

SERIES: DO YOU KNOW WHO YOU ARE?

PART 4: I AM BLESSED

In Genesis chapter 1 there is a short, but a poignant, incredibly amazing, account of how God created all things by speaking them into existence through the power of His Word. What is sadly missed often times among the raging controversy concerning the details of how and when God created the world are two simple but profoundly powerful statements. One phrase God says several times after a day of creating, **“And God saw that it was good.”** Genesis 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 28. Then after God created our first parents His first action after that was, **“God blessed them.”** Genesis 1:28

It is interesting to note that our parents didn't ask God to bless them. He did it because at His core Father God is Good, Gracious, Kind and Loving. The truth about God's character is radically uncommon. When you study the plethora of world religions and supernatural belief ideologies, you will be surprised at the dearth of any concept of God as someone who is good and delights in blessing His people. Just the opposite is the truth. You will find the common picture that paints a god who must be manipulated, forced and coerced into blessing his people. The consequence of this kind of thought is people are taught that one of the key responses you are to make is that you must do something—like suffer, fast, pray, enter an alternate state of mind, make a large financial contribution, or repeat a mantra, or own sacred objects, or go

on a sacred pilgrimage, or offer an animal sacrifice, or even a human sacrifice, or seek out a shaman, or witch doctor, or medicine man or woman, or cast spells, or do something else to make God bless them. Whatever the activity is the message is the same: You have to find a way to manipulate God to bless you. This is at the core of religion.

This was the experience of a young girl named Shana that I have read about recently. She had led a double life for over 7 years where she had convinced her parents and friends that she was a Christian while actively practicing Wicca. “I had already been through four years of Christian education and a Lutheran confirmation class,” she said. So, I knew all the right answers without ever having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.” Shana described how her understanding of Jesus was distorted by the wrong notion that she had to earn God’s blessings. She writes, “The Holy Spirit showed me recently that this sprang from the lie that I could please God with my life, when that’s not the case at all. In reality, He is pleased when I come to Him completely empty, destitute, with nothing to offer and nothing to bargain with, because He fills that emptiness with Christ and identifies me as His own. I don’t have to trick God the way I trick my friends into thinking I know Him.”

This was true of the people in Paul’s day and who he was writing to in Ephesus—and many scholars believe this letter was sent to several cities to the Christians who lived there. The people in these cities struggled with the same idea that Shana did, of feeling the need to trick God into blessing

them. According to the N.T. scholar Arnold Clinton, Ephesus was referred to as the “Mother City,” because of her influence over the politics, commerce, and religious atmosphere of the province. Although Ephesus had a tolerance for the diversity of many coexisting belief systems, Arnold writes, “Ephesus was unique because of the extraordinary prominence of the goddess Artemis also known as Diana. Her relationship to the city could best be described as a covenant bond, and thus she was often called, ‘Artemis of the Ephesians.’” Her temple was so large and grand that it was located outside the city in what was considered a sacred area and that many ancient writers describe it as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Many of the Christians in the Ephesians’ church came out of the occult, magic and sorcery. In Acts 19:11-12 Luke tells us, **“God gave Paul the power to perform unusual miracles. ¹²When handkerchiefs or aprons that had merely touched his skin were placed on sick people, they were healed of their diseases, and evil spirits were expelled.”** Satan had performed many miracles through sorcerers, witches, mediums, and priests and priestess that belonged to the cult of Artemis (Diana) and those who practiced Jewish magic. Ephesus was not much different than the environment we find ourselves in the United States, and, particularly, in Los Angeles. Many people in our culture and in our churches are troubled by demonic influence. It is often that I have the privilege to pray for or instruct someone how to pray for themselves and exercise the power of Jesus over the demonic in their lives. Then in Acts 19:13-22 we read about Jewish exorcists that were using magic spells and incantations to cast

demons out of people. In vv. 15-20 Luke writes, **“But one time when they tried it, the evil spirit replied, ‘I know Jesus, and I know Paul, but who are you?’** ¹⁶**Then the man with the evil spirit leaped on them, overpowered them, and attacked them with such violence that they fled from the house, naked and battered.** ¹⁷**The story of what happened spread quickly all through Ephesus, to Jews and Greeks alike. A solemn fear descended on the city, and the name of the Lord Jesus was greatly honored.** ¹⁸**Many who became believers confessed their sinful practices.** ¹⁹**A number of them who had been practicing sorcery brought their incantation books and burned them at a public bonfire. The value of the books was several million dollars.** ²⁰**So, the message about the Lord Jesus spread widely and had a powerful effect.”**

C.S. Lewis was fond of saying that we are often guilty of “Chronological snobbery.” Meaning that we have a tendency to arrogantly see people of the past as naive, primitive and less sophisticated than ourselves, but the truth is that people have always been the same, and today, church, our culture is as pagan in their thinking as ever. Mark Driscoll writes, **“From Native spirituality, to pantheistic efforts to live as one with the alleged powerful forces in nature, to positive confession in order to ‘manifest’ reality into existence, to religious efforts to pay God back in some way, to organizing our home feng shui for positive energy, to manipulating God with promises and great acts of devotion, to the run of the mill superstitious behavior,**

people clearly still seek to manipulate the spirit realm for blessing.”

