

Fuel for Your Praise
Ephesians 1:3-14
Tim Becker – October 16, 2016

1. Introduction

The Bible commands that we praise our God. Ps 30:4 says, “Sing praises to the LORD, O you his saints.” But knowing that we ought to praise God isn’t the same as doing it. Praising God isn’t as easy as it seems. Do you agree with that? When the Psalms call for us to sing to God, does it just mean “sing” ... open our lips and make a sound come out?

Why isn’t praising God as easy as it seems? Because our hearts must be praising him too. And while most of us can make ourselves sing, we can’t seem to make our hearts praise. God doesn’t respect worship that looks true on the outside, but is not true on the inside.

This is a problem for me. Sometimes when I come here to praise God with you, on the outside I’m singing all the words of the songs, but on the inside I’m thinking about something else. I’m not proud of this. Other times, I’m singing all the words on the outside, but on the inside I’m bored and unmoved. On the inside I’m merely doing my duty, I’m not worshipping my God. And sometimes, I can’t seem to make myself “feel” the words I’m singing with my lips.

We praise things other than God, right? We praise our favorite food, our favorite movie, our favorite person. We don’t even have to try to praise some things. It just comes out of us. Watch this clip and see if you agree.

Saquon (SAY-kwon) Barkley Hurdles Terrapin Defender:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XAuznXbjJnU> (40s)

Penn State is my alma mater, so when I saw this clip a week ago Saturday afternoon, a spontaneous broad smile broke out on my lips and my heart was glad. I rejoiced in my team. And I didn’t rejoice because it was my duty. I couldn’t help rejoicing. But as you watched the clip, I’ll bet not all of you praised Penn State football and Saquon Barkley. Why not? Because maybe you don’t get excited about football or you like Maryland better than Penn State.

So when our praise of God is small, what’s wrong with us? Maybe we don’t get excited about godly things or maybe we like other things better than God. That’s bad. But we don’t have to be stuck there. You and I can fuel our praise, similar to putting more logs on a fire. What would do that?

If sometimes your heart needs fuel for it to praise your God, then please turn with me to Eph 1:3. This is on p. 976 in the pew Bible. Please follow along as I read Eph 1:3-14.

Read Eph 1:3-14.

* Big Idea

The big idea of this message is that our praise of God will be real and whole-hearted when we see the gifts God has for us in Christ. (repeat)

Please pray with me.

* Pray

God please forgive us for our weak praise of you. Help us. Give us eyes to see gifts in this passage as great prizes.

2. The passage aim: Praise be God

This passage, all 11 verses, is one long sentence in the original Greek language. Paul has one aim for this sentence and we see that aim in the first half of v. 3, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” We can substitute the word “praise” for “blessed” – “Praise be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Even more, “May God be praised.” Paul is stating that God is worthy of praise and that his wish is that God would be praised.

But why? Why should God be praised? Paul answers that question in the 2nd half of v. 3. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ should be praised because he “has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.” Christians are to praise God, to bless God, because he has blessed us. True followers of God are to praise God because he has given them benefits, supernatural benefits. These blessings are gifts that come from the heavenly realms. Yet we don’t have to wait to get to heaven to enjoy them. They benefit us here and now on earth.

Paul, can you get more specific? What do you mean by spiritual blessings? In the rest of this passage Paul answers that question. Let’s look at 5 of these spiritual blessings that God gives to his people.

3. Spiritual Blessing 1: the forgiveness of our trespasses

Let’s start by looking at v. 7, “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace.” Spiritual blessing number 1 is the forgiveness of our trespasses.

Trespasses is just another word for sins. When you hear that God forgives your sins, how do you respond inside? Well that depends on if you think you’ve offended God or just how bad you think that your offense is.

Imagine with me that you get up tomorrow morning and make your way down to the breakfast table. While eating, your husband, or whoever it is that you eat with, says to you, “I forgive you” just out of the blue. How are you going to respond? Well that depends on whether you think you’ve sinned against him or not, right?

Let’s say you’ve been fighting a bit lately, but you are sure that you have kept your cool and not said anything you shouldn’t have. So when you hear him say, “I forgive you,” you think he is picking a fight with you or that he is being all proud and righteous and accusing you of causing all the trouble. Hearing, “I forgive you,” only makes you angry because you feel falsely accused. You think, “I don’t want his forgiveness. I want him to ask for my forgiveness! He’s been the one in the wrong!”

