

Good's Plan Is Eternal

Ephesians 1:1-14

FOCAL PASSAGE: Eph. 1:1-14

September 5, 2010

Scripture

Ephesians

Salutation

1:1 From Paul,¹ an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints [in Ephesus],² the faithful³ in Christ Jesus. 1:2 Grace and peace to you⁴ from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!

Spiritual Blessings in Christ

1:3 Blessed⁵ is⁶ the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed⁷ us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms in Christ. 1:4 For⁸ he chose us in Christ⁹ before the foundation of the world that we may be holy and unblemished¹⁰ in his sight¹¹ in love.¹² 1:5 He did this by predestining¹³ us to adoption as his¹⁴ sons¹⁵ through Jesus Christ, according to the pleasure¹⁶ of his will – 1:6 to the praise of the glory of his grace¹⁷ that he has freely bestowed on us in his dearly loved Son.¹⁸ 1:7 In him¹⁹ we have redemption through his blood,²⁰ the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace 1:8 that he lavished on us in all wisdom and insight. 1:9 He did this when he revealed²¹ to us the secret²² of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth²³ in Christ,²⁴ 1:10 toward the administration of the fullness of the times, to head up²⁵ all things in Christ – the things in heaven²⁶ and the things on earth.²⁷ 1:11 In Christ²⁸ we too have been claimed as God's own possession,²⁹ since we were predestined according to the one purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will 1:12 so that we, who were the first to set our hope³⁰ on Christ,³¹ would be to the praise of his glory. 1:13 And when³² you heard the word of truth (the gospel of your salvation) – when you believed in Christ³³ – you were marked with the seal³⁴ of the promised Holy Spirit,³⁵ 1:14 who is the down payment³⁶ of our inheritance, until the redemption of God's own possession,³⁷ to the praise of his glory.

Translation Notes

1 tn *Grk* “Paul.” The word “from” is not in the Greek text, but has been supplied to indicate the sender of the letter.

2 tc The earliest and most important mss omit “in Ephesus” (I⁴⁶ &* B* 6 1739 [Mcion^{T,E}]), yet the opening line of this epistle makes little sense without the phrase (“to

the saints who are and are faithful...”? or perhaps “to the saints who are also faithful,” though with this sense the οὗ σιν [ousin] is redundant and the καί [kai] is treated somewhat unnaturally). What is interesting is Marcion’s canon list which speaks of the letter to the *Laodiceans* among Paul’s authentic epistles. This, coupled with some internal evidence that the writer did not know his audience personally (cf. [1:15](#); [3:2](#); absence of personal names throughout), suggests that *Ephesians* was an encyclical letter, intended for more than one audience. Does this mean that the shorter reading is to be preferred? Yes and no. A plausible scenario is as follows, assuming Pauline authorship (though this is strongly contested today; for arguments on behalf of Pauline authorship, see M. Barth, *Ephesians* [AB 34], 1:36-50; P. T. O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 4-47; and H. W. Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 2-61): Paul sent the letter from Rome, intending it first to go to Ephesus. At the same time, *Colossians* was dispatched. Going counterclockwise through Asia Minor, this letter would first come to Ephesus, the port of entry, then to Laodicea, then Colossae. Tychicus’ instructions may well have been for each church to “fill in the blank” on the address line. The church at Ephesus would have certainly made the most copies, being Paul’s home base for nearly three years. Hence, most of the surviving copies have “in Ephesus” in v. 1 (so κ^2 A B² D F G Ψ 0278 33 1881 $\dot{\iota}$ latt sy co). But one might expect a hint of evidence that Laodicea also made a few copies: Both Marcion’s list and [Col 4:16](#) may well imply this. What is to account for the early Alexandrian evidence, then? These mss were perhaps made from a very early copy, one reflecting the blank line before each church filled it in. Although it is of course only speculation (as is necessary in a historical investigation lacking some of the pieces to the puzzle), this scenario accounts for all of the data: (1) “in Ephesus” in most mss; (2) Laodicea in Marcion’s list and [Col 4:16](#); (3) the lack of an addressee in the earliest witnesses; (4) why the earliest witnesses’ reading must be rejected as *too* hard; and (5) why the author seems not to know the readership. In sum, is “in Ephesus” original? Yes and no. *Some* address belongs there; ἐν Ἐφέσῳ (en Efesw) is the predominant address, but several other churches also received this circular letter as their own. For this reason the phrase has been placed in single brackets in the translation. NA²⁷ also lists the words in brackets, indicating doubt as to their authenticity.

map For location see [JP1-D2](#); [JP2-D2](#); [JP3-D2](#); [JP4-D2](#).

