

# God's Benefit Package

Ephesians 1:3-14

Preached September 13, 2009 by Dr. Dwight Kilbourne

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, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

**Introduction.** Having heard about the benefits of using a chain saw, a mountain man walked into the Ace Hardware to purchase one. The "helpful hardware man" showed him a saw that he guaranteed would saw 10 times the amount of wood as a cross cut saw. The mountain man was convinced and purchased the saw.

Four days later the mountain man returned to the store with the saw. He shared that despite all his hard efforts including sawing 4 hours longer than usual over the past 4 days, he had not been able to cut more wood with the chain saw. The salesman said, "Let me look at the saw." He pressed the bulb to prime the carburetor, pulled the cord and the machine roared like a lion. After it ran smoothly for a moment he turned it off. The mountain man with eyes wide open said, "What was that sound that saw made?"

Often we are like that mountain man. We fail to realize and appropriate all that the gift God has placed in our hands can do. We do not know the great spiritual benefits God has given us through salvation. This morning we will look at some of those great blessings that Paul has shared in our scripture lesson.

**The Purpose of Salvation.** Nearly everyone gathered here knows that the purpose of a chain saw is to cut wood. But do we know what the purpose of salvation is? We are saved for what purpose? Probably most living in the Bible belt would say the purpose of salvation is to get people to heaven. This answer is not the answer the apostle provides in our text. Rather he

offers three other fundamental reasons God saves.

Paul claimed that before the foundations of the world were laid, God chose for us to be *holy* and *blameless*. From the very beginning, the God who is holy desired for people to be holy and God has acted to make it so.

When the Methodist movement was born in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the mission statement that propelled its members was "*to spread scriptural holiness.*" Early Methodists were concerned about holiness of heart and life. Talking about holiness is part of the original Methodist DNA.

Through the years, I have often struggled to wrap my mind around what holiness is. (With this confession, I might be kicked out of my union.) To be holy is to be "unique," "different," or "separate." To be blameless is to be "without flaw." God wants us to be a different sort of person without flaws.

Think of this illustration. Imagine you have invited special guests to come to your home for a formal dinner. You want everything to be extraordinary for your guests, not just another meal. You see that your house is cleaned and everything is in its right place. You iron the tablecloth and linen napkins. You set the table with your finest china, crystal and silverware. You want this to be a special evening for your guests, serving from the best and without flaws. Your aim is for it to be as perfect as possible. Through salvation, God works for our lives before him to be special, different and without flaws

The second aim of salvation found in our scripture lesson relates to how we

live out our lives. God's purpose is that as we place our confidence in Christ and experience salvation so that we might "*live for the praise of his glory.*"

The phrase "*living for the praise of God's glory*" is not something many of us can immediately understand by merely reading the words. Thinking about parent-child relationships may help us understand this aim. Our middle son loved playing baseball and in my opinion was a good pitcher. During his high school days, he was a member of the varsity baseball team. During those days, I felt he was never given a fair opportunity to play. Yet I saw him support his team, practice hard, cheer on his teammates and be an overall positive influence on his team. Even when Dad was seething because he was not put into the game, his son supported his team. When the sports awards were given during his senior year, he was awarded the best team spirit for baseball. His actions and award brought honor to Patty and me. I was so proud of him. On that team he had lived out praise to the glory of his father and mother. God's aim in salvation is that it will positively impact how we live our lives. How we live will honor our Savior.

The third aim of salvation Paul highlights here does not relate to individuals but focuses upon the cosmic nature of salvation. Paul speaks that God's plan is to *gather up all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth*. The idea here is to "sum it all up," to "bring it to a conclusion." God's plan in salvation is that at the right time He will make sense of all things.

So here is the three-fold purpose of salvation: *"that we be holy and blameless," "we live for the praise of God's glory" and "to gather all things in Christ."*

**Spiritual blessings.** How do we and creation reach these goals that God has in mind?

Imagine tomorrow you go to the mailbox and you have a letter informing you that you have won an all expense paid trip to Hawaii, including all arrangements. What would you need to do to reach your destination? When the vehicle comes to pick you up at your home, you need to have your luggage ready and get in the car. At the airport, you need to check in and board the plane. You will probably change planes once or twice. When you arrive at the airport, you disembark and find your transportation to the resort where you will stay. Each of these is part of what you have won and essential to reaching your destination.

God makes it possible through the benefits of salvation. Paul highlights three of these here in Ephesians.

The first one we will examine is *adoption – God destined us for adoption as his children.* God wants to bring us into his family as his children.

From biblical times through today, adoption involves two critical components. One is the juridical and the other relational. Throughout history in various cultures the legal process to adopt a child has given the adopted one legal rights as a member of the family and shares in the family inheritance. Through adoption, we are given the right to be children of God. John expressed it this way: *"To all who received him (Jesus), to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God"* (John 1:12).

When a child is brought into a family through adoption, that child is given a new identity. Generally, the child receives the last name of the adoptive parents. Think of this: through God's saving act in Jesus Christ we are identified by God as his daughters and sons. We are the children of God.

Adopted children are chosen children. They are given the opportunity to have a

close relationship with their adoptive children. Paul in Romans 8 speaks of this relationship. He asserts believers are given the "spirit of adoption" and cry "Abba! Father" or "Daddy." (That is an intimate familial term of affection.)

