

“Our Unlimited Resources” (part 2)

Ephesians 1:1-14

Several years ago, there was a reality tv show called, “Treasure Hunters,” which aired on NBC. The show’s basic premise involved teams of three that had to solve puzzles and complete challenges in hopes of solving the ultimate puzzle and winning the grand prize. Teams travel across the United States and Europe in search of seven “artifacts” which when assembled will lead to the key. Find the key, and find the treasure. The teams were given a cell phone, a laptop, and a GPS to help them in their search. Find the key, find the treasure.

If you have a Bible with you, take it and turn with me to the first chapter of Ephesians. In this passage, we read about the immense treasure that is ours in Jesus Christ. Faith is the key to accessing this treasure!

Last week, I began a brand new series of sermons that I’ve given the title, “Spiritual Habits.” We’re going to spend some time taking an in-depth look at the Christian life and all that it involves from start to finish.

“Habit” — *a settled practice; a usual manner of behavior*

Most often, we tend to view a ‘habit’ in a negative sense as in something that needs to be given up. However, there are good habits that ought to be cultivated in our lives, things we habitually pursue and practice in the Christian life. Think of them as ‘grace’ habits or spiritual disciplines we give ourselves to as people of faith. Think of it as the working out of what God has worked in.

Philippians 2:12-13—“...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.”

The Christian life involves ‘working out’ what God has ‘worked in.’ The word translated as ‘work out’ in verse 12 is a word that means to perform, or to accomplish. It speaks of working to full completion, like working out a problem in math, or like working a field in order to get the greatest harvest possible. The word translated as ‘works in’ in verse 13 is the word ‘energeo’ which means to be active and operative. ***The idea is that it is the life of God in the believer that is the source of our strength.*** The habits of holiness that you and I are called to practice are not done in our own effort or strength, but in the strength of the One who is actively working in us.

As a Christian, you are someone who has been forgiven and are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. God’s purpose for your life involves you progressing in your faith to maturity. The word that the Bible uses for growth and maturity in the Christian life is the word ‘sanctification’ which describes the work of God in conforming the believer to the image of His Son. To be ‘sanctified’ is to be set apart.

God has made sufficient provision for our sanctification in the gospel. His ultimate goal is the development of ‘family likeness’ whereby we become conformed to the image of Christ, expressing the character traits of our heavenly Father. This is something we can only do as the Holy Spirit works in our lives as believers. Holiness is an imperative, but it is first an indicative. The command to be holy is rooted in God’s gracious work. What He commands us to do, He also provides the means.

Over the coming weeks, I want us to look at these spiritual habits that I have grouped into several categories:

- Sharing His Life—the starting point
- Pursuing His Glory—the ultimate motive

- Hearing His Word—reading and studying the Bible
- Having His Ear—prayer, fasting
- Loving His Church—giving, participating, serving
- Obeying His Mission—evangelism, mission

Spiritual habits will not be rightly understood without first understanding all that you've been given in Christ. When God urges us to be holy, He doesn't throw us back on our own resources. Rather, we live by His grace and appropriate the resources He has provided for us in Christ. For this reason, I want you to look with me at what Paul writes in the first chapter of Ephesians. If you want to know what is yours in Christ, there's no better place.

In these chapters that make up the letter of Ephesians, Paul describes the church as being a temple for the Holy Spirit. It is built upon the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, with Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone. As a temple, he says we have been given 'unsearchable riches' in Christ. In the opening verses of the chapter, we are immediately introduced to the storehouse of wealth that is ours. There is a vast and inexhaustible treasury of wealth that is yours as a believer, and this is what we continually draw upon as we live the Christian life. That means that God hasn't left us to fend for ourselves. We don't live the Christian life in our own strength, but through all that He has graciously given us in Christ.

1—Recognize the RIGHTEOUSNESS you've been given

“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Designation— *“To the saints...”*

Now that word ‘saints’ in verse 1 is simply one of the many terms that is used in the New Testament to describe the person who has trusted in Jesus Christ as Savior and given His righteousness. To be saved is to be a saint. The Greek word is ‘hagios’ and it means holy and set apart. To be holy is to be different and distinct, set apart for God and His purposes.

