

Route Sixty-Six

Part Forty-Nine

Ephesians

Every Spiritual Blessing

(John 5:39; Ephesians 1:3)

With Study Questions

*Pastor Paul Viggiano
Branch of Hope Church
2370 W. Carson Street, #100
Torrance, CA 90501
212-6999
pastorpaul@branchofhope.org
www.branchofhope.org
9/20/2020*

310)

Route Sixty-Six

Part Forty-Nine

Ephesians

Every Spiritual Blessing

(John 5:39; Ephesians 1:3)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ (Ephesians 1:3).

Introduction

Often, I have found, I am more excited about the message I am bringing forth than those listening. There is good reason for this. Throughout the week I am baptized in the wonderful instructions of dear saints (mostly departed) who have made every effort to help me appreciate what the Scriptures are teaching about God-His riches, His blessings and what duty He requires of me. It is the most wonderful component of a wonderful job.

After this delightful immersion, the pastor stands before the congregation, as it were, with a fire hose trying to fill teacups. He/I (for I think this is true of many pastors) is so excited to share his discoveries! It's the way you might feel when you read a great book or watch a great movie or find a great restaurant. You can't wait to share it with your friends and loved ones. You watch them take that first bite and you're waiting for them to react!

If they don't have a sufficient reaction, you become vexed. Maybe you ordered the wrong item or there was a different chef. How can someone possibly not see the beauty or taste how delicious this meal is?! As a pastor, sometimes you fear you have ruined a great meal with a poor, or insufficient, presentation.

What we can be confident of, to push the metaphor, is that the ingredients of this meal, being the word of God, are sublime. And the reasons we aren't bursting forth in praise are not found in the shortcomings of God's truth, but the limitations of our own spiritual, intellectual and ethical dimness.

In this short epistle to the saints in Ephesus, Paul breaks into prayer twice; large sections in Ephesians 1:15-23 and Ephesians 3:14-19. These prayers are not so much petitions for items or deliverance or health. They are, essentially, prayers that his readers would begin to comprehend what he was writing—that which already belongs to them. And after that second prayer it's almost as if Paul cannot contain himself and bursts into a benediction in the middle of his letter. Let's see if we can catch a little of his excitement. Lord help our hearts move in that direction.

A Survey of Ephesians

A Lack of One-ness

Why would Paul write Ephesians? He didn't write out of thin air. He wasn't cordially killing time with a 'just thinking of you' note. It would appear there was a problem. The *symptom* of this problem was a lack of unity in the church. This unity, or one-ness, is seen when Paul turns (halfway through the letter) to the very practical application of what he is hoping will be their reaction to what he has written.

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, ²with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, ³endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴*There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all (Ephesians 4:1-5).*

A bit shameful, don't you think, that he must write to them from prison to motivate them to behave well. But his point should be obvious. There is one God, one baptism, one faith, one Lord, one Spirit, one body-unity! But true unity was lacking. Like when kids take their friends hand and make them slap themselves. The symptom here was a church that was slapping itself. What would Paul, the Spirit, prescribe to heal this malady?

More often than not, merely telling someone to behave is insufficient if you desire true, lasting, heart-motivated transformation. So, for three

chapters Paul will take them deep into the caverns and high into the heavens of why there should be unity.

The Heart of Unity

At some level most of us have experienced unity. To this day I still get together once a year with my college roommates who were also teammates. Players and coaches often feel this bond, this *esprit de corps* (the *spirit of the body* due to some kind of common experience). It is more often applied to the military, but it can be applied to family or a work project. The movie, *Apollo 13*, captured this among the engineers posed with a life-saving mission for the endangered astronauts.

It is while Paul is laying the foundation for a true bond a unity that he breaks into prayer and benediction. What unity do we have as brothers and sisters in Christ that far exceeds the unity-the bond-provided by noble, albeit, less profound ties that bind? He begins his explanation in the form of a praise-one of the longest sustained outflowings of praise we read in the New Testament.

It begins in Ephesians 1:3, with the words, **“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...”** Then he begins to explain why. He has:

Blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.

Who can calculate the magnitude of such a statement?

He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless.

Prior to us choosing Him, He chose us! And He didn't choose us because we were holy, but to make us holy.

He predestined us to adoption as sons.

More than once Paul will call upon the predestinating election of God as a source of unity and praise. The very doctrine that troubles the creature

is that which brings glory to the Creator and is designed to come back around and bring unity to the body.

Paul will then, as it were, pause as if to explain the first cause of all things. Again, if this be applied to anyone or anything but God, it would (and has been) a travesty and a tragedy. What is the first cause? The answer to the great 'why' from the lips of human pottery?

...according to the good pleasure of His will.

These are words he will say again (1:9). Paul continues his fire hose at the teacups.

“According to the riches of His grace” we have “redemption... forgiveness” again, “according to His good pleasure.”

And what is the end game of God's good pleasure?

...that in the dispensation¹ of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth – in Him (Ephesians 1:10).

