

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

EPHESIANS LESSON 1 (Chapter 1)

Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST. Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, Kevin Pendergrass.

“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” (Eph. 1:3). Welcome to the Gospel of Christ. This is the first lesson in our study of the Book of Ephesians. In this first lesson we are going to talk about the importance of being “in Christ.” But before we do that, I want to talk first about the importance of location. Today, we as human beings understand the importance of where we are located. I remember when I was growing up and was in the third grade, a tornado warning had been issued. We went outside to see if we could spot the tornado, and we saw it coming right toward us. It was at that point that we really understood the importance of being inside—the importance of being in the closet, or in some other safe location. Maybe you are walking outside on the street someday and it begins to rain. If you do not want to get wet, you’ll understand the importance of being inside. If we can understand that from a worldly, physical standpoint, how much more should we realize the importance of being “in Christ” so that our spiritual being can be in a spiritual place and a safe place? That is what we are going to talk about in this lesson.

Why is it so important that we are “in Christ”? There are several reasons. The first reason why it is important for us to be in Christ is because all spiritual blessings are found only “in Christ.” We see in Ephesians 1:3 that only in Christ can spiritual blessings be found. Let’s talk about some general, worldly blessings that **everyone** receives. Whether people are Christians or not, everyone receives certain general, worldly blessings. In Romans 1:20 Paul said, “Since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.” Paul said that people should have no excuse **not** to believe in God. In fact, people should go in search of God merely because of the beauty of His creation, and should know that there is a Creator. Whether one is a Christian or not, he can see and enjoy the beauty of God’s creation. We learn from Genesis 2:9 that “out of the ground the Lord God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food.” Nature is something that is pleasant, and is a blessing that everyone can enjoy. Look at what Jesus said in Matthew 5:45 about the just and the unjust—“That you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” Jesus is saying that there will good things that happen to bad people. There will be bad things that happen to good people. That is simply the way it works. That is the way the natural order works. There will be times when general blessings occur for everyone. One of the questions that people ask is, “Why do bad things happen to good people?” Jesus answered that question in Matthew 5:45. Good things will happen to everybody, and bad things will happen to everybody. So, yes, there are worldly blessings that all people can receive. But only “in Christ” can one receive **spiritual** blessings.

Now I want to talk about some of these spiritual blessings. There are many spiritual blessings about which we could talk. But today we will be talking about only a few of them. One of those is the spiritual blessing of joy. Galatians 5:22 talks about one of the fruits of the Spirit being joy. This is not just being happy during happy times. Look at someone who may be miserable most of his life. In fact, you may know someone who is hardly ever happy or joyful. Put that person in a good situation where he is getting everything he wants, and he may be happy for a few minutes, hours, days, or weeks. But eventually he goes back to being miserable. Why? It's because that person does not have **true** joy. Only "in Christ" can find one find true joy. It is not just a joy that one experiences during happy times. James 1:2 says that we can be joyful (and should be joyful) even during times of trials and tribulations. This does not mean that we should say, "I just can't wait to see the next bad thing that will happen to me because that will make me feel good." But when those types of things do come, we still can find joy because our joy is not connected just to this world and material things, but is connected to spiritual things. It is those things that really matter. Being in Christ, a Christian has a different mindset than those in the world. We are not living just for today or for this world. We are living for something greater. In Romans 8:28 look at what Paul said: "We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose." The faithful Christian might have a car break down, might have his house wrecked by a tornado, or might have someone close to him die. But he knows that no matter what, if he remains faithful, he will have Heaven as his eternal home. We can always have the spiritual blessing of joy.

