

# Ephesians 1:3, 4, 7; Holy and Blameless; Redemption and "Aphesis"

by Karl Kemp; November, 2013

I always quote from the New American Standard Bible, 1995 edition unless I mention otherwise. Since I borrowed from some of my earlier writings for this article, the quotation of these verses was taken from the 1977 edition of the NASB. The only difference is that the 1995 edition changes "would" to "should" in Eph. 1:4. Sometimes I make comments in the middle of quotations in brackets [ ] or [[ ]] to make them more obvious.

INTRODUCTION: My goal here was to write a rather short article on Eph. 1:3, 4, 7. These verses are of key importance on the super-important topic of righteousness, holiness, redemption, and the victory over all sin. I discussed these verses in the paper on my internet site that includes verse-by-verse studies of Ephesians chapters 1 and 4. Ephesians 1:3, 4, 7 are discussed in some detail in that paper, and these verses are discussed in Article #s 20 and 21 in my "Twenty-Eight Articles on Holiness and Victory Over Sin" on my internet site (Google to Karl Kemp Teaching); those articles are available individually on this Christian article site. I will borrow from those writings for this article. Go to those writings (especially the verse-by-verse study of Ephesians chapter 1 on my internet site) for more details.

**"(3) Blessed** [[The NIV has "Praise (be to)." God the Father is to be blessed/praised, with thanksgiving, for the blessings He has bestowed on us in Christ Jesus, very much including the blessings that are reserved for the future. This sentence, which continues through verse 14 in the Greek (what a glorious sentence!), puts a strong emphasis on praise to God for His gracious and glorious plan of salvation.]] **be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ** [[The apostle Paul goes on to describe many of these spiritual blessings as he continues this long sentence. The primary blessings we have in Christ are spiritual, but the blessings are not limited to the spiritual dimension. Some of these blessings are available to us now, and some of them are reserved for the future (cf. Eph. 1:14). Even now we have the victory "in the heavenly places" (we live in the heavenly places now by the Holy Spirit) by virtue of our union with Christ Jesus - by our being "in Christ." On "the heavenly places," see Eph. 1:20; 2:6; 3:10; and 6:12. Note that the words "in Christ," or equivalent words (like "in Him," "in the Beloved") are repeatedly used in this long sentence (and quite often in the New Testament), referring to the glorious union believers have with the Lord Jesus Christ (verses 3, 4, 6, 7, 9 [if you translate "in Him," with the NASB

and NIV], 11 ["in whom"], and 13). Verse 5 shows that we are adopted as sons *through* Jesus Christ. ], **(4) just as He** [God the Father] **chose us in Him** [in Christ] **before the foundation of the world** [[These words are quite important, but I won't discuss them in this article. See my Ephesians Chapter 1, Part 1 on this Christian article site.]], **THAT WE SHOULD BE HOLY AND BLAMELESS BEFORE HIM** [my emphasis]. [[On chosen to be holy, cf., e.g., Deut. 7:6; 14:2. The same Greek adjective translated "holy" here was translated "saints" in verse 1 (the adjective was plural in verse 1). The call and enablement to be "holy and blameless" before God is a major part of the present spiritual blessings given to us in Christ Jesus. Our thinking right in our hearts and living right (by God's grace through faith) is the bottom line of Christianity (cf., e.g., Eph. 2:8-10; 3:14-6:17; Rom. 6:1-23; 8:1-14; 1 Pet. 1:13-25; 2:24; 4:1-6; Rev. 2:1-3:22; and 22:12-15).

Through the atoning death of the Lord Jesus (cf. Eph. 1:7), and by the work of the Holy Spirit (cf. Eph. 1:13, 14), we (born-again Christians) are enabled to live in an abiding state of holiness and blamelessness - set apart (by God) for God, and living in the center of His will, with the victory over all sin. This is the ideal state that we can, and should, be living in as born-again Christians. Holiness is not an optional matter for Christians (e.g., Heb. 12:14 NIV, KJV), and we must make holiness a top priority. However, Christians aren't automatically holy; the only way we can live in holiness is by grace/the Spirit through faith (a faith that is based on the good news that is spelled out in the New Testament). The victory over sin is far from being automatic or always easy: The world, the flesh (the old man that wants to continue in sin), and the devil and his hosts are against us, but the powerful grace of God in Christ is sufficient.

