

Who We Are In Christ

Bible Reading – Ephesians chapter 1 verses 3 to 14 (AMP)

'Blessed and worthy of praise be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms in Christ, just as [in His love] He chose us in Christ [actually selected us for Himself as His own] before the foundation of the world, so that we would be holy [that is, consecrated, set apart for Him, purpose-driven] and blameless in His sight. In love He predestined and lovingly planned for us to be adopted to Himself as [His own] children through Jesus Christ, in accordance with the kind intention and good pleasure of His will— to the praise of His glorious grace and favor, which He so freely bestowed on us in the Beloved, [His Son, Jesus Christ]. In Him we have redemption [that is, our deliverance and salvation] through His blood, [which paid the penalty for our sin, and resulted in] the forgiveness and complete pardon of our sin, in accordance with the riches of His grace which He lavished on us. In all wisdom and understanding [with practical insight] He made known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Christ, with regard to the fulfillment of the times [that is, the end of history, the climax of the ages]—to bring all things together in Christ, [both] things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him also we have received an inheritance [a destiny—we were claimed by God as His own], having been predestined (chosen, appointed beforehand) according to the purpose of Him who works everything in agreement with the counsel and design of His will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ [who first put our confidence in Him as our Lord and Savior] would exist to the praise of His glory. In Him, you also, when you heard the word of truth, the good news of your salvation, and [as a result] believed in Him, were stamped with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit [the One promised by Christ] as owned and protected [by God]. The Spirit is the guarantee [the first installment, the pledge, a foretaste] of our inheritance until the redemption of God's own [purchased] possession [His believers], to the praise of His glory.'

SERMON

I have no idea why, but throughout my life I have had a relatively low opinion of myself. Perhaps my standards have been too high, but it seemed to me for quite a long time that no matter what I did, it wasn't quite good enough.

Often, such negative thoughts can be as a result of some aspect of our upbringing.

I can't recall my father ever saying to me that I would never amount to anything, but I do remember times he wanted me to do things that didn't interest me – for example becoming an engineer like he was, and work in the company he worked in (Vauxhall Motors) - these kind of things. And when I didn't accept his advice or pursue his plan for my life, he would seem disappointed.

I love my dad but there have been times in my life that I thought that maybe I would never be able to please him. Perhaps you too may have struggled with feelings of this kind as you grew up?

I do know that even today, I often feel that no matter what I do, I will never make certain people happy. I lost count of the number of times my mother told me that this was how she felt too.

When I became a born again Christian, I attended a Home Group led by a godly woman called Ann. It didn't take her long to notice I had an issue with my self-worth.

One day she said to me, *“Chris your problem is you don't know who you are in Christ. If you knew who you were in Christ you wouldn't feel the way you do about yourself!”*

Even though I had been a Christian for many years, I didn't know what she meant.

However, her powerful words still echo inside my mind to this day. It took me a while before I plucked up the courage to sit down with her and ask her to explain what she meant. She kindly gave me a 3 page print out of Scriptures from the Bible that were words of truth that God has spoken over His children.

The devil does his best to prevent us, firstly from discovering these words from God, then listening to them, and then being able to believe them.

And I am sure the apostle Paul knew this better than most, because much of his New Testament teaching seems to be designed to build us up and encourage us to believe the splendid truth about who we are in Christ and **not** the lies of the evil one.

In the passage of Scripture I just read to you, Paul mentions the phrase 'in Christ' five times.

And in 2 Corinthians chapter 5 verse 17, Paul explains what he means by this. He says:

'Therefore if anyone is in Christ [that is, grafted in, joined to Him by faith in Him as Savior], he is a new creature [reborn and renewed by the Holy Spirit]; the old things [the previous moral and spiritual condition] have passed away. Behold, new things have come [because spiritual awakening brings a new life].'

PAUSE

So to be 'in Christ' means that we believe in Jesus - by faith - to be our only Saviour; we are a 'new creature' (that is we have been born again and have had our spirit renewed by the Holy Spirit); our old way of living has been got rid of; and the awakening that God's Holy Spirit has wrought in is, enables us to live in Christ, a life we could not live without this transformation - because without our spiritual renewal, we would be stuck fast in our fleshly body of sin, and our sinful way of thinking and acting.

PAUSE

Let's now take a look at the passage of Scripture I just read to you, from the opening chapter of the New Testament Epistle to the Ephesians. Ephesus, by the way, was where the Ephesian Christians lived, it was a Greek city which, today, lies near the western coast of what is now Turkey.

This Epistle is believed to have been written by St. Paul while he was a prisoner under house arrest in Rome (a.d. 60-62).