3 tn *Grk* “and faithful.” The construction in Greek (as well as Paul’s style [and even if this letter is not by Paul it follows the general style of Paul’s letters, with some modifications]) suggests that the saints are identical to the faithful; hence, the καί (kai) is best left untranslated. See M. Barth, *Ephesians* (AB 34), 1:68 and *ExSyn* 282.

4 tn *Grk* “Grace to you and peace.”

5 sn [Eph 1:3-14](#) comprises one long sentence in Greek, with three major sections. Each section ends with a note of praise for God (vv. [6](#), [12](#), [14](#)), focusing on a different member of the Trinity. After an opening summary of all the saints’ spiritual blessings (v. [3](#)), the first section (vv. [4-6](#)) offers up praise that the Father has chosen us in eternity past; the second section (vv. [7-12](#)) offers up praise that the Son has redeemed us in the historical past (i.e., at the cross); the third section (vv. [13-14](#)) offers up praise that the Holy Spirit has sealed us in our personal past, at the point of conversion.

6 tn There is no verb in the Greek text; either the optative (“be”) or the indicative (“is”) can be supplied. The meaning of the term εὐλογητός (euloghtos), the author’s intention at this point in the epistle, and the literary genre of this material must all come into play to determine which is the preferred nuance. εὐλογητός as an adjective can mean either

that one is praised or that one is blessed, that is, in a place of favor and benefit. The meaning “blessed” would be more naturally paired with an indicative verb here and would suggest that blessedness is an intrinsic part of God’s character. The meaning “praised” would be more naturally paired with an optative verb here and would suggest that God ought to be praised. Pauline style in the epistles generally moves from statements to obligations, expressing the reality first and then the believer’s necessary response, which would favor the indicative. However, many scholars regard [Eph 1:3-14](#) as a *berakah* psalm (cf. A. T. Lincoln, *Ephesians* [WBC], 10-11). Rooted in the OT and Jewish worship, *berakah* psalms were songs of praise in which the worshiper gave praise to God; this would favor the optative (although not all scholars are agreed on this genre classification here; see H. W. Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 153-59, for discussion and an alternate conclusion). When considered as a whole, although a decision is difficult, the indicative seems to fit all the factors better. The author seems to be pointing to who God is and what he has done for believers in this section; the indicative more naturally fits that emphasis. Cf. also [2 Cor 1:3](#); [1 Pet 1:3](#).

7 tn Or “enriched,” “conferred blessing.”

8 tn *Grk* “just as.” [Eph 1:3-14](#) are one long sentence in Greek that must be broken up in English translation. Verse [4](#) expresses the reason why God the Father is blessed (cf. BDAG 494 s.v. καθώς 3).

9 tn *Grk* “in him.”

10 sn The Greek word translated *unblemished* (ὁ μώμους, amwmous) is often used of an acceptable paschal lamb. Christ, as our paschal lamb, is also said to be unblemished ([Heb 9:14](#); [1 Pet 1:19](#)). Since believers are in Christ, God views them positionally and will make them ultimately without blemish as well ([Jude 24](#); [Eph 5:27](#); [Col 1:22](#)).

11 tn *Grk* “before him.”

12 tn The prepositional phrase ἐν τῷ ἀγάπῃ (en agaph, “in love”) may modify one of three words or phrases: (1) “chose,” (2) “holy and unblemished,” both in v. [4](#), or (3) “by predestining” in v. [5](#). If it modifies “chose,” it refers to God’s motivation in that election, but this option is unlikely because of the placement of the prepositional phrase far away from the verb. The other two options are more likely. If it modifies “holy and unblemished,” it specifies that our holiness cannot be divorced from love. This view is in keeping with the author’s use of ἀγάπῃ to refer often to human love in Ephesians, but the placement of the prepositional phrase not immediately following the words it modifies would be slightly awkward. If it modifies “by predestining” (v. [5](#)), again the motivation of God’s choice is love. This would fit the focus of the passage on God’s gracious actions toward believers, but it could be considered slightly redundant in that God’s predestination itself proves his love.