James Montgomery Boice—*“Every Christian is a saint, and every saint is a Christian. Moreover, every true Christian is in some sense separated from the world. It does not mean that we are taken out of the world. This is not the way God operates. But it does mean that we are removed from it in the sense of not really belonging to the world any longer. If we are truly Christ’s, we have a new nature, a new set of loyalties, and a new agenda.”*

A ‘saint’ has been set apart by God, baptized into the life of Christ, and is to then live for God as a billboard of grace. He has problems like everyone else, but approaches them differently because he has a different lifestyle. The word ‘saint’ is closely related to the word ‘sanctified.’

Sanctification is like a two-sided coin. On the one side, it involves being set apart from something. On the other, it involves being set apart for something. A saint is someone who has been set apart from sin and set apart for God. He no longer gives himself over to serve sin and self, but has been set apart to serve the Lord.

1 Peter 3:15—*“...sanctify the Lord God in your hearts.”*

Sanctification is to be viewed in past, present, and future. Our sanctification as ‘saints’ is:

- positional (past)

The Bible says that believers have an exalted position in Christ that they received at salvation, and this is crucial to knowing who we are Christians. The believer's position in Christ is an accomplished fact that occurred the moment he was saved and is something he will never lose. My position is secure in the Lord.

- progressive (present)

Positionally, I am sanctified. It is what God has done for me in Christ. Presently, I am being sanctified. It is what God is doing for me in Christ. And so when Peter says, 'Sanctify the Lord Jesus in your hearts,' I am simply being told to act in accordance with my new position. It is related to the daily practical expression of the Christian life. It involves cooperation with my will.

2 Corinthians 7:1 — “Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

We are holy in our position, but we're not always holy in our practice. We can't improve on our position. However, we can most definitely improve on our practice. The goal of the Christian life is to bring our practice in line with our position. It is here that spiritual disciplines, then, become very important.

- perfect (future)

Our sanctification as saints will one day be perfect when we reach our eternal home and see Jesus. When we are one day ushered into His presence, we will be like Him. We will be given a glorified, resurrection body.

Sanctification is the work of God, but your growth in Christ as a believer involves a cooperative effort between you and Him as you yield to the Spirit's work in your life. A lot of people fall into one of two extremes. On one hand, they become so

passive that they fail to take their sanctification seriously. On the other hand, they may act as if the Christian life is a matter of self-effort and they're acceptance is based on their performance. Avoid these extremes!

Location— “...*who are in Ephesus*”

They were saints who had been set apart from the world, but they were not removed out of the world. They were a people for God's own possession, but He had them right where they needed to be for the gospel's sake.

As saints, the Bible says that our citizenship is in heaven. Yet we also are citizens of the world. The believer has a dual citizenship. He lives in two worlds. Sanctification is not something that happens in isolation, but happens in a very specific time and location. God uses circumstances, trials, and our obedience. He uses means such as the spiritual habits we practice to mold us and transform us into the image of Christ.

Salvation— “...*faithful in Christ...grace...peace*”

The word 'faithful' carries the meaning of 'believers' in Christ Jesus. This doesn't imply that they were saved because they were faithful, but that they were faithful because they were saved. The point is that their faith was in Christ, and their lives were changed as a result. The truth expressed here is that faith in Jesus Christ results in faithfulness to Jesus Christ.

Notice Paul's expression there in verse 2—“Grace and peace to you.” Most of his letters begin in the same way. The word 'grace' refers to the kindness God toward those who don't deserve it. Grace is the unmerited, undeserved, unearned favor of God. It very much can be defined as **God's riches at Christ's expense**. Because believers have experienced the grace of God, they are at

peace with God and within themselves. Grace, faith, and peace all belong together in the experience of salvation.

2—Rely upon the RESOURCES you've been given

“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...”

Now, there is an unusual sentence structure in the passage that you don't really see in our English translations, but you do see it in the original language. From verse 3 all the way through verse 14, it is one long and unbroken sentence filled with adjectives. To read it, one is left breathless. It is Paul's way of amplifying our understanding of all the great wealth of resources we've been given in Christ. In verse 3, Paul states his theme that summarizes all that he will go on to say in the letter, and that theme is the believer's wealth in Christ. God has made us rich in Christ. Our Father in heaven is not poor and powerless—He is rich and has therefore made us rich in His Son.