Rev. John Neese and his wife Louise for a number of years have had a special calling from God. They have opened their home to foster children from Holston Home for Children. Some of those children they adopted as their own. Years ago, they were caring for an infant who had bi-racial parents – African-American and Hispanic. While John has a bit of a darker complexion, he and Louise are white. While waiting in line at a restaurant, John was holding the baby. A woman looked at the beautiful child and said to John, "It takes no fool to realize who the daddy of that child is." When we are adopted, God looks at us and says, "That's my girl." "That's my boy."

The second benefit of salvation necessary to reach God's desired purpose is *redemption – in Jesus we have redemption through his blood.* The word translated as "redemption" comes from a word group that means to "release," "to free," "to loose," "to buy back for a price." These words were often used when a prisoner of war or slave was freed by one paying a ransom.

In order for us to reach God's goal of salvation (holy and blameless, living to honor God and Christ gathering all things to himself) we must be set free from those things that hold us captive. We must be released from those forces in our lives and world that keep us from becoming all God wants us to be. Those forces might be destructive or life-controlling habits, addictions, fears, guilt, low self-esteem, the stuff we own, co-dependent relationships, self-absorption and/or pride. There are few, if not any of us, who have not a measure of these forces holding us back.

Through salvation, God gives the power to break the chains of those things that control and limit our lives. At times that redemption may come as a radical and instantaneous release but often it occurs over a process of time. Nearly always the operation of that redeeming

power functions in cooperation with those who are held captive.

The third benefit, forgiveness, is tied closely to redemption. (Often we hear them relating to each other Colossians 1:14; Romans 3:23). In order to experience redemption, that releasing act of God, we must experience forgiveness.

Biblically, forgiveness relates to two spheres – legal and relational. In the legal sphere, God is the Judge who measures human actions, thoughts and intentions. Sin, whether missing the mark, slipping up and failing, or outright violation of God's rules carries a penalty or price. As Judge, God executes the judgment against the guilty.

Part of the consequence of sin is a violation of the relationship with God. Just as our actions or words injure our relationship with others, so our sins do damage to our relationship with God. They create an obstacle between God and us.

The salvation act of God through Jesus Christ brings forgiveness to people. On the legal level, God pardons our sins. When we are forgiven, we no longer face the penalty of the sin and are released from it. (It is not as though we are exonerated and declared to be innocent.) Rather our faults and sins are forgiven. Our relationship with God is restored and we return to good standing with our heavenly Father.

Please realize this: salvation brings both release from the penalty of sin (forgiveness) and release from the power of sin (redemption). While forgiveness happens in an instance, redemption is God's on-going act to free us from all that holds us back.

Until her death when John was seven, his mother nurtured him in the Christian faith and helped to develop his keen mind. Following her death, he was off to boarding school. At 11 years of age, his ship captain father took him aboard for a life on the sea. During his early teens, John would dip from the spiritual waters of his childhood but often drifted away from the faith. In his late teens, John's life took a vile turn and he began living an unrestrained and riotous life as a sailor and felt little need for God. His rebellious lifestyle led him to rough times.

At age 23 while aboard a ship, he read Thomas a Kempis', *Imitation of Christ* and was touched by what he read. This proved to be a very important starting point for John's spiritual journey of salvation. During that voyage, a storm struck that nearly destroyed the ship and drowned the crew. Miraculously, they were spared and arrived in Ireland some time later. Spiritual growth happened slowly over the next 6 years.

Even though he became a man of faith, his vocation led him to become a captain on a slave trading ship. Initially, he had no problem with his position, thinking of himself more as a jailer tending prisoners. But eventually, he became convinced this was wrong and began to look for a way out. An illness rendered him unfit to sail. Eventually when John was in his late 30's he accepted a position as associate pastor of an Anglican Church and later as the priest of a parish. For the last 44 years of his life, he served as a pastor.

God's hand was upon John Newton. He experienced God's salvation and knew the forgiveness of sins and was redeemed from its power. He is credited with saying: *"That one of the most ignorant, the most miserable, and the most abandoned of slaves should be plucked from his forlorn state of exile on the coast of Africa, and at length be appointed minister of the parish of the first magistrate of the first city of the world; that he should there not only testify of such grace, but stand up as a singular instance and monument of it."* ([www.reformedbiblechurch.com/AGrace/AmazingGracePg2.htm](http://www.reformedbiblechurch.com/AGrace/AmazingGracePg2.htm))

"Amazing Grace how sweet the sound,  
that saved a wretch like me."

**Invitation.** God's aim is for us to be holy and blameless and live lives to honor him. God seeks to bring all things together in Christ.

Have you experienced the forgiveness of God and his redeeming act? Will you this day turn to him?

Do not include a confession early in the service. Rather have the opening to be high celebratory worship and praise. At the end of the sermon have prayer for the people.

Pray for God to forgive each worshiper and for each to sense that forgiveness  
Pray that God would deliver each person from those forces that control and restrict their lives – name them – alcoholism, pornography, pride, fear, anxiety, hatred, grief– find tools God has placed – therapists, pastors, teachers, support groups. Pray that each will know the full measure of being adopted into God's family.