

Church, Praise Our Triune God!

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Preacher: J.D. Edwards

[0:00] Well, our introduction to the book of Ephesians was through the book of Acts, understanding! about the city of Ephesus and how the Lord planted a church there and ministered to it! through Paul. And now we begin going through the book of Ephesians. This passage that I'm about to read verses 1 through 14, we will spend about a month here. So today and three more because it's so dense, it's so rich. The passage I'm about to read to you, some commentators have described it using beautiful language. They've described it as a magnificent gateway into the rest of the letter.

It's been called a breathless cascade of momentum. It's been called a kaleidoscope. You can look through these verses and see so many colors and movement and patterns. It's been described as a snowball that's rolling down the hill and gaining momentum and gaining weight as it goes. It's also been described as a lyrical prancing racehorse.

Get ready for what we're about to read. It's been called an operatic overture. I've never been to an opera and don't ever plan to be at one, but I can imagine. And it's also been described as the flight of an eagle because it conveys the overwhelming grandeur and movement of this letter with an opening doxology. Doxology means praise to God. So hear God's word, his inspired, inerrant, infallible, clear, sufficient, powerful word for you and me, his people. Ephesians 1, 1 through 14.

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

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, just as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, by which he made us accepted in the beloved. In him, we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace, which he made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times, he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are in on earth in him. In him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of his glory. In him you also trusted after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation in whom also having believed you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession to the praise of his glory.

[4:11] The word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God. Please be seated. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of the Lord stands forever.

Let's pray. Lord, our flesh does not want to grasp hold of you.

Our minds don't want to understand you. Our hearts want to incline away from you. Unless you move on your people, Lord, that's how we will continue to drift and live in misery.

We pray that by the Holy Spirit, Lord, you will powerfully shine your light in our hearts. We pray that you will turn our minds by faith to grab hold of the triune God.

We pray, Lord, that you'll stir us up to praise you for who you are, for you are worthy, Lord, of our praise. Please cause us as a church, Lord, to join in this doxology and blessing you from whom all blessings flow.

[5:36] We pray this for your glory. Amen. Amen. Overflowing delight is contagious.

A child tells a story. A person you enjoy belly laughs. A musician you appreciate totally enraptured in the piece they're playing.

Overflowing delight is contagious. Here's Paul, a Roman citizen, unjustly denied his rights.

Far away, isolated in the biggest and loneliest city of the ancient world. Overflowing with contagious delight.

His song, his all-consuming, overflowing, contagious delight is the praise of God. It can be summarized with an invitation to the churches who will read this letter.

[6 : 47] And that includes you and me. Church, praise our triune God. Church, praise our triune God.

Today I want to use this longer passage, verses 1 through 14, more structurally. I'll only go in detail verse by verse through verses 1 through 3 or so.

Because we get to enjoy the rest of the passage in the weeks ahead. And in these verses I hope to help you see with me and evaluate if you agree three conclusions.

So three conclusions from this glorious doxology that opens up the letter of Ephesians. Here's the first conclusion.

Before anything else, churches are called to praise the living God. Before anything else, churches are called to praise the living God.

[7 : 47] Well, let's define church first. Who is part of a church? Look with me at verses 1 and 2. He says, Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the will of God.

Now listen carefully for the words he uses to put up as markers of what a church is. To the saints who are in Ephesus and faithful in Christ Jesus, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The church is not a people with common hobbies, a common culture, common preferences, or common political opinions.

A church is made up of ones who are those four words. See? Saints, faithful, grace, and peace.

Those are the four markers. Let's look at each one. Saints. A church is made up of men and women, boys and girls, who were born sinners.

[8 : 56] And because of the gospel, the ministry of Jesus Christ revealed in his word, these sinners, God declares to be saints.

These are ones who God has made holy. It means to be set apart for a peculiar purpose. Covered in the blood of the lamb.

Think of how the instruments around the tabernacle and the temple and the old covenant were to be made holy by the sprinkling of blood.

That's what it means to be a saint. It's you're now like that instrument. You have been washed and sprinkled by the blood, not just of an animal, but the blood of God himself and the person of Jesus. He has covered you with his blood, setting you apart now for a peculiar purpose. The church is made up of saints.

[9 : 56] The church is also made up of the ones that God calls faithful. Church is not made up of people who are hard workers. It's not made up of people who are better than others based on their own deeds, but of ones who are faithful in Christ Jesus.