PAUSE

To begin, I'd like to tell you who Paul has addressed his letter to, in order to discover whether or not it includes you and me?

In his opening sentence (verse 1) he says he is writing to:

‘The saints who are at Ephesus and are faithful *and* loyal *and* steadfast in Christ Jesus.’

Does that include you and me? Well even though we don’t live in Ephesus, the answer is ‘yes’, it does include us, **provided** we are a ‘saint’ and are ‘faithful, loyal and steadfast in Christ Jesus’.

Now that leads us to a supplementary question; who or what is a saint?

And the Amplified Bible footnote helpfully defines a saint for us in the context of Paul’s letter. It says:

‘“Saints” refers to born-again believers. All believers are holy, that is, set apart or sanctified for God’s purpose.’

Unfortunately, some forms of Christianity wrongly deem a Saint to be someone who is dead, but had evidence of performing miracles in their life-times. This definition is not found anywhere in the Bible.

PAUSE

So, now we can be clear and say that if we are a born-again believer – and also faithful, loyal and steadfast in Christ Jesus, then the Bible tells us some remarkable truths about ourselves.

This opening chapter of Ephesians alone, tells us seven important truths about who we are in Christ Jesus. Some days you may not feel like the truths I am about to read to you apply to you, but we need to hold on to these truths because - for many of us - they are life-changing.

PAUSE

Feel free to use the sheet I gave you, if you wish, to follow me as I go through each verse of this powerful Scripture.

You will see that the **first thing** we can hold onto is that:

‘God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realm.’

What does it mean to have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realm?

Did any of you ever watch that TV quiz programme on Saturday evenings in the late 50’s and 60’s called ‘Take your Pick’ hosted by Michael Miles, where, after surviving what became known as the ‘yes-no interlude,’ if the contestant

correctly answered 3 fairly simple general knowledge questions, they got to open a box with a key and there was a ticket or envelope which he or she handed to the quiz-host and the contestant agonised for a few seconds before discovering whether they had won 'tonight's star prize' or perhaps the 'booby prize.'

Well spiritual blessings in heavenly places are like spiritual 'star-prizes' held in Heaven for us by God, but they can only be handed over to us if we turn a spiritual key. That key is faith in Jesus Christ. If we have faith, God promises He has spiritual blessings in Heaven waiting for us, and those blessings have our name written on them. They are there for the asking, waiting for us to step out in faith and say, for example, *"God I believe you have the gift of joy and peace ready and waiting for me. From this day onwards I will no longer allow my afflictions to cause me anxiety or fear; I thank you for the blessings you have for me Father, please manifest them now into the physical realm, that I may receive them in faith, in Jesus' Name, Amen."* God has many blessings He is ready to give you, He is just waiting for you to ask.

The second benefit I see, is revealed to us in verse 4. It is that:

'[in His love] He chose us in Christ [actually selected us for Himself as His own] before the foundation of the world.'

If you are in Christ, God actually chose you to be His, even before the world began. He chose you before you had even been born, i.e., before you had done a single thing for Him! I find that mind-blowing. How awesome is our God!

The third benefit I see revealed to us, is also in verse 4. It says:

'We (are) holy [that is, consecrated, set apart for Him, purpose-driven] and blameless in His sight.'

So, God has set us apart from unbelievers to be 'Holy in His sight'. Not only that, but God's Word says we are blameless. When we hear the devil whisper in our ear, such lies as 'you are to blame for that!', we need to know who we

are in God's sight, so that we can say, *"Don't you lie to me Satan; I am blameless in the sight of God because the Bible tells me so. I command you to flee from me in Jesus' name!"*

Now that was just an illustration and it goes without saying, that if we **have** said or done something that has caused problems for which we **are** responsible, (i.e., to blame), then we should do something to rectify the situation!

PAUSE

The fourth benefit I see is revealed to us in verse 5. It is this:

'He predestined and lovingly planned for us to be adopted to Himself as [His own] children through Jesus Christ.'

If you and I are born-again Christians, we have been adopted into the family of God. You and I are a son or daughter of the living God! Did you know that? It's true if you are in Christ!

As natural children, we have rights and privileges. In most cases our parents loved us and provided for us as best they could. Also on the death of our parents, we have certain 'legal rights.' In Biblical days, the family estate passed to the parent's children on the death of the parents. It made no difference whether the children were biological children of the parents, or adopted children.

If we are 'in Christ', you and I are children of God, and so because He is a perfect father, God pours out blessings upon us, and we are heirs to His promises.

The fifth benefit I see is revealed to us in verse 7 and is that:

'In Him we have redemption [that is, our deliverance and salvation] through His blood.'