In the marvelous book of Ephesians Paul wanted the people of God, both then and now, to know that we don't need to manipulate God to bless us His people. In Matthew 7:11 Jesus says, **“It is the Heavenly Father’s pleasure to give good gifts to those who ask Him.”**

It is possible that Paul, knowing that we as humans have a tendency to misunderstand God’s goodness, grace and favor that has been given to us—that he writes one of the most profound and compacted verses in the entire Bible. In the original Greek language these 12 verses from vv. 3-14 is one single sentence that explores in depth the reality that God truly has blessed His people in Jesus Christ. Church, if you have surrendered your life to Jesus Christ you have everything you need to live a life that will be faithful and lived in praise, glory and honor to Jesus Christ. If you were offered one wish, what would you want? Wealth? Power? Love? The truth is God has given Himself to you in Jesus Christ. God may not give you wealth, health, simplicity, or ease, but the Good News of the Bible is that God has given Himself to you. If you're in Jesus, then you're blessed by and welcomed into community with the Trinity—the eternal Friendship of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Please hear me, church—nothing can compare to that blessing. In these 12 verses the Trinity is mentioned as both our blessing and the source of all our blessings. Every blessing comes to us from Father God. They are given to us

and accomplished by Jesus Christ and what He did for us on the cross, and these great blessings are applied to our lives by the Holy Spirit. This is why Paul writes later on in Ephesians 4:30-32, **“And do not bring sorrow to God’s Holy Spirit by the way you live. Remember, He has identified you as His own, guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption.”** ³¹**Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior.** ³²**Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.”** For the next few moments let’s look at...

How to live in the benefits that God has provided for you in Jesus:

I. In Jesus you have God’s favor and spiritual benefits

Ephesians 1:3 says, **“All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ.”** The concept of blessing has two basic ideas to it. To bless means you speak well of, praise and extol, and it also means to give favor and to provide with benefits. In this first verse Paul says we give praise to God, and we bless Him because of the blessings of His grace, favor and the benefits that He provides for us in choosing us in and through Jesus Christ. We will look at these blessings in the following points, but Paul says that God has blessed us, favored us and has provided for us by choosing us to be in Christ, to be blameless—without blame—in Jesus Christ, He has chosen

or marked us out for Himself (holy), He has adopted us as His children, He has purchased our redemption—our freedom from slavery to satan, sin and selfishness, and we have received the Holy Spirit as the proof or the down payment of our final inheritance. Church, sister, brother, friend, this is the starting point of your identity. You do not belong to yourself, but you belong to Jesus Christ. Paul goes on to say that God has blessed us with the spiritual blessings in the heavenly realms. What does that mean? Heavenly realms refers to a spiritual reality which we as believers share and which evil demonic forces still seek to attack God and us. Dr. Snodgrass writes, **“A larger reality exists where Christ is already exalted as Lord, where believers participate in His victory, and where spiritual forces are opposed. Though we believers live physically on this earth, we receive spiritual resources, and our identity in and through Jesus Christ, who is ruling and reigning in the heavenly realms, right now.”** All of our blessings come from residing in Jesus Christ. He is our sole focus and source of our identity, power and victory.

II. In Jesus, you have been chosen by Him and for Him

The Bible is clear that you have been chosen in Christ before the world began, meaning that the ideas that are expressed in words like plan, purpose, chosen, predestined, elect, and appointed speak to the relational aspect of your being chosen especially within the context of God adopting you through Jesus Christ. The words chosen and election mean that the existence of God’s people, His family, can only be explained