Ones who have trusted God's promises, whom God has filled with faith and whose hearts have been turned from unbelief to belief. That's what it means to be faithful, to be full of faith.

Not the strength of our faith, but the object of our faith, which is Jesus Christ. It's faithful in him.

Faith is the instrument. John Calvin defined faith or illustrated faith as a poor beggars, empty hand outstretched with which he grabs hold of Christ.

That's what it means to be faithful in Christ Jesus. If you're here today and you're not sure if you are faithful in Christ or if God can call you a saint, maybe you feel far from God.

Please know that God does not demand you to first get your act together. Clean yourself up. He says you are saints if you are in Christ.

[11 : 21] You are in Christ if you receive him by faith, not by works. That's what it is to be a Christian. That's what the churches are made up of.

It's for anyone who will abandon self-righteousness, reach out that empty hand like a poor beggar with nothing to offer, but use that to grab hold of Christ for yourself by faith.

And he greets them with those words grace and peace. A church is made up of ones to whom God has shown grace. Let's define the word grace.

Mercy is to withhold punishment from someone that deserves it. But to just have a punishment that I deserve not given to me, that's far less than the grace we receive from God.

Grace means God gives good gifts to those who are ill deserving. Yes, we deserve that punishment. Not only does he withhold that by mercy, he lavishes us with generous blessings as his people.

[12:30] The church is made up of ones who know this grace from God. And peace. A church is made up of ones to whom God gives supernatural peace that passes all understanding.

We are born at war with God. We were enemies of God. God is the one who now gives us terms for being at peace with him, for ending our striving against God.

And it's because Jesus Christ has become our mediator. He's taken the wrath as an expression of the justice of the perfectly just God in our place.

We are a shield from the holy God. Our Lord Jesus is the one who makes peace for his people. Our lives were troubled by sin.

We hated God. But in Christ now, our lives are no longer troubled, but they're settled. We still have trouble in this world, but our relationship with God is no longer troubled.

[13:34] We no longer hate God, but instead, God is our advocate. He's our shelter. He's our hiding place. We retreat into him.

God has blessed us with peace. Jesus Christ stands as that high priest over us. And he says, the Lord bless you and keep you and make his face shine upon you through my ministry, Jesus says. The Lord lifts up his countenance upon you now and gives you his peace. That's what it is to be the church. Okay, so that's the church.

And my conclusion was that before anything else, churches defined this way have one peculiar purpose. Before anything else, and that is to praise the living God.

Notice what he says in the very next breath. Look at verse three. 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.

[14:44] You can imagine if you're sitting there in Ephesus, this massive city in Asia Minor, and you get to hear this letter read to us from Paul.

You might be expecting a lot of other things that he wants to tell us, but he begins with blessing God. Praise God from whom we receive every spiritual blessing.

It's not a report on how Paul is doing in prison, though they certainly prayed that Paul was well. It's not a man-centered hook trying to build rapport with their felt needs like a sales pitch.

Though the contents of this letter could not be more relevant to the life of the church. It's not even an introduction to the topic or theme of the letter, which is the church itself.

Though they and we will have learned a theology of the church from God's perspective by the time we're done working through every sentence of this wonderful letter. Instead, he says right away, church, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

[16:01] That's the most important, the most urgent thing I need to get across to you. Now, three times in these opening thoughts, it's like Paul ramps up his meditation on God.

And then he punctuates it with a declaration of praise to the glory of God. I invite you to look at this with me. Put your finger first on verse six.

After meditating on God in verse six, he says to the praise of the glory of God's grace. Now, take your finger down to verse 12. Verse 12, he ends with to the praise of God's glory.

And then he continues on and punctuates the last thought about God in verse 14 to the praise of his glory. This letter opens by calling the church, by calling you and me who are gathered in Christ's name to praise the living God.

This communicates to us and it teaches us that before we as a church talk about how God's word applies to our everyday decisions, though there is a time for that, too.

[17:12] We exist as a church to praise the living God. Before we as a church organized times to hang out with one another and enjoy more fellowship, though there's a wonderful time for that, too.

We exist as a church to praise the living God. Even before we work through the fine points of how to interpret some difficult passages of the Bible.

There's a time for that, too, though. But we exist as a church before anything else to praise the living God. Amen. Well, that's the first point before anything else.

Churches are called to praise the living God. Here's the second conclusion from this wonderful opening to the letter. God's word teaches churches to praise God as Trinity. Second conclusion is that God's word teaches churches to praise God as Trinity. Someone asked a pastor in the 1800s named Charles Spurgeon in London.