Now let’s change the situation just a little. The breakfast interaction is exactly the same. Out of the blue your husband says, “I forgive you.” But let’s say that the reason you have been fighting lately is that you have severely betrayed your husband. What you did was terribly wrong and terribly hurtful. It is the biggest evil you’ve done to him in 7 years of marriage. You know you were wrong and you feel awful about it. You know you deserve the worst from him. You love your husband and can’t imagine life without him. You haven’t slept well for days, worried that he might leave you. So when you hear, “I forgive you” out of his lips at the breakfast table, you can hardly believe it. This is the best news you can imagine. You feel so humbled and so happy all at the same time. You hug him and kiss him. With tears, you find yourself saying, “Thank you!” over and over again. You are sure that you have the most loving husband in the world. Your respect and admiration of him shoots to the sky. You never want to wrong him again.

Both situations with you and your spouse are the same. The difference is in how you see yourself. When you don’t see yourself as the sinner, then hearing that you are forgiven offends you. When you do see yourself as a sinner, hearing that you are forgiven makes your heart humble, happy, and thankful.

So Christian, take a good honest look at your life. Open your eyes to see your sins. Don’t minimize them. Don’t rationalize them by saying that you aren’t as bad as that other person or that you have been under a lot of stress lately or that this is just the way you are. Admit your specific sins, the ones from this morning or yesterday or last week. Admit that they are awful. Admit that they are a terrible betrayal of your loving God and Maker.

Then turn your eyes away from your sins to God’s gift of forgiveness. If you are in Christ, he forgives you. When God forgives you, he pledges to not treat you as your sins deserve. You deserve his anger. You deserve to be separated from him forever. You deserve hell. But he treats you as though you never sinned.

Psalm 103 wonderfully expresses this:

(Psalm 103:10–13) ¹⁰ He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. ¹¹ For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; ¹² as far as the east is from

the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. ¹³ As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.

* Summary

Tell your heart to smile, Christian. Though your sins are red with guilt, they shall be white as snow because God has forgiven you. This is spiritual blessing number 1, God's forgiveness. O praise be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!

4. Spiritual Blessing 2: Redemption through Jesus Christ's blood

When God forgives you for your sins is it just a matter of words, "I forgive you."?

Imagine that a man begins violating our daughters here in Taylor County. Eventually the police catch him, but only after a dozen girls have been abused by him. He is caught by the police. The man goes to trial before a judge and the evidence is presented. The evidence clearly shows that the man did the crimes and that the crimes were terribly wicked. He comes before the judge and the judge says, "You look to me like a person who is actually good on the inside. You just made some bad choices. So because I think you are actually good, I will set you free ... no prison time, no probation, no fine. Free. You may go. Behave yourself and have a good day."

If this happened, would you consider it right? Isn't there something in you that says that we ought not to overlook a serious crime like this? Letting this man free without paying any penalty for his crime would be unjust. Justice is rewarding good and punishing evil. And justice is good. We want judges who uphold justice. If they don't, we will replace them. Good citizens demand justice.

So, what kind of a God would he be, if the Judge of the Earth lets sins go unpunished by merely uttering the words, "I forgive you."? He would be an unjust judge if he did not punish wickedness. Justice and righteousness are closely related. So if God let the guilty go unpunished, he would be unjust and unrighteous. God would be wicked, not holy.

But God is not wicked. God is holy. And God does not let the guilty go unpunished. So when God forgives you for your sins, those sins must be punished before you can be forgiven. This is like a law that must be kept, the law of justice. And God will keep it. God made this law. Justice is holy. Justice is godly. Forgiveness is not free, it costs.

Justice demands that the punishment fit the crime. If you drive through a red light and no one is injured, your penalty ought to be less than if you in a rage deliberately drive your car into another automobile, killing someone. So, how offensive is your sin against God?

Imagine two 9 year old boys are playing at the park. Billy and Bobby have been good friends since they were young. But today, Billy gets mad at Bobby because Bobby won't

share his candy with him. So Billy screams at Bobby telling him that he is a terrible friend and wishes he would never see him again. Not nice. Billy has sinned against Bobby.

Now imagine instead that Billy gets home from school and his mom tells him that he is late getting his chores done. She tells Billy that he better do them right away or he will be punished. So Billy screams that she is a terrible mom and wishes she wasn't his mom. Not nice. Billy has sinned against his mom.

Now tell me, do you think that Billy's sin against Bobby is just as bad as his sin against his mom? I'll bet that most of you think that Billy's sin against his mom is far worse. I think you're right. But why? Billy owes his mom much more respect than he owes Bobby because his mom has been much more loving and caring for him than Bobby has. Who stayed up all night when he was sick? Who helped him with his homework when she was so tired and would rather rest? Who worked hard to feed and cloth Billy? Bobby is just a friend. Billy sinned against him. But even though his words to Bobby and his mother were almost the same, his sin against his mother was much greater because of her much greater love and honor and authority over him.