on the basis of God's character and action, not on some quality in the people who are chosen other than the human family is created in the image of God and He loves us and He calls us to Himself through Jesus Christ. It is most common when people talk about divine election, and they think of divine election of individuals and the benefit to them. But biblical texts have a different emphasis for election as Snodgrass writes, **“(Election) is primarily a corporate term. Nothing in Ephesians 1 focuses on individuals; rather, the text focuses collectively on those who are in Christ.”** Loved ones, this is profound because it changes how we think about God. People are chosen; people become the elect one in the Elect One, Jesus Christ. God chose Abraham to be the Father of Israel in order to bring the blessings of God to the world. The N.T. is very clear that Christ has taken on that task. Jesus is the “seed of Abraham par excellence, who fulfills Israel's election.” Galatians 3:7-29 says that, because Abraham believed God's promise to him, he was counted as being in right relationship with Him because of his faith. Paul writes in vv. 7-9, **“The real children of Abraham then are those who put their faith in God.”**^{8b} **God proclaimed this good news to Abraham long ago when He said, ‘All nations will be blessed through you.’**⁹ **So all who put their faith in Christ share the same blessing Abraham received because of his faith.”** Notice Paul says all who put their faith in God. Not a chosen few, but all who believe in the Chosen One, Jesus Christ. Ephesians 1:4 says election, predestination takes place in Christ. In other words, individuals are not elected and then put in Christ. They are in Christ and therefore elect. T.F. Torrance defined election as,

“The love of God enacted and inserted into history in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, so that, in the strictest sense, Jesus Christ is the election of God.” When you surrender your life to Jesus Christ because He is the Chosen One you become chosen also because you have put your faith in Him, and one day, it says in 1 John 3:2-3, **“But we do know that we will be like Him, for we will see Him as He really is. ³And all who have this eager expectation will keep themselves pure, just as He is pure.”**

III. In Jesus, you are set apart for His purpose, and You are blameless

Paul writes that God chose us in Jesus Christ for the purpose that we would be set apart, holy and without blame in His eyes. Holy means that you have been set apart to become like Jesus Christ. It is a process. Holiness has two aspects to it. Jesus sees you and me as holy now. This is called our positional holiness. God sees us in Jesus. Sanctification has to do with now that you have surrendered your life to Jesus Christ and His love for you, now you strive to think like Him, feel like Him and act like Him, which means your thoughts, feelings and actions will be different than what they were before you knew Christ. In Leviticus God calls His chosen people Israel to a life of holiness and purity. This has not changed in the N.T. 1 Peter 1:14-16 says, **“So you must live as God’s obedient children. Don’t slip back into your old ways of living to satisfy your own desires. You didn’t know any better then. ¹⁵But now you must be holy in everything you do, just as God who chose you is holy.**

¹⁶For the Scriptures say, ‘You must be holy because I am holy.’” As you listen to the Holy Spirit, He will constantly be leading you to change how you’re thinking about Him, yourself and others. This is where our love for Jesus is to trump what our family thinks and what our culture thinks when it is contradictory towards His Word, will and way. Will we ever be perfect? No. To hide behind that is a cop-out and an excuse. But I am to strive to live my life for His glory, honor and purpose, and as I do, my identity gets stronger in whose I am and how He has created me to live. It is the same idea concerning being blameless before Him. Positionally in Jesus Christ we are blameless. As our love and devotion get stronger for Him our lives will begin to take on a blameless character, because we’re obeying God’s Word and the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

IV. In Jesus you belong to Father God through adoption

In Ephesians 1:5 Paul says that **“God decided in advance to adopt you into His own family by bringing us to Himself through Jesus Christ. This is what He wanted to do, and it gave Him great pleasure.”** What a profound blessing, benefit and value for you and for your identity. Under Roman law, an adopted child acquired all of the legal rights of a natural-born child and was released from the control of his natural father. The child also received the adopting parent’s family name and a share in the status of the new family. When you surrender your life to Jesus Christ you are no longer living in your sin and rebellion. You are not illegitimate. You have all the rights of the family that Jesus

Christ has. You are loved, accepted, valued and, most of all, you belong to God and to His family. Romans 8:15-17 says, **“So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God’s Spirit when He adopted you as His own children. Now we call Him, ‘Abba Father.’¹⁶ For His Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God’s children.¹⁷ And since we are His children, we are His heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God’s glory. But if we are to share His glory, we must also share His suffering.”**