[18:16] You know, the Trinity is a high mystery. Shouldn't we save that for later? You know, maybe maybe don't bring that up for the first few years of a new believer. Spurgeon says we need to give a new believer God's word.

That's what feeds them. And if the Trinity is what is emphasized in God's word, we're not wiser than God. Give the church God's word. Give the church the Trinity. Let us let us be overwhelmed by how great and magnificent our God is.

And that's what Paul does next. Each time that Paul repeats that refrain. Remember, we just touched it with our finger.

The refrain is this to the praise of the glory of God. Every time he does that, it's a marker in the structure of this passage. He gives us these three different points to ponder as a focus.

First, he calls the church to consider the work of the Father from verse 3 until the exclamation mark of doxology in verse 6 to the praise of the glory of God's grace.

[19:23] Look at it for yourself. Next, he calls the church to consider the work of the Son starting at verse 7 until the exclamation mark of doxology in verse 12 to the praise of God's glory.

Finally, we consider the work of the Holy Spirit from verse 13 until the exclamation mark of doxology, the very next verse in verse 14 to the praise of his glory.

Brothers and sisters, all spiritual blessings flow to us from the Father through the Son by the Spirit. By shifting our focus to each of the persons of the Trinity, one in turn following the order of redemptive history. This passage points out to us the work of the one God in his three persons for the glory of his name, the name of God, which is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The unity of God is also emphasized by the structure of this passage, because in the original from verse 3 all the way to verse 14, it's one continuous flowing lyrical sentence.

[20:36] It represents to us the unity among the Godhead, the majestic reality that God is one in essence, though three in persons.

Neither, as our creed says, neither confounding the persons nor dividing the substance, but holding God in his work together. Because God possesses one singular divine essence, one divine nature, one divine will, all of God's external acts toward creation are the undivided work of the entire Trinity. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit do not divide up the work of salvation into separate tasks, nor do they act as three independent agents working on a committee together.

In every act of one person of the Trinity, the one God operates. Yet God's unified work shines through distinct personal properties among God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Specific aspects of our salvation are ascribed to a particular person of the triune God. Let me show you an example in this passage. Look at verse 4. Verse 4 ascribes to God the Father, choosing and adopting us in Christ.

[22:04] Verse 6 ascribes to the Son, the Redeemer who takes on human flesh to shed God's blood. Verse 13, it's the Holy Spirit who seals and applies this same redemption to the lives of the people that God chose in the Beloved, in Jesus Christ.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, save you. The Father's eternal purpose, the Son's execution of that purpose in time and space and history by the Spirit's power who is now powerfully working in us that God adopted.

Three distinct persons working in perfect, flawless harmony to save you and me whom God has loved in Christ before the foundation of the world.

Why? To the praise of the glory of God. So scripture in this passage teaches us to praise God as Trinity.

Well, the third and final point for today is a conclusion from this passage. And this is where we'll spend a little bit more time just on one verse, verse 3.

[23:21] And here it is. Praise means to bless the giver of all blessings. We've seen how before anything else, we as a church are called to praise God.

We're called to praise God as Trinity. Well, what does it mean to praise Him? It's to bless the giver of all blessings. All spiritual blessings to the church are given from the Father, accomplished by the Son, applied by the Spirit.

Think about how this has been true in your own life. The dead, our triune God, brings to life. The blind, our triune God, makes to see.

The orphans, our triune God, brings into His family. What can we say then? These spiritual blessings lavished on us. He gives us what to say in verse 3.

We say, 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.

[24 : 27] Blessed be means to praise God, who alone is praiseworthy. Blessed be means to adore God, who alone is perfectly adorable.

Blessed be God. And he's precise here. He says, which God are we to bless? Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

What does this mean? Blessed be the God whom our Lord Jesus Christ worshipped according to His human nature.

Blessed be the one true God that Jesus Christ came to reveal, to bear witness to. Blessed be the God to whom our Lord Jesus Christ prayed according to His human nature.

This is what it means. Blessed be the God of our Lord Jesus Christ. Professor John pointed out in our Bible study, it reveals the two aspects of Christ's ministry as divine and as man.

[25 : 33] According to His human nature, the one true God is the God of our Lord Jesus Christ. And according to His divine nature, the relation between God the Father and God the Son is just that.

It's within the triune God's head. The God whom our Lord Jesus Christ has revealed and He teaches us, His people here on earth, to call this God, the Creator, Father, along with Him.