Now let me tell you, this has nothing to do with material wealth. To be materially wealthy is not the same thing as being spiritually blessed. You can have all the money in the world and still be bankrupt on the inside. No amount of material wealth can cure the ills of the soul. There is no material possession that ever comes close. This is not a proof text for the health, wealth, and prosperity gospel.

Their source (v. 3a)

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...”

Verse 3 serves as a doxology of worship as Paul extols the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The word that he uses for 'blessed' translates a Greek

word that means eulogy. Now, when you think of a ‘eulogy,’ more than likely you imagine someone speaking words of blessing and tribute in honor of a person who has died. The word Paul uses here means ‘to be praised.’

“Blessed be...” —word is ‘eulogetos’ and is an adjective which means to be adored, to be celebrated with praises

“...blessed us” —word is ‘eulogeo’ and is an aorist tense verb; means to speak well of

“...every spiritual blessing” —word is ‘eulogia’ and a noun that means bounty and benefits

You need to pay attention here to what Paul is doing. In a letter that largely deals with who we are in Christ and what the practical implications of that are for our lives, he begins with God. His starting point is the exaltation of God for who He is and what He has done. Is that your starting point?

One of our problems is that we don’t often start where we should. We easily become self-centered and self-focused. What matters to us is our own individual experience. Is it any wonder, then, why we become so discouraged? We must keep our minds focused upon the Lord!

Paul uses a form of this word ‘blessing’ three times in verse 3, and it is his way of setting in motion an anthem of praise to the triune God that extends all the way to verse 14.

Charles Swindoll —*“Interspersed throughout this concert of praise, three resounding doxologies, or praises of God’s glory, emerge. In Paul’s mind, everything God does is for His own glory and honor. Theologians call this the ‘doxological purpose’ of God’s plan.”*

Each of these three doxologies in verse 6, 12, and 14 relates to the work of a distinct member of the Godhead—Father (v. 3-6), Son (v. 7-12), and Spirit (v. 13-14).

We express this truth when we sing the ‘Doxology’:

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;

Praise Him, all creatures here below;

Praise Him above, ye heavenly host;

Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost!

Their access (v. 3b)

“...who has blessed us in Christ...”

One of the most profound and important principles of New Testament faith is built on a simple preposition—“in.” The expression ‘in Christ’ occurs 216 times in Paul’s letters and 26 times in the writings of the apostle John.

This phrase and its equivalents, such as ‘in Him,’ or ‘in Christ,’ or ‘in the Lord,’ occur 39 times in these chapters. It reflects a rich truth that is often neglected—Before the Christian life is ever one of imitation, it is first one of participation. It describes the spiritual position of the believer in which he is identified with Christ. By the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ alone, every believer is joined in union with Christ. This union is the relationship through which we receive every benefit of salvation. Every believer is joined to Christ in one spiritual body so that what is true of Him is also true for us. (see John 15)

John Stott—*“To be ‘in Christ’ is to be personally and vitally united to Christ, as branches are to the vine and members to the body, and thereby also to Christ’s people. For it is impossible to be part of the Body without being related to both*

the Head and the members. According to the New Testament, and especially Paul, to be a Christian is in essence to be 'in Christ,' one with Him and His people."

The believer is in Christ, and therefore is able to draw on the wealth of Christ for his own daily living. Again, it means that we have been joined to Christ in an inseparable union so that what is true of Him is also true of the believer.

Their breadth (v. 3c)

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

This can be translated as 'all the blessings of the Spirit' and refers to what we have been given in the Holy Spirit. God the Father has given us every blessing of God the Spirit, through God the Son. The Holy Spirit is the One who channels our riches to us from the Father, through the Son. Not to know and depend on His provision is to live a life of unnecessary and self-imposed spiritual poverty. We've been blessed with every spiritual blessing! This means that we've already been given everything we need for a satisfying and successful Christian life.

2 Peter 1:3—“His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us to His own glory and excellence.”

When it comes to living the Christian life, the power of God has granted to us 'all things.' This means that we have inexhaustible resources and supplies for our every need. There is a vast storehouse of blessing that God has given us access to in Christ. This is not something that I am waiting for, but something that I have been given access to now. He has already blessed us with all spiritual blessings and given unto us all things that pertain to life and godliness.

