now reigns! (1:20)
 - Where believers reign with him! (2:6) ; CCC 1003, *United with Christ by Baptism, believers already truly participate in the heavenly life of the risen Christ, but this life remains "hidden with Christ in God."*⁶⁶⁰ *The Father has already "raised us up with him, and made us sit*

with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.¹⁵⁶¹ Nourished with his body in the Eucharist, we already belong to the Body of Christ. When we rise on the last day we "also will appear with him in glory."¹⁵⁶²

- Where angels & demons operate unseen (3:10; 6:12)
- We will discuss this later in Ephesians, but again the purpose here is to draw our attention upwards & praise God.