The only true God of whom Jesus Christ came to bear witness. And the life and ministry of Jesus proves and convinces and testifies of the one true God.

This is the God from whom all blessings flow. And this is the God we as a church are called to bless and to praise. To be a Christian is to believe the testimony of Jesus about God.

Believe in who God, who Jesus is revealing, and you will be saved. Blessed be this God. The God who blessed and continues to bless us, His church.

[26 : 40] Blessed be the God who speaks well of us. Though we would never praise His name and speak well of Him if it were not for His grace to save us in Christ.

And to stir us up by His Spirit to bless Him. Blessed be the God who invokes blessings upon us who deserve curses. Blessed be God who blesses us with every spiritual blessing.

Even though we have nothing to give Him or add to Him. He needs nothing from us. He blesses because of the abundance of who He is. He says, Blessed be God who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing where?

In the heavenly places in Christ. He calls the church to bless God who blesses earthlings like us with our fallen fleshly bodies.

But He still blessed us. But He still blessed us even now with blessings that are not of this earth. They're blessings that are from heaven. That are spiritual.

[27 : 46] Not worldly comforts. Not things for our flesh. But blessings that are in the heavenlies. That are celestial. That are high.

That are imperishable. He calls the church, Bless God who so blesses you with all spiritual blessings in heaven. Because they are bound up, secure for you in Christ.

God's word doesn't say that God might bless you. Or will eventually bless you if you perform well enough. He declares that in Christ, God has already blessed you.

With every spiritual blessing that heaven has to offer. Bless this God church. This blessing is bound up in the person of Jesus Christ.

This passage that we've read from verses 1 through 14 refers to Jesus Christ. Either Christ, the Lord Jesus Christ, the beloved. 17 different times.

[28 : 52] What a joy this will be for us to walk through this passage. Each focused on the Father one week. The Son the next. The Spirit the next. But each of them revealing the glory of the God who is Trinity.

Accomplished in Christ Jesus who unites us to the blessings of God. Notice in verse 4 that God has blessed you in Christ by choosing you before the foundation of the world.

Notice that God has not elected us as isolated individuals. But he elects us in Christ. Our covenant head so that every blessing promised to the Son by God the Father in eternity is now legally and

securely yours in Christ.

Nothing can take away this promise. Christ has secured it for you and me. Notice in verses 5 and 6 that God has blessed you in Christ by predestining you and me for adoption according to his grace. See in verse 6, God has blessed you in Christ by redeeming you by his blood. Verse 7, God has blessed you in Christ by forgiving you, by purchasing you. What a pleasure to declare the gospel of redemption.

[30:08] It means that Jesus has stood in the place of his church. He knows every single one of your sins and mine. And God calculates the cost of our sin precisely.

And Christ has fully paid. There's nothing owed from us who are in Christ to God anymore. He has completely executed the penalty we deserve to purchase us.

And he's traded our sin, which he bore on himself, with his perfect righteousness, which covers you and me completely in the eyes of God.

In verse 8, God has blessed you in Christ by lavishing you and me with understanding, with wisdom, with the ability of our fallen minds to behold God sufficiently for salvation, to respond to him with faith, grabbing hold of Christ.

God has blessed you in Christ according to verse 9 by revealing his will to you, the church. He's blessed you in Christ in verse 11 by granting you and me an eternal inheritance.

[31:17] God has blessed you and me in Christ according to verse 13 by then pouring out his spirit on everyone who Christ redeemed, sealing you like the signet ring of a king saying, this one is mine.

This is my property. No one can take you from my hand. God has blessed you and me in Christ according to verse 14 by guaranteeing our full redemption.

Brothers and sisters, many of us are going through very challenging days, hard weeks, difficult months for some years.

Look to the heavenly places. Look to Christ. Not a single spiritual blessing that God promised Christ will be lost or held from you.

They are yours already. May God's kindness stir you and me up in our souls to worship him, to praise him, to say, blessed be our triune God.

[32:28] May God so captivate you and me by his grace that our lives, even as we leave here today, will just be an echo of this contagious song of delight in God.

May all that we do praise our triune God together for his glory. Let's pray. Lord, we bless you. Every spiritual blessing you give to your church through Christ.

You are our loving father. Father, you have loved us in Christ. And there's nothing that we can do. There's nothing that if we neglect to do will change your love for your people in Christ.

Help us to trust you, Lord, to trust your word, to trust your promises, to experience this, then to bear witness to one another. Great is the faithfulness of our triune God.

Amen. Amen.