It is true, of course, that forgiveness is a foundational part of the Christian gospel that is provided through the atoning death (and resurrection) of the Lord Jesus. This truth is typically well understood by Christians, but there is a major problem when, as it so often happens, most of the emphasis is put on forgiveness and right standing. In my opinion we should put about ten percent of the emphasis on forgiveness and right standing and about ninety percent on being righteous and holy through the atoning death (and resurrection) of Christ Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit (by grace through faith).

A major problem we have in the body of Christ is that many Christians (even the majority) don't believe we can actually live in an abiding state of holiness. Living in a state of holiness means to be set apart for God and living for Him in righteousness, doing things His way, by His grace, from the heart, through faith. It includes living with the victory over sin. The ideal, and it is not presented in the New Testament as an unrealistic ideal, is that we shouldn't sin at all (by God's definition of sin). But many Christians (even the majority) don't believe we can ever stop sinning in this life. And they even cite a few verses from the Bible to supposedly prove that all Christians will necessarily continue to sin throughout their lives on the earth. (See pages 194-206 of my book, "Holiness and Victory Over Sin." The book is available on my website and at amazon.com.) If we aren't

even aiming at the target (of total victory over sin), we certainly aren't going to hit the target.

It is commonly said, for example, that we all sin daily in thought, in word, and in deed. Because of their understanding of what the Bible teaches, they (by their own admission) don't have faith for holiness and victory over sin. (They don't think we're supposed to.) Also, even if you know and believe that the New Testament *does* call Christians to holiness and victory over sin, the victory still is very far from being automatic or always easy - the world, the flesh, and the devil are engaged in intense warfare against us.

For a study on the meaning of holy/holiness, I recommend the last chapter of my book, "Holiness and Victory Over Sin." (Most of the book is relevant to the topic of walking in holiness with the victory over sin.) Included in that chapter are discussions of Eph. 5:27 and Col. 1:22, two other verses where Paul used the words "holy and blameless." **In love** [[The NASB (and the NIV), wrongly I believe, inserts a period before the words "in love." In the first place, as I mentioned, verses 3-14 are all one sentence in the Greek. It is common for English translations to split this sentence up into several sentences; I don't necessarily object to this, but if we add a period, we should add it after the words "in love," with no punctuation before "in love." My Greek New Testament (United Bible Societies, Fourth Revised Edition, 1993) and the NKJV have no punctuation before "in love" and a comma following. I prefer this translation. The *Amplified Bible* and the NRSV have no punctuation before "in love" and a period following. The KJV has no punctuation before "in love" and a colon following. I could live with either one of these translations. By inserting a period before "in love," the NASB (and NIV) wrongly, from my point of view, eliminates the important relationship (intended by the apostle Paul) between our being "holy and blameless" and our (fully) abiding IN AN EXPERIENTIAL LOVE RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD. First we should think of God's love for us, but also included is our walking in love before Him (by His grace/Spirit), including our love for Him, our love for the rest of the children in His born-again family (cf. 1:15), and for those outside the family.

We can speak of the love God had for us before we became Christians (e.g., Eph. 2:4, 5a; Rom. 5:8; John 3:16), but - and this is important - we aren't able to experience and abide in His love (at least not to any significant extent) while we are denying (or indifferent to) His existence and/or rebelling against Him, and before we come into a right relationship with Him through the new covenant in the blood of Christ. Note, for example, what Paul said regarding the former (pre-Christian) status of the Christians from Gentile backgrounds in Eph. 2:1-3, 11-18; 4:17-19, 22; and 5:8-14. We can't be reconciled to God, have peace with Him (both mentioned, for example, in Eph. 2:16, 17), and abide in His love without changing our attitudes, motives, and priorities and beginning to truly submit to Him and live for Him in righteousness and holiness by His powerful saving grace in Christ. Our attitudes, motives, and priorities will be changed as we appropriate

and cooperate with the saving grace of God in Christ by faith, in accordance with His Word. Being reconciled to God, having peace with Him, and abiding in His love involve much more than just being forgiven, as significant as that is.