We also can have (and should have) the spiritual blessing of hope and salvation if we are in Christ. Hope and salvation can be found only in Christ. When we look at 1 John 5:13 we see John saying, "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life." Only in Christ can we have hope. Only in Christ can we have salvation. I want to talk about a biblical hope, not a worldly type of hope. We sometimes use the word "hope" to mean "a chance." We might say, "Well, I hope that my favorite sports team wins this weekend." What we mean by that is that the team might win, or might not win. But we hope that the team wins. We sometimes look at hope as we would the flip of a coin. "I'm going to flip this coin, and I hope it lands on heads." Or, "I hope it lands on tails. But I really can't know." That is not biblical hope, which is **knowing** that we have eternal life, as 1 John 5:13 says. If we are in Christ, we can **know** that we have salvation. What is sad about this is that if a person is **not** in Christ, then he can know that he does **not** have salvation. For those who are outside of Christ, there is no hope past this life. That is why it is so vital that we are found "in Christ." The importance of being in Christ is that we have Heaven for eternity. What a spiritual blessing and joy that is. We read in Revelation 21:1-4 that no longer will there be any tears in Heaven. Look at what Revelation 14:13 says: "Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, 'Write: "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them.'" Those who die in Christ will have Heaven as their eternal home. That is such a wonderful spiritual blessing. But it can be found only in Christ.

Another great spiritual blessing is knowing that Christ is on our side. In Matthew 10:32 Jesus said that if we confess Him before men, then He will confess us before His Father in Heaven. That means that if we live a life that is pleasing to Him ("in Christ"), and if we live a life that is "walking in the light" as 1 John 1:7-9 says, then Christ is on our side. Plus, He will be on our side when the Day of Judgment comes. If there is anyone who we should want on our side on that great day, it is Christ. Matthew 10:33 is a sad verse. It says the exact opposite: "Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven." We therefore need to make sure that we are in Christ

so that we know that Christ is on our side. The Bible says that if Christ is not for us, then He is against us. If we are outside of Christ, cannot be for us. That is why it is so vital that we are found “in Christ.”

Another spiritual blessing is the forgiveness of sin. Before Christ died to shed His blood, there existed under the Old Law a day of atonement. It was not a day where the people simply forgot all of their sins. Rather, it was a day on which they remembered their sins. Now that Jesus has died and shed his blood, we can read the following from Hebrews 10: 16-17—“’This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days,’ says the Lord: ‘I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them,’ then He adds, ‘Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.’” What a great spiritual blessing it is to have our sins forgiven because we are in Christ. But our sins can be forgiven only if we are in Christ. If we are in Christ, not only will our sins be forgiven, but no longer will those sins be remembered.

There are so many great spiritual blessings that are found in Christ. These are just a few. We could talk for so long about the many spiritual blessings that are in Christ. But we must be in Christ in order to have them.

The second point of this lesson about why it is important for us to be “in Christ” has to do with the fact that in Christ we are “the chosen.” Ephesians 1:4 says, “...just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him.” This is not teaching predestination, where God said, “OK. I want this person to be saved, and I want this person to be saved. But I want this person to be lost.” Rather, it is teaching that Christ chose the kind of people who would be saved by saying that everyone who is “in Christ” will be saved. All of those who do God’s will, will be saved. God planned before time began that all those who are in Christ will be saved. We are chosen because we choose Christ. One of the most wonderful things about Christianity is that it is a choice. God did not create us as robots that have no choice or say-so in the matter. God created us with choice. In Joshua 24:15 we read,

“And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

You may see this passage on people’s doormats. We **do** have a choice. If you want to choose to worship something that is not the true and living God, you have the choice to do that. God does not want you to do that. But He will not stop you because He has given everyone the freedom to choose. In Proverbs 1:28-29 we read, “Then they will call on Me, but I will not answer; they will seek Me diligently, but they will not find Me because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord.” People did not choose the fear of the Lord. Verse 30 says, “They would have none of My counsel, and despised My every rebuke.” Christianity is indeed a choice. In Isaiah 7:16 we read, “Before the child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land that you dread will be forsaken by both her kings.” Children are not born in sin, as this verse shows. Children are innocent. There is a time when they do not now how to refuse evil and choose good. However, such a time will come in their lives. It is an age of accountability, when we are expected to choose the good and refuse the evil. I want to emphasize that we are chosen because we choose God and Christ. In Matthew 20:16 and Matthew 22:14 the Bible says that many are called, but few are chosen. How are we called? We hear people today say that they received a calling to do God’s will. Unfortunately, many people do not understand what it means to be “called of God.” Someone might say, “God called me on the phone and talked to me. He told me that I need to do such and such.” That is not what the Bible teaches. How are we called? The