Just as Billy owed greater honor to his mother than to Bobby and so Billy's sin against his mother was greater than his sin against Bobby, so you and I owe enormously greater honor to God. And so our sin against God is enormously greater. God is infinitely more loving and honorable than any other person. And so our sin against him is infinitely more offensive.

So what would justice demand that your punishment be for your sins against God? An infinitely offensive sin requires an infinite punishment. So our just God has decreed that sinners suffer forever in the lake of fire. This is what the law of justice demands.

But God has provided a way out for you. God has provided a way to satisfy the demands of justice and to forgive you for your many great sins. God has provided a way to buy out your punishment. This is what the Bible means by redemption. It takes a great price to buy out a sinner from suffering forever in the lake of fire. And it takes a great price to redeem not just one, but many sinners. What price is great enough to redeem men from their sins?

Heb 9:22 says that "under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins." Under the law of justice, how can the impure, the sinful, be made pure, be forgiven? By blood, by the shedding of blood. This means by giving up life, someone must die. But will just any blood do? No, Heb 10:4 says that "it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." Likewise, the blood of another sinner cannot take away your sins. But what if a pure life was shed? A spotless, sinless, precious beyond all, life was shed? The law of justice says, "Yes, the shedding of pure sinless blood will be sufficient for forgiving the sins of men." And so God sent his beloved Son to live a sinless life and to give his life as a ransom for many. When Jesus died on the cross, it was not for sins he committed, but for sins that

you committed. Was there ever a man less worthy to be mocked and whipped and nailed to a cross than Jesus? No. It would have been more suitable for any man who ever lived to be there instead of Christ. Because any other man is enough of sinner to worthy to be punished that way, but not Jesus. This makes him the Perfect Redeemer for you and your sins.

Look back with me at Eph 1:7, “In him we have redemption through his blood.” If you are in Christ, then after looking at the horror of the punishment you deserve, turn your eyes away from that and look long at God’s gift of redemption. Jesus shed his precious blood on the cross so that you wouldn’t have to satisfy the righteous demand of justice. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, “For our sake he [God] made him [Jesus] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” Jesus willingly accepted the responsibility for your sins and gave you his righteousness. This is a great loving humbling exchange.

* Summary

Tell your heart to smile, Christian. Though you rightly deserve eternal torment for sins, God has redeemed you by the precious blood of his Son. This is spiritual blessing number 2, God’s redemption. O praise be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!

5. Spiritual Blessing 3: Adoption

So God forgives us for our sins and he redeems us from paying the penalty for our own sins. These are both precious gifts. But if that was all, then your relating to God would be like how you relate to the gal DMV. You smile and are cordial, but you aren’t friends or family. You aren’t close. But those are not the only spiritual blessings God has for his own. Look with me at Eph 1:5, “In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will.”

God’s forgiveness and redemption are not done by him with a cold or business-only demeanor. He planned to forgive and redeem you to make you a son of his. He wants to relate to you not as a kind but distant authority, but as a father. Take the best father you can imagine and multiply that many times. God predestined you to a close personal relationship with himself. He made the decision to adopt you out of a heart of love for you.

By adopting you, he has brought you into his family. You have brothers and sisters in Christ. What a benefit we have from God that he made us one family with Christians here and around the world. As father, God is at the center of his family. His children enjoy his presence and enjoy his enjoyment of them.

If you are in Christ, then turn your eyes away from your self and revel in your adoption as a son or daughter of God. Delight in God as the best father any ever have.

* Summary

Tell your heart to smile, Christian. Though you were once God's enemy, now in love he has adopted you as a son. This is spiritual blessing number 3, your adoption. O praise be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!

6. Spiritual Blessing 4: Holy and blameless before him

To see the 4th spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, look with me at v. 4. "Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him." This verse says that God chose those who would be united with Christ before the world was created. God chose those he would forgive and redeem and adopt before they ever lived a day. And he chose us for a purpose. That purpose is that we who are in Christ should stand before him holy and blameless.

How do you feel when you read that he chose you to be holy and blameless before him? I am always stopped by those words. I know myself to be a sinner. Still. By his mercy God forgave and redeemed me years ago, but my will to sin is not yet broken. I regularly sin in ways that shock and embarrass me. I wish it weren't so. Can you relate to my experience? I see myself as a far worse sinner than I used to see myself. So when I hear God's word tell me that he chose me to be holy and blameless before him, I know it is not because I no longer sin. God's seeing me as holy and blameless before him is because I have Christ's righteousness as my own as a gift.

If you are in Christ, then turn your eyes away from your unworthiness before God and humbly delight in your status before him as holy and blameless.