There's a lot of teaching around the body of Christ about God's unconditional love. I believe much of this teaching is simply wrong, and it can be dangerous. It goes far beyond the balanced teaching of the Bible to tell people that God will always continue to love them just the same no matter what they believe in their hearts or what they do, or don't do. This out-of-balance teaching is one reason there is so little fear of God and so little repentance and motivation for righteousness and holiness in so many Christians. (I discussed these things in some detail in my paper on Ephesians chapter 1 on my internet site.)

Let's not see how far we can push the love and grace of God. IT'S NOT THAT WE CAN IN OURSELVES BE WORTHY OF, OR EARN, GOD'S LOVE, but if we continue to reject and disdain His love and grace, we will ultimately be confronted with His eternal wrath, which is very different than His supposed unconditional, eternal love. Compare, for example, Rom. 2:4-10; Gal. 5:19-21; 6:7-9; Eph. 2:3 ("children of wrath," on the path that culminates in God's wrath in the day of His wrath); 5:1-7; and Col. 3:5-11.

It is true, of course, that we must emphasize God's love, mercy, and forgiveness. (The devil and his hosts spend a lot of time attacking God's people, telling them that God doesn't love them, when He does; telling them they have committed the unpardonable sin, when they haven't; telling them that they never can stop sinning, that God's grace isn't sufficient; etc.) But it is not acceptable to put all the emphasis here. It won't work! We need the full gospel! We need the balanced truth of what the Bible teaches about new-covenant salvation! God knows our hearts. He knows if we are making Him and His Word top priority in our hearts. If we're not, we're going to have to make it top priority to change (to repent) by His sufficient grace in Christ through faith.

I'll quote part of what Klyne Snodgrass, a Southern Baptist scholar, said under Eph. 1:4-6 ("Ephesians" [Zondervan, 1996], pages 49, 50). "Election does indeed bring privilege, but not so that people can bask in privilege or disdain others. Election always brings responsibility; God has chosen us to do something - namely, TO LIVE HOLY AND BLAMELESS LIVES BEFORE HIM [my emphasis] (1:4; cf. 5:27). Other biblical texts on election have the same understanding, whether they refer to Israel, the remnant, or an individual like Paul or Jeremiah. God's choosing enlists people in his work and gives them responsibility." I'll also quote a few sentences from his page 66, "Christians are to live in a holy and blameless manner before God (Eph. 1:4). This is not an oppressive weight, but as much privilege as it is responsibility. [Yes! What a great privilege to be set free from spiritual death and bondage to sin and to live in a holy and blameless manner before God!] We are called to live in keeping with God's intent for us."

I'll also quote part of what D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said under Eph. 1:4 ("God's Ultimate Purpose: An Exposition of Ephesians Chapter 1" [Baker, 1978], page 102). "So we must always start with holiness, as the Scripture does; and therefore the preaching of holiness is an essential part of evangelism. I stress this matter because there are certain quite different ideas about evangelism, some indeed that say the exact opposite. They maintain that in evangelism the preacher does not deal with holiness. The one aim is 'to get people saved,' then later you can lead them on to holiness. But what is salvation? To be saved is to be rightly related to God, and that is holiness. The whole purpose of evangelism is primarily to tell men what sin has done to them, to tell them why they are what they are, namely, separated from God. It is to tell them what they need above everything else is not to be made to feel happy, but to be brought back into a right relationship with the God who is 'light and in him is no darkness at all.' But that means preaching holiness. To separate these two things, it seems to me, is to deny essential biblical teaching. We must start with holiness, and continue with it; because it is the end for which we are chosen and delivered."]] ... **(7) In Him** [literally, "in whom," referring to Christ, the Lamb of God] **we have redemption through His blood** [[It would probably be better to translate the redemption; the definite article is included in the Greek. This is the redemption that was promised in Old Testament days. The idea behind redemption was the buying of slaves to set them free. We were all slaves under sin, Satan, and spiritual death, but now we have received the redemption. Now sin, Satan, and spiritual death have no legal authority over us. We haven't just been redeemed from the guilt of sin; we have been redeemed from the authority, from the power, and from the kingdom of sin. We wouldn't be redeemed if we were still slaves of sin (in bondage to sin).