And yet most Christians I know don't seem to live like this is a reality. We are often bothered and upset by our perceived lack of resources. So we pray, "I need more patience." Or, "I need more love in my heart." Or, "I need more joy in life."

It is not an issue of you needing 'more' of something. It is an issue of you calling upon something you already have!

We have reason to worship and sing the praises of God because we've been blessed in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. The word 'heavenly' translates a word that means above the sky. It includes more than just the idea of heaven, for it encompasses the full supernatural realm of God. This refers to the present experience of blessing, the invisible realities of your life today as a believer—your thought-life, your attitudes, your behavior. It is the place where you experience conflict, pressure, struggle, and temptation. It is the place where you are exposed to the attack of the enemy, where the heat of the battle is in your life.

Ephesians 6:12—“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”

The invisible realms are the places of conflict, but it also is the place of blessing for you as a believer. Because of our union with Christ, we're seated in heavenly places with Jesus now. That means that everything Paul is going to unfold in these verses are rock-solid foundational truths that sustain us through every trial of the Christian life.

3—Rest in the RELATIONSHIP you've been given

“...even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will, to the praise of His glorious grace, with which He has blessed us in the Beloved.”

Let me challenge you to do something. Take a pen or a highlighter and underline all the verbs of this passage. A verb is an action word. You will notice that all of the action words in these verses refer to God and the work that He has done for us in Christ to bring us into relationship.

In verses 3-14, Paul outlines the privileged relationship that believers have with God through faith in Jesus Christ. The Christian life is one of relationship whereby you've been adopted into the family and completely accepted by God on the basis of faith in Christ. All that is necessary for this to become reality has been accomplished by God.

God the Father (v. 4-6)

“...even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will, to the praise of His glorious grace, with which He has blessed us in the Beloved.”

God the Son (v. 7-12)

“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of His will, according to His purpose, which He set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Him, things in heaven and things on earth. In Him we have

obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of His glory.”

God the Holy Spirit (v. 13-14)

“In Him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in Him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of His glory.”

You say, “But I don’t feel like I’m seated in heavenly places right now!” True, you may not feel like it. When the stress and pressure of life comes, when our health begins to slip away, when disappointment comes. That’s why you need to accept this truth by faith. Faith is the key that opens up God’s treasure chest of riches in Christ.

Hebrews 11:1—“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”

2 Corinthians 4:18—“...we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.”

Paul’s starting principle here in this passage regarding the blessing of God is that His blessing is something that has already been accomplished. It is not a future promise to be fulfilled, but a present gift to be grasped. Our progress in the Christian life comes by understanding this. Knowing who we are will shape how we live. Not knowing who we are as Christians will leave us confused in our lifestyle. We end up living below our privilege.

A few years ago, there was a tragic story that came out in the news about Timothy Gray, a homeless man who had frozen to death while living under a railway bridge in Wyoming. Gray's body was discovered by some children who were sledding under the Union Pacific Railroad overpass. When state officials determined his identity, it was discovered that he was a long-lost relative of a reclusive and eccentric New York heiress named Huguette Clark. Timothy Gray was the half great-nephew of Clark, and tragically he was unaware that he was entitled to 7 percent of her \$300 million copper mining fortune...

Sadly, a lot of Christian men and women live like that.

Each and every day, from the moment our feet hit the floor, our first thought should be, "I'm a child of God, chosen by Him to be a member of His forever family. I'm forgiven and accepted in Christ, a holy saint of God. All of His wealth is my inheritance—and I can draw upon these riches every moment of every single day, and this is regardless of what my circumstances may be."

On the basis of what He has done for me in Christ, I am to devote my whole life to Him. I am to present my body to Him as a living sacrifice. I am to be transformed through the renewal of my mind. And as Hebrews 12:14 says, I am to strive for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

Remember, we start from a place of relationship!

Pursuing holiness and cultivating spiritual habits make sense only when you realize who you are in Christ and what you have in Christ. If you don't know Him as your personal Savior, that invitation is extended to you today! Believe the gospel of Christ's death on the cross and resurrection from the grave. Receive forgiveness of sins and a new position in Him today!