3-18-18

Ephesians 1:3-14

I begin by reading this whole passage because in the original Greek, this was all one long sentence with no punctuation. Apparently, it is very difficult to translate. One translator by the name of E. Norden refers to the sentence as “the most monstrous sentence conglomeration that I have ever found in the Greek language”. Another translator by the name of C. Masson sees through the mechanical difficulties to the beauty of the message Paul has by saying, “one is struck by the fulness of its words, of its liturgical majesty and its perceptible rhythm from beginning to end”. From this, we can see why different translations have punctuation in different places. These variances make little difference in the overall message of the sentence. The good news for us is that we don’t have to worry about translating and we can focus on what Paul has to say.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” This is the way to start prayer, by blessing God. We think of blessings as something we receive for our benefit, and that is true. Blessings come to us from God out of His infinite stockpile of good things. So, what does it mean for us to bless God? There is certainly nothing that we can give God that He doesn’t have. There is nothing we can do to benefit God. He was perfectly fine without us before creation. Yet, here is Paul, pronouncing blessing upon God.

The idea of blessing God begins in the Old Testament. We see it a number of times in the Psalms; for example, in Psalm 103:1-2:

Bless the Lord, O my soul,  
And all that is within me, *bless* His holy name.  
Bless the Lord, O my soul,  
And forget none of His benefits

We get the impression that to bless the Lord is to praise Him and that is what it means. The Hebrew word translated bless means “to kneel” which gives the idea of honoring and praising; it shows submission. The word carries into the New Testament and means to praise and worship. Notice that the blessings God gives us are completely unmerited. The only reason we receive blessings from God is because of His grace. We don’t deserve any of them. On the contrary, God is worthy of all praise and worship. He is worthy just because of who He is; He is God. But He is also worthy because of all His attributes, all the things He does. He deserves worship and thanksgiving from us for His grace to us. He *is* deserving of blessing.

If we glance just a little further ahead in our verse, Paul speaks of God blessing us with every spiritual blessing. An amazing thing is included here: If God didn’t bless us in His grace, we would not be capable of blessing Him. It is by God’s grace that the Holy Spirit gives us the faith to believe in Jesus Christ as our Saviour. With that salvation, God’s law is written on our hearts and our spiritual inclination is to follow that law; to be pleasing to God. Without that spiritual desire, our prayers would be unacceptable.

Proverbs 28:9

He who turns away his ear from listening to the law,  
Even his prayer is an abomination.

The LORD is not interested in the prayers of anyone who has not accepted Christ, because it is only by accepting Christ that our hearts and ears are attentive to His law. Again we see that any good we do is initiated by God so that we have no claim to our salvation or worthy actions. He is deserving of all our praise, worship, and adoration; He has graciously given us the ability to bless Him; let us be quick to take advantage of that ability to give Him glory.

Paul speaks of God in terms of Jesus Christ. This is because all access to the Father is on account of and through Jesus. Consider that wonderful and clear statement Jesus makes in:

John 14:6

I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.

This passage isn’t just referring to salvation and spending eternity in heaven, although that is certainly important. Jesus is the one and only mediator between God and man. He is the One who repaired the breach between us caused by the sin of Adam. When we accept Jesus as Saviour, God applies Jesus’ righteousness to us. When we want to come to God in prayer, it is by way of Jesus, it is in His name. As we considered before, we can only bless God by way of Jesus.

Paul refers to the LORD as the *God and Father* of Jesus. We are used to thinking of God as Jesus’ Father. This comes out in the New Testament many times where Jesus calls God His Father and many times it gets Him in trouble. Of course, it is actually shown in the Old Testament.

Psalm 2:7

I will surely tell of the decree of the Lord:  
He said to Me, ‘You are My Son,  
Today I have begotten You.

There are also several times in the New Testament where God audibly claims Jesus as His Son. Because we who are Christians have been blessed by God to become His adopted children, it is important to identify Jesus as the only *begotten* Son. Now since Jesus is one with God; is, in fact, God Himself, it is beyond us to comprehend how Jesus can be His Son. This is one of the mysteries of Christianity that leads us to worship God who is beyond our understanding.

What we usually don’t consider is that Yahweh is also Jesus’ God. This is most clear from what Jesus cried out from the cross, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me.” But there are also Scriptures in which Jesus offers praise and praise is to be offered to God alone. Again, we are faced with a mystery. Jesus and the Father are both part of the Triune God, along with the Holy Spirit; Jesus is God. Yet He refers to His Father as His God. This is precisely the kind of thing that non-believers will scoff at; it doesn’t make any sense to the natural man. Christians may not grasp how this works, but it’s not a stumbling block to our belief.

Once again, we go back to God’s grace. The Holy Spirit has been given to us and the faith He provides enables us to accept these things. It’s not a blind faith, but a true faith in the word of God. Rather than causing us to lose belief, these things lead us to praise God. We see that He is far beyond us and truly to be admired; He is God and we worship Him.

