



First Baptist Pulpit

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The "E" Word

Ephesians 1:3-14

Remember when we were kids, how our mom used to tell us that we could catch a cold if we went outside without our coats and hats or especially if we got our heads wet?

The truth is, germs, not cold weather, cause colds. The reason we catch more colds in the cold winter weather is because we're indoors more and in closer quarters with other people and their germs.

Research shows that the most common way to get a cold is from someone who has a cold, sneezes on his hands, and then shakes yours. [Which makes me think twice about shaking all your hands on the way out - just kidding]

Germs are contagious. Germs are the agents that transmit colds and viruses.

Now why do I bring this up?

We're beginning a new series today called "Becoming a Contagious Christian." In this series we'll be talking about spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ; about sharing the joy we have in Christ by intentionally coming in contact with those who are yet to make the great choice of following Him.

Yes, that means for the next few weeks we are going to talk about the "E" word. No that is not a typographic error, by one letter..., I'm talking about a word that is just about as taboo to most Christians as using profanity. Most believers really don't want to talk about the "E" word, "Evangelism". "Oh no, that scares me to death!" But this is going to be different.

Bill Hybel and Mark Mittleberg wrote a book called "Becoming a

Contagious Christian." It is my favorite book on communicating our faith with others, and it doesn't follow the typical pattern.

Let's face it, evangelism, sharing the good news of Jesus Christ, is one the key reasons God leaves us on earth after we become Christ followers. But I propose to you that if we are going to be effective at this, it's not just learning the facts and a way to present it -- it is more to infect others with the love of God that we have in our hearts and lives. We need to be "contagious." If we transmit God's love to their lives, then when we speak they will want to listen.

Ephesians 1:3-14

Now today we're going to be looking at **Ephesians 1:3-14**. We're using this letter because God communicated some things to the Ephesian church that they needed to hear that would make them more contagious.

Basically they needed to be reminded how rich they were in Christ. That's the theme to the letter - how rich Christians are, having made the decision to commit their lives to Jesus.

What does knowing how rich we are in Christ have to do with being contagious? A lot of times, when you think you're poor; you become convinced that you don't have anything to offer anyone else. You become *pessimistic* instead of *optimistic*. And when you're pessimistic you're not contagious. *No one in his or her right mind wants to "catch" pessimism*. And honestly, some Christian appear to have been baptized pickle juice, not water.

But if you've got something that makes you hopeful and optimistic - others will want what you have. You'll be contagious!

However, if you're a Christian, you have great things to be optimistic about! From time to time you need to reflect on how very rich you are in Christ, not only for your own benefit but also so you can

bleed others with enthusiasm for life. No one is richer than the person who has experienced God's grace! No one has more to offer!

So today we're going to start learning how to be more contagious by considering *Germes That Make Us Contagious*. Let's begin.

As we read this passage from the letter to the Ephesians, I want you to **circle every time the two words "in Christ" or "in Him" appear.**

(Read Ephesians 1:3-14)

Every time you circled the words "in Christ" or "in Him" the Bible was stating something that makes people rich who are "in Christ." Who are Christians.

Verse 3 says God has given *"every spiritual blessing"* to those who commit their lives to Christ.

Today we want to look at these spiritual blessings and see them as "Germes" that Make Us Contagious. These are the things that we have "in Christ" that we ought to accentuate, the things that make us optimistic. These are six spiritual blessings we ought to share with others

I. HOLINESS (VERSE 4)

Ephesians 1:4 *For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.*

The word "holy" used here means "to be separated from sin and consecrated to God," which are actually two sides to the same coin. When a person commits his or her life to Christ they have a new attitude about sin and this new attitude affects the way they live.

I know what some of you are thinking. "Holiness doesn't sound like something that would make someone want to come to Christ." But contrary to what a lot of people think, it's not holiness that turns people off. It's "holier-than-thou-ness" that people reject. The truth is, true biblical holiness is a very attractive quality!