And to quell the notion that our inclusion in this great plan of the ages-this eternal plan of peace and unity for all humanity (Jew, Gentile, every nation, kindred and tongue) to enjoy-is somehow contingent upon the superiority of one person over another, Paul labors his point with words which have been, again, a source of both the sweetest peace and hottest consternation.

In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will (Ephesians 1:11).

¹ On a radio talk show this verse was produced in defense of Dispensationalism, as if the word itself was an argument for the entirety of the doctrine. I explained to the listener that I believe we should be witnesses for Jehovah, but that doesn't make me a Jehovah's Witness.

I am grieved that we must stop. But this extended praise for that which we already *possess* is followed by an extended prayer that we might *perceive*. He will pray that the “**eyes of [our] understanding**” might be enlightened (Ephesians 1:18). He wants us to “**know**” what we already have.

And the power which accomplishes all of this is the same power that raised Christ from the dead. Jesus Christ is at the right Hand of God...

...far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come (Ephesians 1:21).

Beware wary of doctrines which teach that Jesus has not yet taken the throne! They work against the glory of God and the unity of Christ’s church.

And, as if to immediately shut down the natural human pride which may attend realizing what a glorious mission we have been called to, Paul reminds them of their previous, natural state. They/we were “**dead in trespasses and sins**” (Ephesians 2:1). They/we were “**children of wrath**” (Ephesians 2:3). It is with a pastoral heart that Paul does not leave them long in their history. The glorious conjunction comes rapidly, “**But God, who is rich in mercy**” is followed by yet more expressions yielding humility to the human heart and exaltation to the riches of God’s grace.

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast. ¹⁰ For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:8-10).

Paul will then spend time addressing the specific problem of his era. The promises were made to and through Israel. Yet now there were gentiles in the church.

Clearly, prior to Christ, the Jew/gentile distinction was significant (though there were many gentiles even in the Old Testament who were included among the covenant people of God). But God chose a single nation through whom He would preserve the message and deliver the Savior!

They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. ⁵ To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen (Romans 9:4, 5).

The gentiles were not part of this. They were...

...aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world (Ephesians 2:12)

Yet Paul offers another conjunction, **"But now in Christ"** (Ephesians 2:13) that has all changed. The **"wall of separation"** between Jew and gentile has come down. Paul was urging his readers to no longer view each other as **"strangers and foreigners"** but as **"fellow citizens."**

Paul is seeking to dispel the notion that any Christian, any person, has obtained a higher status by anything other than the good pleasure of God's gracious, predestinating will. The source of true unity, the means by which God creates **"in Himself one new man from the two"** (Ephesians 2:15), is through the preaching of peace to those near and those afar off.

It is very difficult to read these passages and draw the conclusion that members of that church would walk away from worship and be able to say to their fellow believer, "but there are still promises that belong to me that do not belong to you."

Before moving into the practical application of his letter, Paul will then launch into a prayer that Christ may dwell in the hearts of his readers. That they...

...being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—¹⁹ to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God (Ephesians 3:17b-19).

This is what moves Paul to a benediction followed by lessons on what true unity consists of. Again, it is painful to shorten the lesson here, but briefly stated, these last three chapters consist of:

- **Gifts from God and the word of God toward unity and Christian maturity (Ephesians 4:7-14).**
- **A willingness to no longer walk as the world. To put on the new man (Ephesians 4:17-24).**
- **A pursuit of moral living. Lying, anger, stealing, corrupt words, sexual impurity, unfruitful works of darkness, drunkenness, etc. Which all give a place for the devil (Ephesians 4:25-5:14).**
- **Worship to the glory of God and one another's benefit (Ephesians 5:17-20).**
- **Honor God as husbands, wives, parents, children, masters and servants (Ephesians 5:21-6:9).**
- **Recognize this to be a spiritual war which requires spiritual armor (Ephesians 6:10-20).**

Conclusion

We are in a war-a spiritual war. But let us recognize in a very significant way that it is a war that has already been won. The Goliath of sin and death was conquered by the One anointed by God who is Christ. Let us appreciate the order of this epistle. The practicality of chapters four, five and six become the most impractical pursuit imaginable apart from the Gospel of chapters one, two and three.

It would be like removing a person's legs and bidding them to run a race. Apart from the victory of Christ, the cross, the resurrection, the ascension, there is no race to be run. The spiritually dead do not run a spiritual race. May the rich mercy of God find and give life to our hearts by grace through faith in Christ.

Questions for Study

1. Why do you suppose you find some sermons or lessons more edifying or enriching than others (page 2)?
2. How did the Apostle Paul respond to his own writings in Ephesians (page 3)?
3. What was the problem the saints at Ephesus were contending with? How do you know this (pages 3, 4)?
4. What was Paul's method in solving the problem in Ephesus (pages 4, 5)?
5. What is the first cause or initial reason for the events in life? What would the alternatives be (page 5)?
6. Why should we be reminded of our previous, natural condition (page 6)?
7. Discuss the unity of the Jew and gentile Christian (page 7).
8. What are some practical applications of a unified church (page 8)?
9. In what respect are we in a spiritual war? In what respects is the war already won (page 8)?