

Ephesians 1:3, Trinitarian Summary

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Overview

Trinitarian structure of 3-14

- All three members mentioned in v.3
- Then three paragraphs, each ending with “to the praise of his glory,” dealing respectively with the work of Father, Son, and Spirit in salvation.

This week, focus on v.3, the trinitarian summary. It has two parts, distinguished grammatically from one another, tied together with the notion of “blessing”:

- An expression of Paul’s volition, that others would join him in worshipful recognition of the relation between the Father and the Son
- A statement of fact, the role of the Son and Spirit in conveying the Father’s blessings to us.

Blessing in the Bible

“Bless” = εὐλογεῶ, “to speak well of.” There are three uses of this term in the Bible (cf. Calvin on this verse):

1. Man to God (“Blessed be God”), speaking well of God in praise. This is stating facts that are already true. In our text, the words “Blessed be the God...” express Paul’s recognition that God is worthy of praise and his desire that others would join him in speaking well of God.
2. God to man (“God ... hath blessed us”). God’s word, unlike ours, is causative (Gen 1); he states facts before they happen, and thus causes them to come into being. The observation that “God ... hath blessed us” describes God’s sovereign causation of bounty toward us in the past.
3. Man to man: a patriarch blessing his children, or a priest blessing the people. In either case, the one blessing is God’s representative, invoking God’s blessing on the one being blessed. This is how our words can be causative. We do not have this power in ourselves, but God has encouraged us to petition him and has promised to work on our behalf.

Application.—This is why truth-telling is so important. God’s words are automatically truthful; they cause the world to happen. That is what words are for. In being godly, we should strive to have our speech conform to what is reality. Words out of touch with reality are fundamentally ungodly.

The Relation between the Father and the Son

“3 Blessed [be] the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”.—This builds on a common OT Doxology, e.g., Gen 9:26; 24:27; most commonly “Lord God of Israel,” Ps 41:13; 72:18, and 8 other times. As a rabbi, Paul would have these in mind as he utters this New Covenant praise. Note several contrasts with the OT examples. These contrasts focus our attention on the relation between God the Father and God the Son, and show how highly exalted our Savior is.

The person to whom God is related

In the OT example, it is one of the patriarchs: Shem, Abraham, or most commonly, Israel. The nation traced its identity back to these patriarchs, and found in their relation to God the key to the nation's relation. In the NT this role in the praise is taken by the Lord Jesus. Our relation to God is defined by his relation to God. *Consider the transition Israel (person = Jacob) → Israel (nation) → Israel (person = Jesus), the last equation evident in the servant songs of Isaiah.*

The roles of God toward this person

The OT often says “blessed be the Lord God of Israel.” It never says, “Blessed be the God and Father”—of Israel or of anyone else.

- The image of God as a Father is rare in the OT, and only metaphorical. Deut 32:6 appears to be the first reference, but it is so exceptional that in the early monarchy the title distinguishes the promised Messianic king (2 Sam 7:14; cf. Psa 89:26). There are a few metaphorical references in the high poetry of prophecy, (Isa 63:16; 64:8; Jer 2:27; 3:4,19; cf. Mal 1:6). “God and Father” never appears; the reality (“God”) and the metaphor (“Father”) cannot be thus joined.
- In contrast, our Lord is distinguished as both Son of Man and Son of God (cf. Rom 1:3,4), and the twin titles “God and Father” relate respectively to these. God is the “God” of Jesus the “son of man,” who thus owes him worship and obedience, just as we do. In this Jesus is the perfect Israelite. But God is also the “Father” of Jesus as the “son of God,” a fundamentally new relationship, the fulfillment of the messianic promise to David.
- This distinction shows us how remarkable it is that we are encouraged to call God, freely, “Our Father.” This is possible only because of our identification with the Lord Jesus; cf. John 20:17.

Transfer of the title “Lord”

The OT praises are almost universally, “Blessed be the Lord God of xxx” (13x). The only time we hear “Blessed be the God of xxx” is on the lips of a pagan (Dan 3:28). (“Blessed be God” *simpliciter* occurs twice in the Pss, 66:20 and 68:35.) And never do we see the title “Lord” applied to the one of whom he is the God. But here Paul shifts the title “Lord” from the name of God to the name of the one to whom God is being related. Against the background of the OT phrase, this usage is astounding. The one of whom God is the God and Father, is himself Lord, worthy of equal honor with his God and Father. God has indeed “given him the name which is above every name” (Phil.2).