What's attractive about holiness? Why does the Bible say this is a vital spiritual blessing? Why is it a positive thing that I should be excited about? Why would others want to be holy when they see it in my life?

Because holiness represents positive change! Holiness is "wholeness," and people all around us

are looking for positive change. They're looking for wholeness in their broken lives.

Here are some facts that will refresh your thinking on the brokenness of a lot of people in our culture. (*From "No Perfect People Allowed," by John Burke, pages 44-45*)

For the average person under age forty:

- One (or even two) out of six women you talk to will have been sexually molested.
- Most men will have struggled with pornography or serious problems with lust.
- One in five to ten people will struggle with substance abuse.
- One out of every three women you interact with will have had an abortion.

That's just the tip of the iceberg of brokenness in our culture.

Also, it is estimated that as many as 34 million people have grown up in alcoholic homes. And that figure does not include the number of people who grew up with parents who abused other harmful substances.

Do you realize what holiness does? *It offers help and hope and healing from the things we have done to ourselves because of our sin and the things that others have done to us because of their sin.*

- Holiness says that God has given us power to combat the weaknesses of our fallen human condition.
- God's holiness supplies us with the capacity to come back from our failures! It makes us authentic - and people will respond positively to authenticity!
- The hurting and broken people all around us need the holiness they can have "in Christ."

Pastor F. E. Marsh told that once he was preaching on the importance of confession of sin and wherever possible of restitution for wrongs done to others.

One person in the congregation came to him. He was a boat builder and worked for a man who rejected Christianity. He said, "I have talked to him about his need of Christ and urged him to come and hear you preach, but he scoffs and ridicules it all. Now, I realize that I have been guilty of something, that, if I should acknowledge it to him, will ruin my testimony forever."

He then went on to confess that sometime ago he started to build a boat for himself in his own yard. He had been taking home from work copper nails to use on his boat. He knew it was stealing, but he tried to salve his conscience by telling himself that his employer had so many he would

never miss them and besides he was not being paid all that he thought he deserved. But this sermon had brought him to face the fact that he was stealing and there was no excuse.

"But," he said, "I cannot go to my boss and tell him what I have done or offer to pay them. If I do he will think I am just a hypocrite. And yet those copper nails are digging into my conscience."

For weeks the struggle went on. Then one night he came to his Pastor and said, "Pastor, I've made it right with my boss."

"What happened when you told your employer what you had done?" asked the pastor.

"Oh," he answered, "he looked strangely at me, then exclaimed, 'George, I always did think you were just a hypocrite, but now I begin to feel there's something in this Christianity after all. Any religion that would make a dishonest workman come back and confess that he had been stealing copper nails and offer to settle for them, must be worth having.'"

Holiness is contagious!

Here's the second germ we ought to spread, the second spiritual blessing we have "in Christ" that others need.

II. FAVOR WITH GOD (VERSES 5-6)

Notice the word "grace" that appears. The Bible talks a lot about grace.

What is grace? Grace, put simply, is *favor*. Particularly, favor with God. Furthermore, it is "undeserved favor." When any one makes a faith commitment to Jesus Christ they receive God's favor. They don't deserve it. It's just a part of God's wonderful nature. It's how He is. He's gracious!

Verse 6 says *"to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves."* God's favor is free when I place my faith "in Christ."

When Billy Graham was driving through a small town, he was stopped by a policeman and charged with speeding. Graham admitted his guilt, but was told by the officer that he would have to appear in court.

The judge asked, "Guilty, or not guilty?" When Graham pleaded guilty, the judge replied, "That'll be ten dollars -- a dollar for every mile you went over the limit."

Suddenly the judge recognized the famous minister. "You have violated the law," he said. "The fine must be paid--but I am going to pay it for you." He took a ten dollar bill from his own wallet, attached it to the ticket, and then took Graham out and bought him a steak dinner! **"That," said Billy Graham, "is how God treats repentant sinners!"**

That's grace. Jesus paid for our sins on the cross. When we make a faith commitment to Him - based on what he did for us, we receive God's favor. We don't receive it because we deserve it.

