

“What Kind of Church Should We Be?” – Ephesians 1:3-10

If you could ask God one question and know that He would answer you, what would you ask? Maybe you would ask for healing or for money. Maybe you are dying to know who really shot Kennedy or who all is in the Epstein files they keep saying they are going to open. But I bet a lot of you would ask why about something. Why did God do or allow some bad thing in your life? I understand the desire to know.

For me, at least right now, I would ask God where He wants our church building to be and when and how is He going to provide it? I keep telling people who ask me that we are just waiting on God. But then it dawned on me. What if God is waiting on us? What if He is trying to teach us something? What if He is waiting on us to be a certain way before He provides us with a building? What if we need to do something or be something that we aren't right now?

I thought the start of a new year would be a good time for us to make sure we are who we are supposed to be and we are doing what we are supposed to do before God shows us where He wants us to be. So, we are going to go to scripture to help us figure that out the next few weeks. I thought this would be an appropriate time to look at the book of Ephesians because Paul wrote the book, as he usually did, to a church, not unlike ours and he wrote it for a reason.

Paul wrote a lot of his letters to churches that had real problems. The churches at Colosse and Galatia had some doctrinal problems and so Paul wrote them to set them straight. The church at Corinth was so messed up he had to write them twice to get them back on the straight and narrow but the church at Ephesus was a growing and thriving church that Paul wanted to encourage and celebrate with them the *“glorious grace of our Lord Jesus Christ”*, as he would say so often.

Paul says that we have everything we need to start a new life as individuals and as a church through the grace of God. He says that we are given every spiritual blessing and that we are given forgiveness, and we have been adopted by God but that there is a catch to it. We are given all these things only one way and it is written in Ephesians over and over again what this catch is.

Do you know what the catch is to all of these blessings? We have to be **“in Christ”**. That's the catch. Paul says it 11 times in just the first 14 verses. He says, “In Him” or “In Christ”

over and over again and I want you to pay attention to this repetition as we go through those verses. Turn to **Ephesians chapter 1** and let's read **verses 3-10**.

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. ⁴ For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵ he^[a] predestined us for adoption to sonship^[b] through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace ⁸ that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, ⁹ made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, ¹⁰ to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

So, I was once again reminded of our similarities as Christ Fellowship to the first church, this time to the Ephesians and I want to encourage and celebrate with you the words of Paul to a church on how we should act and relate to others and to God. I want us to see in these passages how we are blessed by God's grace and through our being "in Christ". **We have the blessing of election, adoption and unification.**

But before we get to the blessings we have for being "in Christ" we need to figure out what it actually means to be in Christ. First off, what it is not: being in Christ is not religion. It is way more freeing than religion. It is not self-improvement. That should come about when we are in Christ but being a better person is not the goal. It is not church membership. Again, that should be assumed that someone in Christ should be a member of a local church but that's not the goal.

1 Corinthians 6:17 says, *"But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit."* **Philippians 3:10** says, *"I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings."* Being in Christ is not just walking the aisle and getting baptized and joining the church. It is being united with Him, knowing Him, abiding in Him and with Him. It is not just coming to church but giving your whole life to know Him better and to be obedient to what He says the best that you know how. And you are learning more and being changed more every day. It is a full and abundant life (John 10:10) being in Him.

It means listening to music that is about Him, reading books about Him, having conversations about Him. Having friends who are also in Him. It means coming to and supporting your local church. If coming to church is not a priority in your life, don't tell me

you are in Christ. It is not true. The church is the bride of Christ and we should love what He loves. That also means supporting the church with tithes and offerings. You can't be in Christ and, as **Malachi 3:8** says, “rob God” at the same time.

You know what being in Christ really is? It means to be holy. What is holy? It means to be separate and different from the world. That's what is going to draw people to our church. They don't even know it but what they are looking for is people who live and love like Jesus. They sure don't want religion. That's just a bunch of rules. We all want to be around people who believe in something so strongly that it changes their lives to something unlike the world. That is what being in Christ really is.

Now, let's continue with the passage and see what the blessings are for being in Christ. And these blessings can be understood as being blessings in the past, blessings for the present and blessings in the future. Let's look first at our blessing of **election**. Now, when I start talking about election, predestination or choosing, some of you start to cringe. Some of you get ready to debate why you are a Calvinist or Arminian and why you are right and everybody else is wrong. Or maybe you have no idea what I'm talking about because so many people have not heard this preached on much. We are not going to debate it here. I agree with the great old-time preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon who was asked one time how he reconciled the concept of predestination and the sovereignty of God with the notion that man has a free will to choose his eternal destination. His answer was classic. He said, *“I see no need to reconcile between friends.”* In other words, the Bible teaches that God is sovereign. The Bible also teaches that man is responsible for his actions. We are responsible to act in accordance with God's will. And because God is in control, we are responsible to obey Him—that is our purpose. (The Church In Christ by Jim Drake, Sermoncentral)

It says in **verse 4** that He chose us, **in Him**, before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. We are blessed because He chose us from His entirely unmerited favor. He chose us in spite of the fact that, in our old life, we were unholy and blameworthy. Why would He do such a thing? Paul tells us further down in **verse 6**, *“to the praise of His glorious grace”*.

