

Ephesians 1:1-14

1. Listen to Tim Keller's sermon, "Salvation", last four minutes. Keller asserts you know you have received the blessings listed in Ephesians 1 when "grace becomes glorious to you" (referring to 1:6). When that becomes the "theme of your life" that's when you know you have received these blessings. Discuss.
2. The *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters* provides this helpful background:

Being converts from a Hellenistic religious environment—mystery religions, magic, astrology—these people needed a positive grounding in the Pauline gospel from the apostle himself. Their fear of evil spirits and cosmic powers was also a great concern, especially the question of where Christ stands in relation to these forces. Because of their pagan past, they also needed help and admonishment in cultivating a lifestyle consistent with their salvation in Christ, a lifestyle free from drunkenness, sexual immorality, stealing the bitterness.

Paul's list of blessings is impressive to his readers because of its contrast with the pagan life they left. The pagan life can be described as follows:

BENEFITS: Purpose and "cosmology"—i.e., reasons for why things happen; a sense of protection in a dangerous world; attachment to a historic religion; appeasement for sins through sacrifices; connection to society through complex web of religious-communal rites

COSTS: The monetary costs of participation in magical and cultic practices; capricious gods and fearful superstitions; a lifestyle which provided appeasement for sin but no cure for sin.

By contrast, the gospel provides:

BENEFITS: Unity (Jew and Gentile, male and female, slave and free); a cosmic God motivated by love and granting permanent blessings; true forgiveness without sacrifices or the associated monetary costs; the permanent blessing of the Holy Spirit, who frees up from sin; chosen status; insight into the eternal plan of the universe; and not mentioned here: a community of faith, a purpose in life, a compassionate Lord, etc.

COSTS (not from this passage): Risk of being a social outcast; risk of persecution; Jesus' agenda replaces your agenda

In order to more fully appreciate your blessings in Christ it can be helpful to list the costs and benefits of the life you would have if you *weren't* a believer. Think of coworkers, neighbors, and your intelligent, successful friends outside the church. What is their "salvation", their *raison d'être*? What are the associated costs and benefits?

3. Paul gives a tremendous list of the blessings afforded the saved. Our appreciation of the depth of these blessings may be unconsciously diminished by their ubiquity. If every Tom, Dick and Harriet who follows Jesus has these blessings too, how special are they, really? Imagine for a moment that the dozen or fewer people in this room are the only humans alive who can claim these riches. How would that change your perception of your life in Christ?

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Fun fact: Ephesians 1:3-14 is a single, long, and very complex sentence in the Greek.

Further Fun Fact: Ephesians was Calvin's favorite book of the New Testament.