Along with God's favor comes the third "germ" mentioned in this passage of Scripture.

III. FORGIVENESS (VERSE 7-8)

Ephesians 1:7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace

Not long before she died in 1988, in a moment of surprising candor on television, Marghanita Laski, one of the best-known secular humanists and novelists of the 20th Century said, "What I envy most about you Christians is your forgiveness; I have nobody to forgive me." (*John Stott in The Contemporary Christian.*)

Laski did have someone who would have forgiven her if she had only asked. And it's important to note from her candor that Christians are admired for their belief in forgiveness. God's forgiveness is contagious!

Inside all of us there is a need to be forgiven. We realize that we have all done wrong things. In Christ we may have all of our sins forgiven!

When a person makes a faith commitment to Christ he or she receives amnesty for every hateful word, every contrary thought, and every wrongful deed. The slate is wiped clean by the pardoning hand of God. Why? Because our blame is placed on Christ's account and His righteousness is placed on my account.

In your sphere of influence there are family members, friends, co-workers, neighbors and others who would love to know that their sins would be forgiven because they placed their faith in Christ.

Fritz Kreisler (1875-1962), a famous violinist of the first half of the 20th Century, discovered a rare violin that he wanted to buy. Unfortunately, when he finally had enough money to buy it, it had been sold to a collector.

Kreisler made his way to the new owner's home and offered to buy the violin. The collector said it had become his prized possession, and he would not sell it. Disappointed, Kreisler was about to leave when he had an idea. "Could I play the instrument once more before it is consigned to silence?" he asked. Permission was granted, and the great violinist filled the room with such heart-moving music that the collector's had a change of heart. "I have no right to keep that to myself," he exclaimed. "It's yours, Mr. Kreisler. Take it to the world and let people hear it."

When you and I who have been forgiven by Christ, take that message of Christ's forgiveness to those around us, they will want what we have experienced.

Forgiveness is a very contagious germ.

Not only are we rich in holiness, favor with God, and forgiveness, but when a person is in Christ they also have...

IV. PURPOSE (VERSES 9-10)

Notice those *"the mystery of His will"* and *"which he purposed in Christ."*

Any one who places their life "in Christ" immediately becomes a part of a gigantic purpose, the incredible plan of God to join *"to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ."*

I don't have to live my life in isolation and loneliness and aimlessness. Life has meaning! It has purpose!

I was created to be a part of something bigger than I am. I have something to be enthusiastic about, something to live for.

Life is not just about being comfortable and having fun. Life has to have meaning for me to want to get out of bed in the morning.

Which leads to the next spiritual blessing I have "in Christ" that ought to make me contagious.

Because I have purpose "in Christ" I am significant.

V. SIGNIFICANCE (VERSES 11-13)

Verses 11-13 say, *"we were chosen."* We were *"included in Christ"*.

When you make a faith commitment to Jesus, it means you are one of God's "chosen" people. Why does that make you significant? For what purpose were you chosen?

One reason you were chosen is the one we're talking about today. You were chosen to BE CONTAGIOUS!

"But you are the ones chosen by God, chosen for the high calling of priestly work, chosen to be a holy people, God's instruments to do his work and speak out for him, to tell others of the night-and-day difference he made for you; from nothing to something, from rejected to accepted." 1 Peter 2:9-10 (Msg)

In his book, "Doing Church as a Team," Wayne Cordeiro writes:

"Some time ago, our church 'adopted' the USS Reuben James, a battleship deployed to the Persian Gulf. We agreed to pray daily for the crew and provide sailors with

tapes and books. At the completion of her Gulf tour, the ship docked in Pearl Harbor. I received an invitation to become the crew's guest on a short excursion into the Pacific.

