

The Board and Faculty of NWTTS seminary wish you all a Joyous Christmas and Blessed 2013 filled with God's richest Grace.

The Nativity

Thou cam'st from heav'n to earth, that we
Might go from Earth to Heav'n with thee.
And though thou found'st no welcome here,
Thou did'st provide us *mansions* there.

(Henry Vaughan, 1656)



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His story is...

Our Story

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places," Ephesians 1:3

These words of the apostle Paul are stunning. The faithful saints in Ephesus are told that they have every spiritual blessing. The word 'every' declares that the Christian lacks nothing spiritually. And the fact that these blessings are held in heaven gives assurance that they are guarded by God himself and thus will be received by every saint. Every spiritual blessing will be possessed forever.

These truths cause Paul to cry out in this and later verses with praise to God. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 3); "to the praise of his glorious grace" (v. 6); "to the praise of his glory" (v. 14).

What are these spiritual blessings for which Paul praises God? Paul tells us in vv. 4-14. We are holy and blameless before God (v. 4). We are adopted as children of God (v. 5). We have redemption through Jesus' blood (v. 7). We have forgiveness of trespasses (v. 7). We have obtained an inheritance (v. 11). We are sealed with the promised Holy Spirit (v. 13).

But aren't these blessings in heaven? How are these blessings applied to us prior to our entering into heaven? The answer is found in verse 3. They are "in Christ". Jesus bridges our eternal home in heaven and our current transitory state upon this earth. In Christ, we are made possessors of heavenly blessings now. We are now holy and blameless before God. Now we have been adopted. Now we have redemption from sin. Now we have forgiveness of sin. Yet the fullness of this is not ours until heaven (vv. 10, 14). We are in this already/not yet estate.

How is this possible "in Christ"? because the work that Christ accomplished for his people was not finished with his death and resurrection. Rather, the work of Christ comes to completion when he sends his Spirit, the Holy Spirit, to uniquely dwell in his people at Pentecost. This Holy Spirit indwelling belongs to every faithful believer. Verse 13 tells us that we were "sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance." The Holy Spirit sent from Christ indwells the believer so that he is already heavenly in nature, while remaining an alien and stranger in this world. Paul puts it this way in Ephesians 2:4-6: "But God, being rich in mercy . . . made us alive together with Christ . . . and raised us up with him and seated us with him in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." We are already seated in heaven spiritually where we and our inheritance (every spiritual blessing) are safe and secure. Praise be to God!

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Finally we ask, on what grounds does this occur? Do we do anything to merit or earn these blessings? The answer of course is a resounding, “No”. All is received by sovereign grace. It is all grounded in God’s electing love: “even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world . . . In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will” (Eph. 1:4-5). God chose us, not based on anything in us, but according to his love. And this occurred before the foundation of the world—before we did anything good or bad. “To say that election in Christ took place before the foundation of the world is to underline that it was provoked not by historical contingency or human merit, but solely by God’s sovereign grace” (Andrew Lincoln, *Ephesians* [Word Biblical Commentary] 23).

These spiritual blessings are all of grace. Ephesians 1:3-14 is an expression of gratitude for God’s inexplicable grace. Overwhelmed by the blessing of being chosen in Christ, Paul can only praise the God who is the source of such blessings. As we uniquely reflect upon Jesus coming to earth to accomplish these things during this Christmas season, may God grant each of us hearts that cry out with Paul, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.”