* Summary

Tell your heart to smile, Christian. Though you once were filthy and wicked in God's sight, you are now holy and blameless before him. This is spiritual blessing number 4, in Christ you are holy and blameless before God. O praise be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!

7. Spiritual Blessing 5: The Holy Spirit

Paul writes later in this letter that we who are in Christ were saved by him to walk in a manner worthy of the calling we have received. We are to begin now the journey toward holy and blameless in his sight. God does not save a man to leave him living like every other unsaved man. God calls a people to himself so that they would look like him. But we have a great barrier to our looking like him. It is not enough for God to tell us the right way to live. The Ten Commandments describe right living for all men, but they don't produce right living in any man. The problem is that even after we read the Ten Commandments, our nature still delights in sin. And all men always do what they delight

in. With shame, we admit that our hearts want to violate the Ten Commandments. We need a new heart if we are to live in a way that looks like we are sons of God.

In the Old Testament, God talked about a day that will come when he will cleanse his people from their sins and recreate their hearts so they will be able to obey him. Listen as I read Ezekiel 36:25–27.

²⁵ I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. ²⁶ And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

Now look at Eph 1:13-14 with me to see the 5th spiritual blessing. “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.” When you heard God’s true word about your sins and about Christ’s work and when you believed in Christ as your Savior, then God sent his Holy Spirit within you, just as he promised in Ezek 36. His Spirit changes your heart so that he causes you to obey God’s rules. You begin to live now a holy and blameless life, not perfectly, but incrementally. The Holy Spirit is the guarantee of our inheritance to come.

* Summary

Tell your heart to smile, Christian. Though by yourself you have no chance of obeying God, you now have a Holy Spirit controlled heart by which you can say no to sin and yes to righteous living. This is spiritual blessing number 5, you have the Holy Spirit within you. O praise be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!

8. To the non-Christian

These are the spiritual blessings we’ve looked at: forgiveness of our sins, redemption from the penalty of our sins, adoption as a son or daughter of God, holy and blameless before God, and the Holy Spirit to change our hearts so we can obey God. These gifts are precious. But who actually receives these gifts? Are all people forgiven and redeemed and adopted?

We see a hint at the answer to this question in the last verse we read, v. 13. These gifts are for those people who have heard the word of God, especially the word about the gospel, and who have believed in Christ. What do we mean by the gospel? And what do we mean by believed in Christ?

The gospel can be summarized by four words: God, Man, Christ, Response.

- 1st God: God is the creator of all things. He is perfectly holy, worthy of all worship, and will punish wickedness and sin.
- 2nd Man: Though created good, all people have become sinful by nature. From birth, all people are alienated from God, hostile to God, and therefore subject to the wrath of God.
- 3rd Christ: Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man. He lived a sinless life, died on the cross to bear God's wrath in place of all who would believe in him, and rose from the grave. His purpose in doing this was to give his people eternal life.
- 4th Response: God calls everyone everywhere to repent of their sins and to trust in Christ alone in order to be saved. Those who repent of their sins and trust in Christ are born again into a new life, an eternal life with God.

(Taken almost verbatim from <https://9marks.org/answer/what-gospel/>).

When some of you hear those 4 words about the gospel, you think that they cannot be true. You might say something like, "I don't see God, I have never met Jesus, and while I admit I've done some bad things in my life, they are surely not awful enough to merit eternal punishment. Furthermore, if there was a God who thought my so called sins were that bad, I'm pretty sure that he is the one who would be wrong and bad."

When others of you hear these words about the gospel, you don't exactly disagree that they are true, but you are almost completely uninterested in them. God and sin and Jesus and cross and repentance and belief seem irrelevant to your Monday morning, Friday night, or any other time.

If either of these describes you, I want to say that you are welcome here at church. I'm glad you've come to hear more. And I invite you to reconsider the gospel. Any of us pastors would be happy to talk with you about these things. We won't try to arm wrestle you to see things our way, but we'll talk respectfully and humbly about what God says in the Bible and about life.

So, if you don't find yourself eagerly repenting of your sins and happily believing that Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty you owe, then these spiritual blessings that we have been looking at are not yours. These blessings are for those who have embraced Christ as Savior and Lord.

Again, these blessings are precious. They are all wrapped up in the salvation available to you in Jesus. So if your response to the gospel is negative or lukewarm, then I urge you to reconsider.

9. Conclusion

So in conclusion, the big idea of this message is that our praise of God will be real and whole-hearted when we see the gifts God has for us in Christ.

So Christian, look long and often at the gifts God has for you. And let those gifts be like fuel for your praise of him. Worthy is the Lamb who was slain. He is holy. He is worthy of praise from our lips and our hearts.

Let's sing his praises together.