

# *Bryan Station Baptist Church*

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## **Blessings Of Grace**

BY THE LATE: C. D. COLE

"Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus:

Grace be to you, and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:

According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:

Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.

To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.

In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace:

Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence;

Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself:

That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth, even in him:

In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:

That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.

In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise,

Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory" (Eph. 1:1-14).

Ephesus was once an important city on the western coast of Asia Minor, but today it is only a squalid village, bearing another name, with only a few inhabitants. Ephesus is best remembered as the home of the temple of the Greek Goddess Diana. This temple was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The statue of the goddess was believed to have fallen from Jupiter according to local superstition as recorded in Acts 19:35.

The church at Ephesus was founded by the Apostle Paul. Winding up his second missionary tour, he sailed from Cornith for Syria with a brief stop-over at Ephesus. During this brief stay, he went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. He was well-received and urged to stay longer, but being in a hurry to get to Jerusalem for the feast, he departed, leaving behind Aquilla and Priscilla to care for the work he had begun. On his third missionary tour, after going over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia strengthening the disciples, he came to Ephesus, where he labored three years, so that all Asia heard the word. Paul's preaching was hurting the sale of little images of Diana. Demetrius and his craft, smarting under loss of business, raised a mob against Paul and created an uproar. When order was finally restored

by the town clerk, Paul left for Macedonia. On his return to Jerusalem for the last time, he makes a brief stop at Miletus where he addresses the Ephesian elders, reminding them of his labors among them, and warning them that after he was gone, grievous wolves would attack the flock, and that from among themselves false teachers would arise speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them.

One day a man named Tychicus left the city of Rome bearing three letters from Paul. One of them was addressed to the Colossians, another to Philemon, a wealthy member at Colossae, and the third was this letter to the Ephesians. Tychicus was also entrusted with the runaway slave of Philemon, named Onesimus, who was being returned to his master after being converted under the preaching of Paul.

This letter has been called the epistle of grace. In it all spiritual blessings are traced to the grace of God. Human merit has no place in the plan of salvation at any point. Everything in salvation will redound to the praise of the glory of divine grace. From election in eternity past to glorification in eternity future, all is of grace. That is the emphasis in this epistle.

In the first two verses, we have the address and salutation. The Ephesians are greeted as saints and as believers—saints objectively as set apart in Christ; believers subjectively because faith is their chief characteristic. Romanism seeks for saints among the dead, but Paul found his saints among the living—his saints were the believers in Christ Jesus. “Grace be unto you, and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.” Grace and peace are like mother and child. Grace is the source of all real peace. Apart from grace, no man can have peace with God, nor enjoy the peace of God. And here, Jesus Christ is associated with God the Father as the source of grace and peace. In my judgment, it is unscriptural to think of God the Father as burning with wrath and indignation against sinners until Christ rushed in and appeased His wrath. Nothing needed to be done to reconcile persons of the Godhead. The reconciliation effected by the death of Christ was that of the divine attributes. All three persons loved us poor sinners and were equally interested in our salvation. Of course, God as a judge was angry with the wicked and something had to be done to honor His law and satisfy offended justice. And so Jesus Christ, the Son, was sent by the Father to do this work of reconciliation and make it possible for God to be just and yet justify the ungodly. And so Jesus Christ, by His death on the cross, reconciled justice and mercy; otherwise they would be pulling against each other: justice calling for the punishment of the sinner, and mercy pleading for his forgiveness. In Jesus Christ, Psalm 85:10 was fulfilled: “Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed

each other.” And now on the ground of His death, God can be just and justify the sinner who believes in Christ.

In verses 3–14, we have the blessings of grace enumerated. The third verse summarizes these blessings, and the verses that follow name them in detail. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.” These blessings include all the Father purposed, all the Son provided, and all the Spirit applies. With all three persons of the Trinity working together on our behalf, how great will our blessings be when our salvation is completed in glory! No wonder it was written that “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him” (I Cor. 2:9). And we love Him because He first loved us. And we are to bless Him because He first blessed us. He blessed us with gifts; we bless Him with words of praise and glad service.

These blessings are said to be “according as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.” He did not choose us because we were holy, but that we should become holy. He chose us, notwithstanding all the mess and misery we had got into.

Now the next blessing is adoption. “Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.” God determined before the world began to bring us into the position of sons before Him. Why? It was according to the good pleasure of His will—His own sovereign purpose. How will He bring us as sons before His presence? Through Jesus Christ, Who is bringing many sons to glory. In Galatians 3:26 we read: “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.” To what end, or for what purpose are we adopted as sons? To the praise of the glory of His grace.

In the Bible, predestination is never said to be to damnation but always to salvation. Predestination makes us sons of God, but it makes nobody a child of the devil or of wrath. God does nothing to make one a child of wrath; sin has done that. But in salvation, God does many things. And all that He does is by His grace—His unmerited favor.

Many have not learned to praise God for His electing and predestinating grace. The unregenerate will spew them out of their mouth, and a lot of Christians choke on these doctrines. But they are revealed to us to bring praise from our hearts and souls. Who would not praise God for being chosen to such wonderful blessings? Who would not praise God for being predestinated to the position of sons before Him? These truths are primarily for the saints to

evoke their praise and worship.

Another blessing of grace is redemption. "In whom (in Christ) we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." The word "redeemed" means to buy back what has been sold or lost. We were all sold under sin. Redemption in the Bible has both a commercial and a judicial aspect. Peter gives the commercial view when he says, "...ye were not redeemed (or purchased) with corruptible things, like silver and gold ... but with the precious blood of Christ." Paul also gives the commercial view when he writes, "Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (I Cor. 6:20). But in Ephesians and other places, Paul gives the judicial view of redemption. In Galatians 3:13 we read: "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." Christ was cursed by the law, that we might escape the curse.

And still another blessing of grace is our inheritance. "In whom (in Christ) we have obtained an inheritance...." The believer is sealed to assure his coming into full possession of his inheritance. The seal is the Holy Spirit, and not baptism as some claim. Baptism is never called a seal in the Bible. The object of the sealing is protection and assurance of our heavenly destination. You address a letter to someone in New York. You put a stamp on it to protect it from thieves and to assure delivery. The Holy Spirit is the divine stamp on our souls to guarantee our delivery in glory. Moreover, the Holy Spirit is the earnest or first fruits of our inheritance—the pledge that the rest of our inheritance will come into our possession.

These are all blessings of grace originating in the eternal purpose and will of God, provided through the atoning death of Jesus Christ, and administered by Him who has been given all authority in heaven and earth, and power over all flesh that He might give eternal life to as many as the Father has given Him. And let us always remember that all the blessings of grace are in Christ Jesus. As the poet puts it:

"In Christ is love abounding  
 In Him redeeming grace;  
 In Him my daily manna,  
 In Him my hiding place.  
 In Him there is atonement,  
 In Him eternal life;  
 In Him a full salvation,  
 In Him an end of strife."

"In Him I now am resting;  
 The half I cannot tell  
 Of all the priceless blessings  
 Which make my heart to swell,

With thankful adoration,  
 As day by day I find  
 His peace and grace sufficient,  
 To keep both heart and mind."

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