Bible tells us in 2 Thessalonians 2:14 how we are called: "To which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." How are we called? We are called through the Gospel. Romans 10:17 says that "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." We are called through God's Word, the Bible. God has called everyone who is willing to do what the Bible says. It is God's invitation for people to come to Him. But only a few are chosen. Why? Matthew 7:13-14 tells us that few people will choose to follow God. How are we chosen? We are chosen by choosing to follow Christ. The only way that we can ever be chosen, and say that we are part of the chosen, is if we first do what the Bible says and get "in Christ." In 2 Peter 1:10 the Bible says, "Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure." Our calling is not something about which we have no say-so. We are called through the Gospel. But how do we make our calling sure? We make it sure by continuing to be faithful. We are the ones who control that. The passage goes on to say that if we do these things, we "will never stumble." If we do what the Bible says, then we can make our calling and election sure. The importance of being in Christ is so that we can say that we are part of the chosen because we have chosen Him.

Another reason why it is so important for us to be "in Christ" is because we are adopted if we are in Christ. And only in Christ can we be adopted. From Ephesians 1:5 we read, "...having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself." We become part of God's family. Today, we understand how adoption works. I have many friends who are adopted. You may be adopted. But how wonderful it is to know that God will adopt us! But first, in order to be in the family of God, we must be "in Christ." Look at what Galatians 6:10 says: "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith." Being in Christ means that we are adopted. We are part of God's family. The good thing is that anyone can be in God's family. I've heard it said that you can't choose your family. But in this case we **can** choose our family. If you want God to be your Father, and if you want to be in God's family, then you can choose that. But you have to be "in Christ." In Galatians 4:5 we read, "...to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons." There we see it again—"adoption as sons." Anyone can be in the family of God. In Galatians 3:28 and Romans 1:16 we see that anyone—Jews, Gentiles, males, and females—can be part of the family of God. However, the only way that we can be adopted is if we are found faithful "in Christ."

If we are not in Christ, and if we are not part of God's family, the only other option is that Satan is our spiritual father. We need to ask ourselves, "Is God our spiritual Father, or is Satan?" Look at what John 8:44 says:

"You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it."

We need to ask, "Whose family are we in?" Are we in God's family, or are we in the family of the world where Satan is our spiritual father? The only way we can know is to go to the Bible. Who are we imitating? Who are we following? Are we "in Christ"? If not, then God is not our truth Father. We have yet to be adopted by God. We must make sure that we are in Christ so that we can be in the family of God.

Another reason why it is important to be in Christ is because in Christ we are accepted. In Ephesians 1:6 the Bible says, "...by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved." Where are we accepted? We are accepted only "in the Beloved"—only "in Christ." Romans 8:1 tells us, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit." Does that mean

that if we become Christians and are “in Christ,” then Christ will accept us “just as we are” and that we do not have to do anything at all? No. Paul goes on to talk about what will happen if we do not walk according to this world and according to the flesh. We must continue to be faithful and walk according to the way that God has commanded us to walk. We are to walk “in the light as He is in the light” (1 Jn. 1:7). However, we will be accepted if we do these things. We are not accepted “just as we are.” I’ve heard preachers say, “God will accept you as you are. You do not have to change. If you are in Christ, you can live any way you want because there is no condemnation.” What a twisting of Scripture that is! There must always be change and repentance on our part if we are in sin. When we look back at the Old Testament, we see that the prophets always preached a message of change, change, change. The people were told that they had to change their ways, and that they could not continue living the way they were. Before God would accept the people, they had to change. In Mark 10:17-22, we see that the rich man had to change. John, as the forerunner of Jesus, preached a message of change through repentance. When Jesus arrived on the scene, He preached repentance. After Jesus died, when Peter preached the great sermon recorded in Acts 2, he preached repentance (vs. 38). When Paul began to preach to the Gentiles, he preached repentance. The whole Bible tells us that we must change. The idea that Christ will accept us “just as we are” is a false concept that will lead many souls to Hell because people think they can live any way they want, but as long as they are “in Christ,” they are OK. Romans 12:2 tells us how we are to live our lives. “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” We are not to be conformed to this world. Many people are. Instead of being transformed to the way that God wants us to be, they conform to the world. That cannot be. We must change. Once we do change by repenting, and once we are in Christ, we must continue to live faithfully. Christianity is not a ticket that allows us to do anything we want just because we are “in Christ.” That is absolutely false. We must change when we are in the wrong before we can receive forgiveness. We are accepted only if we accept Christ and His doctrine (2 Jn. 9; Jn. 8:32-32; 14:6; Mt. 7:21). We must do Christ’s will. Hebrews 5:9 tells us that Christ is the Author of salvation to those “who obey Him.” Romans 14:17-18 teaches us, “The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men.” When do we become acceptable to God? It is only when we practice righteousness. Then and only then do we become accepted by Christ.