If we are born-again believers, we have been redeemed by the blood of our Saviour – that is to say we have been delivered from sin and have been saved; meaning we have a new life which begins the day we are born-again - when God's Holy Spirit takes up residence inside us - and that new life continues through the eons of time for all eternity.

After our bodily death we will live, **not** on a corrupt decaying earth, but in paradise (a new Heaven and earth) with God, in His heavenly kingdom.

Verse 7 continues ***'[which paid the penalty for our sin and resulted in] the forgiveness and complete pardon of our sin'***.

Everything you and I did in the past, that was wrong, and everything we did not do which we should have done - ALL OUR SIN - **prior** to turning to Christ, was completely pardoned by God, at the moment of believing in Him. All our past sins were completely wiped away and forgiven. And from that day (that we gave our lives to Christ), every sin we subsequently commit, provided we confess those sins to Him and repent of them - these are also forgiven by our loving God.

We know this because in 1 John chapter 1 verses 8 to 9 (NLT), the Bible tells us this:

'If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.'

The sixth benefit I see is revealed to us at the end of verse 7 and the beginning of verse 8 where it says:

'...In accordance with the riches of His grace which He lavished on us'.

Our salvation is a free gift of God, we don't deserve it, because by our very nature we are sinful people and God cannot abide sin. God has lavished His grace upon all those who are in Christ. Grace is an amazing gift, it is God's unconditional love which we cannot earn. It is an undeserved gift that He has given to us simply because He loves us and chose us and all others who will believe in Him and His Word says we will all receive this amazingly loving gift of God's grace.

And finally, the seventh revelation in this section of Paul's letter is in verse 11:

'In Him also we have received an inheritance [a destiny—we were claimed by God as His own], having been predestined (chosen, appointed beforehand) according to the purpose of Him who works everything in agreement with the counsel and design of His will.'

Because of our faith in Christ Jesus, Paul tells us we now have a unique inheritance and destiny and declares what that destiny and inheritance is – it is

the guarantee of our salvation. Listen to some of the words of verses 13 and 14:

'In Him, you also, when you heard the word of truth, the good news of your salvation, and [as a result] believed in Him, were stamped with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit [the One promised by Christ] as owned and protected [by God]. The Spirit is the guarantee [the first instalment, the pledge, a foretaste] of our inheritance.'

You and I are **owned and protected** by God. So long as we remain faithful and obedient to God and His Son - our Saviour, Jesus Christ - no-one, no demon nor the devil himself, can prize you or me out of God's hand.

We have been 'stamped' with the seal of the Holy Spirit of God. I also believe this means that, once we submit to Jesus Christ and become born-again, although we cannot see it, somewhere on our body, is a seal signifying that we are God's own possession - this seal only being recognisable in the spiritual realm - and woe betide anyone or any demon who tries to take us from Him.

To all who are born-again believers, the seal of the Holy Spirit is the guarantee of God's freely given inheritance of spending eternity in heaven with Him!

PAUSE

The Bible is full of truths concerning who we are in Christ.

You may be like me - in the sense that you may not always have good thoughts about yourself - for all manner of reasons. If so, be encouraged by God's truths:

Here are some Biblical truths concerning what God says about you - IF you are in Christ:

You are a child of God (John 1 v 12).

You have eternal life (John 3 v 36).

Christ is in you (John 14 v 20).

You have peace (John 14 v 27).

You are loved by Jesus (John 15 v 9).

You are Christ's friend (John 15 v 14).

You are loved by the Father (John 16 v 27).

You are a saint and loved by God (Romans 8 v 17).

You have been made righteous through the obedience of Christ (Romans 5 v 19).

All things are working together for your good (Romans 8 v 28).

You cannot be separated from the love of God (Romans 8 v 35).

And... You are a citizen of Heaven (Philippians 3 v 20).

Those are just a dozen Scriptural truths I have chosen to share with you to remind you of who you are in Christ. You can find many many more if you search through the pages of the Bible...

PAUSE

I'd like to close by summarising the seven facts Paul tells those who are in Christ, in just one chapter of one Epistle he wrote and which I shared with you today...

God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing.

God chose us to be His, even before the world began.

We are holy and blameless in His sight.

You and I are a son or daughter of the living God!

We have been delivered from sin and have been **saved** from the eternal punishment of sin.

Our eternal salvation is a free gift of God.

You and I are owned and protected by God.

Nothing and nobody can **ever** prize us out of God's hand, provided we remain faithful and obedient to God's Word in our daily lives.

Praise His Holy Name!

AMEN