So, how are we to be as a church? Holy and blameless. Why? To promote our church? No. For the glory of God. For His praise. So people will see us and see that we are different and God will get the honor and praise.

Next, let's look at the blessing we have of **our adoption**. In **verse 5** it says that He has predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ. My sister, Suzy, used to work for The Gladney Center for Adoption in south Ft. Worth and she was telling me a great story a while back. Years ago, the maintenance man, Richard Kelly, got to work there one morning and thought he heard a cat or something in the bushes. He went to check it out and there was a baby boy wrapped up in a blanket in front of one of the side doors. Somebody had dropped him off in the middle of the night and drove off.

He took the boy inside and took him to the Transitional Care unit and they took him to the doctor and got him checked out and fixed up. He was basically healthy and then they placed him with a family that was on the waiting list who was waiting to adopt a baby and they were ecstatic! They picked him up and it was a huge celebration. In fact, on the day they estimate to be his birthday, his family brings him back to Gladney and the whole staff throws a party for him because that baby is so special.

On one hand my heart breaks for that baby's birthmother. I can't comprehend what she must have felt and probably still feels. She must have been very confused and scared. I'm sure she wondered why this had to happen to her and so she did what she could. And thankfully, little **Carson**, as he was named because he was the son of somebody in a car, found a wonderful home where he is loved and protected and adored.

Some may wonder why God would go ahead with creation when He knew it would be followed by the fall. Why would He do such a thing? Because He also knew that He would adopt us as His sons, joint heirs with His Son Jesus to have all spiritual blessings here on earth and even more incredible blessings when we see Him in Heaven.

And with that adoption we have rights and responsibilities. First, in **verses 7-8** it says that we have forgiveness of our sins through the redemption of the blood of Jesus. What an incredible gift! Redemption means that a price was paid for our freedom. It was used to speak of a slave and the price a master would pay. So, we have rights as a child of the one true King, Father God.

We are no longer slaves to sin and the guilt that comes with it. We don't have to try to be good enough. We can't pay that price and we don't have to. Jesus paid that with His life and because of that we can be forgiven.

The responsibility of that adoption is that we are to be "holy and blameless" as it says back in **verse 4**. We have talked about being holy before and now we see that we have a

perfect model in our family. His name is Lonnie Forester. Right? No! No! I'm kidding. His name is, of course, Jesus! Lonnie is a great role model but Jesus is absolutely perfect. Don't ask yourself what would Lonnie do. Ask yourself what would Jesus do.

We have seen **the past blessing of election** and the **present blessing of adoption**. Let's look at the **future blessing of unification** in **verses 9-10**. Read. Right now we don't have all the answers. Right now we see as though through a glass darkly. We only see the back side of that tapestry that is this life and it is a mystery.

What a blessing it will be when we can know why God would allow little Carson to be born to a mother who couldn't keep him. One of these days we will know why God allowed illness and disaster; why he didn't keep divorce and poverty away from us and our families. I don't understand why God would call me His friend nor do I understand why He allows some of the suffering that goes on but one day..."*when the times will have reached their fulfillment*"...when all of history is consummated and the time is right we will know.

In **Galatians 4:4** it says that in the fullness of time God sent His Son and here it says that when the fulfillment of time has been reached everything will be brought together, unified, under the lordship of Christ. That was the plan from the very beginning. Before the creation of the world, God knew that you would have difficulties. He knew what was going to happen to you and that you wouldn't always understand it.

But to know that one day we will see both sides of the tapestry; we will see Jesus and we will know how and why all of this came about so that through all of it, God's grace and mercy will be made known for those of us who are **in Christ**.

I have just a couple more verses I want to read in **chapter 2** starting with **verses 1-2** and then skipping to **verses 4-7**. "*As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ²in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world.*" Now skip to **verse 4**. "*⁴But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.*"

Woo! That Paul, he should have been a writer, huh? That's beautiful! That's wonderful! And that is how we should act and be known as individuals and as a church. We are to be known as a church who has been blessed because of God's grace

and so we bless others. We have been forgiven so we forgive others. We have a blessed past, present and future through His Son Jesus and we just want others to have what we have.

We are to be known as a church that has been elected to be His holy and blameless children. We are to be known as loved, adored and protected adoptees of the Creator. And we are to be known as those who have faith that one day very soon we will finally understand and be united with our Lord Jesus Christ and everything we do and say will be to His glory; not to make our name famous but His!

Music

That is the kind of church we should be. That's the kind of church the world actually wants us to be and the kind of church that God demands us to be if we are in Christ. Does that describe you today? If not, then maybe you don't truly have that life-changing relationship with God through Jesus that we talk about around here. But you can. And all you have to do is believe that Jesus, who is God, came down from Heaven to die on a cross to pay the price that God the Father said was due for your sins. Then allow the Holy Spirit of God to come into your life and change you every day to look more and more like Him every day. Do it right now as the music plays.