We need to ask ourselves some serious questions. Do we want spiritual blessings? Do we want to be chosen? Do we want to be adopted? Do we want to be accepted? If so, we must be “in Christ.” Before, you may have thought that you were receiving spiritual blessings. But if you are not in Christ, then you weren’t. You might have thought that you were part of the faithful of God. But if you are not in Christ, then you aren’t. You may have thought that you were adopted. But if you are not in Christ, you aren’t. We must be “in Christ” if we want these blessings.

So how does a person get “in Christ”? We do not “believe ourselves into Christ.” The Bible never says, “Believe, and you’ll be in Christ.” Unfortunately, many people have thought that they believed in Christ, but were not in Christ at all. There are some people who think that they can pray themselves into Christ. But that is not the case. Simply praying to God does not mean that God will put us in Christ. Never does the Bible say that we “pray ourselves into Christ.” Some people think that by confessing that Jesus is Lord, or confessing that they have sin in their lives, they will be in Christ. Confession is important (Rom. 10:10), and is something we must do, but the Bible does not say that if we confess, we will be in Christ.

So how do we get “in Christ” where all spiritual blessings are found? If we are not in Christ, we do not have access to all spiritual blessings. So how do we get “in Christ”? The Bible says that there is only one way to get in Christ. According to Galatians 3:27 and Romans 6:3-4, we must be baptized in water for the forgiveness of our sins in order to get in Christ. It is at the point of baptism that we are added to Christ. If you have yet to obey the truth, we pray that today you will obey the Gospel of Christ.

Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

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STUDY QUESTIONS FOR EPHESIANS LESSON 1 (CHAPTER 1)

1. According to Ephesians 1:3, who gives Christians the spiritual blessings that they continually enjoy?
2. According to Ephesians 1:3, where are “all spiritual blessings” to be found?
3. What point was Jesus making when He said Matthew 5:45 that God “makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust”?
4. What does James 1:2 admonish Christians to do?
5. What important message is found in Romans 8:28 for Christians?
6. What spiritual blessing does 1 John 5:13 discuss?
7. What spiritual blessing does Revelation 21:4 discuss?
8. What spiritual blessing does Revelation 14:13 discuss?
9. What spiritual blessing does Matthew 10:32 discuss?
10. What spiritual blessing does Hebrews 10:17 discuss?
11. The text of 1 John 1:7-9 discusses something that every Christian must do in order to receive God’s continual spiritual blessings. What is it?
12. According to 2 Thessalonians 2:14, how are people “called by God” today?
13. In Proverbs 1:28-29, what caused the people discussed in that passage to miss out on God’s spiritual blessings?
14. What, according to Matthew 10:33, will cause many people to miss out on the blessing of eternal life?
15. According to Ephesians 1:4, how long had God planned to give certain people spiritual blessings?
16. In 2 Peter 1:10, what did the apostle Peter urge Christians to do?
17. According to Galatians 3:28 and Romans 1:16, who can become a Christian?
18. This lesson discusses two different families that have two different fathers. Who are those two fathers?
19. When Ephesians 1:6 says that God “has made us accepted in the Beloved,” who is “the Beloved”?
20. What important message is contained in Romans 8:1?