"...I took my place by the captain as we pulled anchor and sailed with a crew of 800. At a safe distance from land, the gunnery detail fired a few rounds from the ship's massive cannons. As every sailor scurried back and forth, I noticed something. Everyone knew exactly what his or her role was. Each person on that ship had a job, a function, a responsibility and a purpose for being there. Everyone except me, that is. I was the only one tagging along for the ride.

"By contrast, several months later, my wife, Anna, and I took a three-day cruise around the islands for some R&R. On deck, I noticed 400 relaxed, sun-ripened humans lounging around the pool with 40 uniform-clad workers scurrying around trying to keep them happy. In a moment of reflection I heard the Lord say to me, *"My church must be a battleship, not a cruise liner. If you are to pierce the darkness and rescue lost souls you cannot be a ship of spectators. Everyone must know why they are on board."*

The church is a battleship, not a cruise liner.

God has appointed and authorized those of us who have made a faith commitment to Christ to find the place in the church where we can best use our spiritual gifts, our heart for ministry, our abilities, our personality, and our experiences to tell others about what Christ has done for us. That is the purpose that gives us significance.

Nothing can make your life more significant than plugging into the plan and purpose of God!

And then there's one more spiritual blessing we have "in Christ" that makes us contagious.

VI. A POWERFUL FRIEND (Vv. 13B-14)

The Holy Spirit is given to all who believe in Christ, and you could never have a more faithful, powerful friend than the Holy Spirit!

Remember when you were a kid and you read comics or saw movies about Superman or Wonder Woman and you thought how neat it would be to have super powers? Well I'm not being sacrilegious when I tell you that when an individual makes a faith commitment to Christ they receive "super power" in the presence and person of the Holy Spirit in their life!

- He is the One who helps us battle temptation and lead us toward holiness. (Luke 4:1)
- He is the One who guides us into understanding the great truths of Scripture. (John 14:26; 1 John 2:27)
- He is the One who empowers us to tell others about Christ. (Acts 1:8)

- He gives us the right words to say in difficult circumstances (Luke 12:12), and gives us the boldness to say them. (Acts 4:31)
- He empowers us to do good for others. (Acts 10:38; Hebrews 2:4)
- He fills us with hope. (Romans 15:13)
- He sets us apart for God's service. (Romans 15:16)

This Holy Spirit wants to befriend others but He wants to use those of us who know Christ to carry the message of the availability of His friendship.

CONCLUSION

There once was a small boy who banged on a drum all day and loved every moment of it, but not his neighbors. He would not be quiet, no matter what anyone else said or did. Various attempts were made to do something about the child.

One person told the boy that he would, if he continued to make so much noise, perforate his eardrums.

A second person told him that drum beating was a sacred activity and should be carried out only on special occasions.

The third person offered the boy a book.

None of these attempts worked.

Eventually, a wise person came along with an effective motivation. He looked at the situation, handed the child a hammer and a chisel, and asked, "I wonder what is inside the drum?"

No more problem.

When Christians become so contagious that the unchurched wonder what is inside of us that gives us holiness, favor with God, forgiveness, purpose, significance, and a Powerful Friend, then we will be better able to share the Good News about our wonderful Savior, Jesus!

I have two questions for you for you before we pray.

1) Are you "in Christ?" Do you enjoy these blessing? If you would like those things in your life would you be willing to make a faith commitment to Christ today? You could just pray a simple prayer like this from your heart right now.

"God, I realize that I need your favor, your forgiveness, your holiness, your purpose, your significance. God I need the Holy Spirit as my friend. Right now I confess to you that I am a sinner who needs your salvation. Come into my heart and help me to live for you."

And my second question is this:

2) If you're already "in Christ," do you realize today how contagious you can become? Do you need to claim your riches in Christ today?

Will you pray to God from your heart something like this:

"God, thank you for all the wonderful things you have given me in Christ. Lord, I want to be contagious! I want others to enjoy the riches I have in Christ. I'm giving myself to you today so that You can use me to share the Good News about Jesus with others. Here I am Lord. Send Me."