—Randall A. Bergquist



Stephen Lauer at the Presbytery of Ohio, OPC: On Oct. 19-20, Stephen attended the meeting of the Presbytery to report on his progress at NWTS. Under care of the Presbytery, he shared that his studies at NWTS are going well and that his summer 2011 internship at Trinity OPC in Bothell, WA had been a positive and edifying experience. The Presbytery rejoiced to hear Stephen testify how much he values the training that he is receiving at NWTS. From the spiritual care and oversight of the faculty to the rigor of the academic program, it is evident that NWTS continues to serve a key role in the preparation of men like Stephen for ministry in the church of Christ. (Report provided by NWTS Board member, Rev. Dan Knox, Pastor of Grace OPC, Sewickley, PA)

From Scott Hunter, Treasurer of the Board NWTS: Please remember us in your year-end giving. We recognize the challenges many of you face during these financially difficult times and are very grateful for the sacrificial giving you have extended to NWTS. The vast majority of the NWTS annual budget is paid for through donations. Your financial support in any amount is valuable to us, for you are the instrument by which our Sovereign Lord continues to faithfully sustain us.

Report on Students: Our three students continue to make progress in their degree programs: Stephen Lauer and Ben Davenport in the M.Div. and Carlo Saulzallido in the M.T.S. We have a prospective student for the Fall of 2013—a man who has expressed interest and visited the campus in order to sample a class lecture.

From President of the Board, Larry Semel: I want to thank the supporters of NWTS for your continued interest in my health. I retired from the ministry on Oct. 31, 2010. We moved to Carlisle, PA, near our daughter and her family. In March 2011, I was diagnosed with Parkinson’s (PK) Disease. My neurologist at that time, as I began treatment, told me that in one year, I would begin to feel better. At my November appointment, the doctor was pleased with the progress he saw in controlling and managing the PK symptoms. I do feel better and see some improvement in the motor skills in my left hand, arm and leg. He told me that I am “holding my own” and saw no need to increase my drug intake or to introduce any new types of treatment. He told me to keep doing what I’ve been doing. Along with taking two drugs, I ride a stationary bike, take walks and do some other exercises. By God’s grace, I am able to keep busy both with projects in the church and at home. Hoarseness in my voice is a bit of a problem when I preach, but so far I can still fill the pulpit on occasion. The hoarseness effects my ability to sing in worship; I miss being able to sing praise in the midst of the congregation as in former days. I also have developed some stomach issues related to the drugs I take. Though I tire quickly during the day, I also have developed a difficulty with sleeping through the night. My wife and I are extremely thankful to our God for all of his gracious care for us and for our Savior who has gained our citizenship in heaven. Thank you for your continued prayers.

Publications: The third volume of James T. Dennison’s series *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation* is scheduled for release this month by Reformation Heritage Books. This volume will contain 23 confessions dating from 1567 to 1599, including documents from the Reformed churches of Poland, Hungary, Germany, Scotland and England. Several of these are available in English for the first time. The fourth and final volume of this series is expected next year and will contain all the Reformed confessions of the 17th century.

Audio Materials and Kerux: NWTS provides a number of online written and audio resources. All issues of *Kerux: The Journal of Northwest Seminary* are available at www.kerux.com. These online archives provide a variety of theological articles, sermons, and book reviews. For your convenience, the website allows you to search the data by book of the Bible, author, title or issue. The December issue is available now. There are also a number of audio resources available at www.nwts.edu. We are currently featuring the Thursday evening lectures by James T. Dennison entitled “The Life of the Prophet Jeremiah”. This Thursday evening series can be downloaded to your home computer, MP3 player or accessed via iTunes, etc. Both the *Kerux* articles and the NWTS audio resources are available to the public at no cost.

From Dan Knox, Board Member: I am pleased to report that we have just passed the two-year anniversary of my stroke (Oct. 30, 2010). I had given little or no thought to retirement then, but one of the first questions I had to ask was whether my ministry would resume after the stroke. I am offering much thanksgiving to God that through the prayers of many, plus months of speech and physical therapy, the Lord has been pleased to grant me opportunity and strength to continue service in his kingdom. Two years later, while still limited by an orthotic device and a cane, I am back preaching and teaching regularly. Typing is by dictation and one-handed use of the keyboard, but in this, too, I will give thanks, endeavoring “to forget what lies behind and to reach forward to what lies ahead, the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:13-14).

Spring Semester Schedule: Our readers will find the schedule for the Spring semester on the nwts.edu website. Classes begin January 7.