Application

Sometimes we need to be reminded of the glories of our Lord Jesus. It is a wonderful thing to meditate on the lofty station from which he came to save us and to which he has been restored. The highest occupation of the human heart is worship, and as we consider what the Spirit has recorded here of our Savior, we should first acknowledge it to be true, thus blessing God by speaking well of him.

Paul does not stop with speaking well of God; he desires that others join him. His desire, “Blessed be God,” is that others would bless God as well.

This two-fold blessing should be the dynamic behind our gatherings around the Lord's Table. Each of us should seek to bless God, and in doing so, to stimulate one another to join in that blessing. "Indeed, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and blessed be his Son the Lord Jesus, the blessed and only potentate, king of kings and lord of lords" (1 Tim 6:14-15).

The Work of the Father through the Spirit and the Son

"God ... hath blessed us".—Paul will shortly work out the details of this blessing, as assigned separately to each member of the Trinity. But the Three are one God, and to make this clear, he summarizes this section with a statement that shows their close interconnection with one another in the divine blessing that we enjoy.

Grammar: "God ... hath blessed us" is modified with three prepositional phrases. One shows the role of the Spirit, one the role of the Son, and one the heavenly setting in which they dwell and in which we enjoy their gracious blessing.

In Christ Jesus

The end of this verse is the first instance of a most important idiom that occurs 9 times in vv. 3-14. E.g.,

- 4, chosen
- 6, made accepted
- 7, redeemed
- 11, made an inheritance
- 13, sealed

(Probably also v.9) The expression occurs many more times throughout Paul's letters, expressing the foundation of God's blessings to us. They are ours "in Christ Jesus." It is true that Christ died *for* us, taking our sin, but more than that happened. According to Rom. 6, we died and rose *with* Christ. His death counts as our death; his life as our life. We are part of him. He is the vine, we are the branches (John 15:5). We are the limbs of his body, incorporated into him by the baptism of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:13). It is in this position of union with him that we enjoy God's blessings, and we may be sure that God will be faithful to bless us, because in blessing us he is blessing his dearly beloved son.

With all spiritual blessings

Both "all" and "spiritual" deserve attention.

- "Spiritual" here does not mean "immaterial," but "pertaining to the Holy Spirit." God's blessings are both material and immaterial; that is not the point. The point is that they are conveyed to us through his Spirit. The greatest of them is the possession of that Spirit himself, according to the terms of the New Covenant, Ezek 36:25-27, the birth "by water and the Spirit."
- He has blessed us with *all* of the Spirit's blessings. Even in the OT, it was promised, "no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly" (Ps 84:11), and in the NT we are

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promised that he will add “*all* these things” to us (Matt 6:33), supplying “*all* our need” (Phil 4:19). He has given us “*all* things that pertain unto life and godliness” (2 Pet 1:3). “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us *all* things?” (Rom 8:32).

- These two come together in John 3:34. God gave the Spirit to Christ, “not by measure,” but fully. Remember that these blessings are ours *in Christ*, in which position we also enjoy “all spiritual blessings.”

In heavenly places

This is where Christ now sits at the right hand of the Father (1:20), and so we naturally understand the phrase to picture the Trinity in heavenly conference about the blessings that the Father will bestow through the Spirit to those who are in the Son. In this sense the expression would point to the place in which the blessings are *decided*. But it is far more than this. It is also the place where they are *delivered*, for 2:6 tells us that we are seated in these same heavenly places together with Christ!

In the course of our daily struggles, we often feel acutely that we are far from heaven, strangers and pilgrims in a foreign and hostile land. But recall Paul’s frequent contrast between our daily Practice and our spiritual Position. (cf. Col 3:3, 8-12; put off and put on, since you have already put off and put on).

We are in Christ. Christ is in heaven. Therefore we are in heaven, too. Heaven is not something far off in the future to which we may aspire, if all goes well. It is our present possession. In prayerful meditation on God’s Word, in fellowship about the Lord’s Table, we can experience its sweetness and peace. It is in this wonderful position that we enjoy the totality of the blessings of the Spirit that God is pleased to grant us in his Son.

Application

This verse reminds us of the amazing truth that the entire Godhead—Father, Son, and Spirit—is engaged in assuring our happiness and prosperity. The Father originates this blessing. The Son provides the legal foundation as our surety and representative. The Spirit mediates it to us and assures us of it. Indeed, “if God be for us, who can be against us?” Well may we take to ourselves the blessing of Deut 33:29, “Happy [art] thou, O Israel: who [is] like unto thee, O people saved by the LORD, the shield of thy help, and who [is] the sword of thy excellency!”