V. In Jesus you have been freed from satan and sin’s impact on your life

In vs. 7 we’re told that **“God is so rich in kindness and grace that He purchased our freedom with the blood of His Son and forgave our sins.”** If you’re not in Jesus Christ then you’re a slave to sin, which is the Bible’s language for addiction. The biblical idea of slavery and redemption is seen so drastically in the book of exodus and is seen throughout the entire Old Testament. We’re reading through the book of Exodus right now in our CVCHURCH daily devotions. Millions of Hebrew people were enslaved to an Egyptian king, called a Pharaoh, who was the ruler of the most powerful nation at that time in history. He was worshipped as a god, and he savagely mistreated the people he enslaved. Pharaoh repeatedly failed to repent when he was confronted by God through Moses and Aaron. God’s judgment was poured out on Egypt through a series of plagues. Every plague was a judgment by God on the Egyptians so-called

gods that were actually idols fueled by demonic entities that Paul mentions in Ephesians 6 as evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world and against evil spirits in the heavenly places. The final judgment was Israel was told to sacrifice a lamb per household and put the blood over their doorposts. For those who did not have the blood, their firstborn died. God redeemed His people and delivered them from their slavery in Egypt. The Egypt deliverance symbolizes the fact that sin rules over our lives and it enslaves us and destroys us. But Jesus was the Lamb of God whose blood was shed that we might be set free. In Jesus Christ you're redeemed. He has purchased your life from sin, satan and slavery so you can be an adopted child of God. Whatever has you enslaved, be it drugs, alcohol, food, sex, gambling, fears, anxiety, worry, anger, rage, insecurity, and inferiority, Jesus has redeemed you. You no longer have to be enslaved to such things, because Jesus died for your sin, and you are free to live your life for Him in all of these blessings that are yours.

VI. In Jesus you have been forgiven of all of your sins

Vs. 7 says we are forgiven. What deep regrets haunt you? What words have you spoken and actions have you taken against those closest to you? What negative motives have you held in your heart against others, lies you have believed, harm you have caused, people you have hurt and grieved, and the shame and humiliation you have carried? What have you done to try to pacify your guilt? Have you denied that you have sinned at all? Have you tried to minimize what you have

thought, felt and did? Have you hidden it, or tried to pay God back or, what so many people do, have you punished yourself and sabotaged your life? Have these efforts failed? Of course they have. Here is the Good News and what God wants you to build your identity on: You are completely, totally, eternally forgiven. It doesn't matter what you have done or what you will do. Jesus Christ, through His death and resurrection, has canceled your sins against you, and you are forgiven. God does not and will not hold your sins against you. He will not punish you. He loves accepts and takes great joy in you in spite of your sinful ways. God's love for you and me is unconditional, and He will never withdraw His love from you like we have had done to us and we have done to each others.

VII. In Jesus you have His absolute kindness in your life

God's kindness to us is His grace. Grace has to do with giving to us His love and the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross that is unmerited, and it is God's undeserved favor in our lives. There is the grace that God gives to all people, whether they love Him or not. His grace allows those who reject Him to make progress in areas such as science, philosophy, technology, education, and medicine. It is God's grace that fuels that creative process and permits the arts and creativity of all kinds. It is God's grace that allows our societies to flourish. To those of us who have received Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, you have been blessed with God's saving grace. Like the common grace given to us all, saving grace provides a numerous amounts of benefits in eternity that

reconciles us to God through Jesus. Paul uses the term grace more than any other writer in the Bible. In Jesus Christ you have been graced. You are chosen by grace, favored in Jesus by grace. You have been set apart for His purpose and presented to Him as blameless by grace. You belong to Father God through adoption by grace. You have been redeemed from Satan and sin by God's grace. You have been forgiven by God's grace. You have His absolute kindness on your life because of God's grace. You are a loved, accepted and a purpose-filled person, if you know and love Jesus, all by His grace.

VIII. In Jesus you have God's seal of His approval

In Paul's day a seal marked what belonged to a person. By placing His Holy Spirit in us, God also places His seal upon us. Ephesians 1:13-14 says, **“And when you believed in Christ, He identified you as His own by giving you the Holy Spirit, whom He promised long ago. ¹⁴The Spirit is God's guarantee that He will give us the inheritance He promised and that He has purchased us to be His own people.”** If you have surrendered your life to Jesus you belong to Him. You are His brother or sister. You are God's daughter or son, and the proof that you belong to Him is that you will see the work, love and life of the Holy Spirit through your own life. Practically speaking, this means that the foretaste of the Kingdom of God we enjoy in this life is only the beginning. It is the power and the leading of the Holy Spirit in your life that gives you the assurance that you have eternal life. Communion time.

COMMUNION

Mark 14:22-25, “As they were eating, Jesus took some bread and blessed it. Then He broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, ‘Take it, for this is My body.’²³ And He took a cup of wine and gave thanks to God for it. He gave it to them, and they all drank from it.²⁴ And He said to them, ‘This is My blood, which confirms the covenant between God and His people. It is poured out as a sacrifice for many.²⁵ I tell you the truth, I will not drink wine again until the day I drink it new in the Kingdom of God.’”