Three important cross-references that confirm that "the redemption" through the blood/cross of Christ includes the full victory over sin (including the call and enablement to live in an abiding state of holiness) are Col. 1:14 (with 1:9-14); Titus 2:14 (with 2:11-13) and 1 Peter 1:18 (with 1:13-19). (These passages are all discussed in my book, "Holiness and Victory Over Sin" [pages 146-150, 124-125, and 190-194].) On redemption also see Rom. 3:24; 1 Cor. 1:30; and Heb. 9:15. Romans 8:23 demonstrates that our redemption won't be complete in the full and final sense until Christ returns and we are glorified (see under Eph. 1:14 in my paper on Ephesians chapter 1), but this doesn't mean that we cannot walk with the victory over all sin in this present life.

I'll quote part of what A. Skevington Wood said under Eph. 1:7 ("Ephesians," "Expositor's Bible Commentary," Vol. 11 [Zondervan, 1978], page 25). "Redemption ([Greek] "apolytrosis") has to do with the emancipation either of slaves or of prisoners. ... By derivation, the term also implies the payment of a ransom price.... Here it is specified as being 'through his blood' (Col. 1:20). The price paid for man's redemption from bondage to sin was costly beyond measure. It was the very lifeblood of Christ himself, poured out in death. ... What was foreshadowed in the Levitical system was realized at the Cross when the Son of God laid down his life in death and ransomed men from sin."], **the forgiveness**

**of our trespasses** [[These words seem to limit redemption to forgiveness. However, I don't believe that "forgiveness" is an adequate translation for the Greek noun "aphesis" used here. I devoted an entire chapter of my book "Holiness and Victory Over Sin" to the meaning of *aphesis*. I refer the reader to that chapter, which includes a discussion of Eph. 1:7 (pages 151-153). I would translate "the release from our trespasses with the guilt and the penalties (including the major penalties of spiritual death and bondage to sin)," or the equivalent. Significantly, this "release" is the equivalent of "the redemption through His blood" just spoken of in this verse. And, significantly, the meaning of the word "redemption" and the fact that Eph. 1:4 spoke of our being holy and blameless before God both require a translation here that goes far beyond the forgiveness of the guilt of sin. Colossians 1:14, which was mentioned above as an important cross-reference for redemption through the blood of Christ, is all the more important as a cross-reference for Eph. 1:7 since it also uses *aphesis*.

The Lord Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, didn't just bear our sins (back to Adam) with the guilt so we could be forgiven, as important as that is; He bore our sins with the guilt AND WITH THE PENALTIES (including the major penalties of spiritual death and bondage to sin), so we could be born again and walk in the imparted righteousness and holiness of God. (These super-important things are discussed in some detail in my book "Holiness and Victory Over Sin: Full Salvation Through the Atoning Death of the Lord Jesus Christ.")

I'll quote part of what Klyne Snodgrass said regarding this verse ("Ephesians," page 52). "...the apostle thought of salvation primarily in terms of release [release "from sin as a power or a tyrant"]. *Aphesis* often carries the connotation of release, (In a footnote Snodgrass says, "See, for example, its use in Luke 4:18.") and the connection to 'redemption' shows that is the nuance here. (In a footnote Snodgrass says, "The same connection exists in Colossians 1:14.") ... Because of grace Christians no longer live in sins or under their indictment. Instead they live in Christ."], **according to the riches of His grace.**" Compare Eph. 2:7. It is necessary for us to know and understand the fullness of what has been provided for us at the present time so we can appropriate and walk in these things by faith. The more we understand the fullness of God's grace, the more we will be thankful before Him, and the more we will be faithful Christians. We are, of course, thankful for what we have now, but we're also thankful - even more thankful - for the eternal glory that is reserved for us (in the near future).

May the will of God be fully accomplished through this article and His people be edified! In Jesus name!

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