Paul uses the title “Lord” for Jesus. We use that title also and it’s a good one, but let’s remember what it means. In general, the title “lord” is one of respect. There were people Jesus encountered who called Him Lord and did so meaning to give Him honor. They believed He had special authority and power and so, gave Him the respect He deserved. But the term came to mean much more than that after Jesus’ resurrection. We recall Thomas’ reaction when Jesus appeared to him recorded in John 20:28. Thomas said, “My Lord and my God.”

Thomas used the term understanding Jesus’ deity. He understood that Jesus was Himself God. Jesus is given all power in heaven and earth and will one day rule supremely. The title “King” can also be applied and the idea of an absolute monarch is something we are not used to. But this is exactly what we will have when Jesus comes back. The thing is, this is how we should be treating Him now. We are citizens of His Kingdom because we are Christians, that means that we claim Him as our King right now. It is good for us to consider sometimes if that is how we treat Him.

Romans 10:9

if you confess with your mouth Jesus *as* Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved

To confess Jesus as Lord means to believe that He is God, which He is. It also means that you believe you must be subject to Him. If He is Lord and King, we must obey all His commands and follow Him. We worship Him as His deity deserves. Let’s practice this now. That way we will be used to obeying our King when He establishes His physical earthly reign.

It is also special that Paul uses the word “our”. Jesus is our Lord. He is absolute King and God, but we are citizens of His Kingdom and so we are treated with favor. Once again, this is undeserved favor, but He graciously accepts us and calls us to Him for protection and comfort. He offers us eternal peace.

With this beginning of praise to God in verse 3, Paul then gives reason to praise Him. Certainly, God is worthy of praise simply because He is God; but Paul points out the blessings He gives us. He says, “God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places”. Notice that this doesn’t say “material” blessings, although God can and does grant those in accordance to His will. These are spiritual blessings, we have them all, and we can take them with us. These are everlasting blessings that we will enjoy throughout eternity and even have some good effect for our life on earth.

Paul goes on in his prayer to bring out what these blessing are. We were chosen before time to be purified so that we could have fellowship with Him. He also foreordained those who accepted Christ to become His sons and daughters; complete with inheritance and staying in our Father’s house. He has and continues to bestow grace upon us. Even now, we are only able to please Him through faith and that faith come from Him by the Holy Spirit.

We owed a debt that we don’t want to pay, but He redeemed us; He paid the debt for us. He has granted us forgiveness by the blood of His Son. He was able to maintain His justice and deliver mercy to us. Even with all this, He continues to pour out grace upon us. The earth as it is will only continue for a period of time, this age will end, history will come to a close; but Jesus will be there at the end and He will rule. God has determined that we will have some part in His Eternal Kingdom. If we can believe these things, we know that we have the Holy Spirit, who seals us and is the guarantee of all these blessings.

These blessings are in the spiritual realm. Paul says these are spiritual blessings, which means by the Holy Spirit, and they are in heavenly places. As near as we can tell, there are three heavenly places or three heavens. The first is our atmosphere, the second is outer space, and the third is where God has His abode with the angels. Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 12:2 that he was taken up to the third heaven, hence the place where God has His throne. From Ephesians 2:2 we know that satan operates in the atmosphere because he is called the prince of the power of the air. All of these are spiritual places, all of these are heavenly places. Somehow, our best blessings are reserved for this realm.

We will look into these in much more detail in the coming weeks. But let us look at the last part of our verse. God has blessed us with all these things “in Christ”. Again, we come to Jesus. As we can only approach God through Jesus, God will only give us good spiritual blessings through Jesus. We spoke last week of common grace where God gives grace to all people, even non-believers. No one could survive if it were not for God giving good things to people. But because we are in Christ, we have spiritual blessings that last forevermore.

Christ is the vine, we are the branches. He is our only source for good spiritual food that we need for our own spirits that have been reborn of God. We, as Christians, are “in Christ” and all these wonderful things from God flow through Him. Focus on Jesus, He is always the source of our life, He mediates before the Father on our behalf. The Father has grace for us and it comes through Jesus.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, You have been given the throne by God the Father. We proclaim that You are King and that You will soon come to establish Your Kingdom. Our desire is to serve You, but our spiritual desire is contrary to the pull of our flesh. It is only by the strength You give us that we can overcome our sinful nature and obey Your commands. In our weakness we ask for Your strength.

Holy Father, You have established Your Son as the way for us to regain fellowship with You. Thank You for making a way. A terrible price was paid on our behalf; our cleansing is only through the precious blood of Your Son. We look forward to the day when every knee, especially our own, will bow before Him and proclaim Him Lord.

He is worthy and it is in His name we pray

Amen