13 tn *Grk* “by predestining.” Verse [5](#) begins with an aorist participle dependent on the main verb in v. [4](#) (“chose”).

sn *By predestining*. The aorist participle may be translated either causally (“because he predestined,” “having predestined”) or instrumentally (“by predestining”). A causal nuance would suggest that God’s predestination of certain individuals prompted his choice of them. An instrumental nuance would suggest that the means by which God’s choice was accomplished was by predestination. The instrumental view is somewhat more likely in light of normal Greek syntax (i.e., an aorist participle *following* an aorist main verb is more likely to be instrumental than causal).

14 tn *Grk* “to himself” after “through Jesus Christ.”

15 tn The Greek term υἱοθεσία (*Juioqesia*) was originally a legal technical term for adoption as a son with full rights of inheritance. BDAG 1024 s.v. notes, “a legal t.t. of ‘adoption’ of children, in our lit., i.e. in Paul, only in a transferred sense of a transcendent filial relationship between God and humans (with the legal aspect, not gender specificity, as major semantic component).” Although some modern translations remove the filial sense completely and render the term merely “adoption” (cf. NAB, ESV), the retention of this component of meaning was accomplished in the present translation by the phrase “as...sons.”

sn *Adoption as his sons* is different from spiritual birth as children. All true believers have been born as children of God and will be adopted as sons of God. The adoption is both a future reality, and in some sense, already true. To be adopted as a son means to have the full rights of an heir. Thus, although in the ancient world, only boys could be adopted as sons, in God’s family all children – both male and female – are adopted.

16 tn Or “good pleasure.”

17 tn Or “to the praise of his glorious grace.” Many translations translate δόξης τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ (*doxh" th" carito" autou*, literally “of the glory of his grace”) with τῆς χάριτος as an attributed genitive (cf., e.g., NIV, NRSV, ESV). The translation above has retained a literal rendering in order to make clear the relationship of this phrase to the other two similar phrases in v. [12](#) and [14](#), which affect the way one divides the material in the passage.

18 tn *Grk* “the beloved.” The term ἡ γαπημένω (*hgaphmenw*) means “beloved,” but often bears connotations of “only beloved” in an exclusive sense. “His dearly loved Son” picks up this connotation.

sn God’s grace can be poured out on believers only because of what Christ has done for them. Hence, he bestows his grace on us because we are *in his dearly loved Son*.

19 tn *Grk* “in whom” (the relative clause of v. [7](#) is subordinate to v. [6](#)). The “him” refers to Christ.

20 sn In this context *his blood*, the blood of Jesus Christ, refers to the price paid for believers’ redemption, which is the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross.

21 tn Or “He did this by revealing”; *Grk* “making known, revealing.” Verse [9](#) begins with a participle dependent on “lavished” in v. [8](#); the adverbial participle could be understood as temporal (“when he revealed”), which would be contemporaneous to the action of the finite verb “lavished,” or as means (“by revealing”). The participle has been translated here with the temporal nuance to allow for means to also be a possible interpretation. If the translation focused instead upon means, the temporal nuance would be lost as the time frame for the action of the participle would become indistinct.

22 tn Or “mystery.” In the NT μυστήριον (*musthriion*) refers to a divine secret previously undisclosed.

23 tn Or “purposed,” “publicly displayed.” Cf. [Rom 3:25](#).

24 tn *Grk* “in him”; the referent (Christ) has been specified in the translation for the sake of clarity.

sn *In Christ*. KJV has “in himself” as though the antecedent were God the Father. Although possible, the notion of the verb *set forth* (Greek προτίθημι, *protiqhmi*) implies a plan that is carried out in history (cf. [Rom 1:13](#); [3:25](#)) and thus more likely refers to Christ.

25 tn The precise meaning of the infinitive ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι (anakefalaiwsasqai) in v. 10 is difficult to determine since it was used relatively infrequently in Greek literature and only twice in the NT (here and [Rom 13:9](#)). While there have been several suggestions, three deserve mention: (1) “To sum up.” In [Rom 13:9](#), using the same term, the author there says that the law may be “*summarized* in one command, to love your neighbor as yourself.” The idea then in [Eph 1:10](#) would be that all things in heaven and on earth can be summed up and *made sense out of* in relation to Christ. (2) “To renew.” If this is the nuance of the verb then all things in heaven and earth, after their plunge into sin and ruin, are renewed by the coming of Christ and his redemption. (3) “To head up.” In this translation the idea is that Christ, in the fullness of the times, has been exalted so as to be appointed as the ruler (i.e., “head”) over all things in heaven and earth (including the church). That this is perhaps the best understanding of the verb is evidenced by the repeated theme of Christ’s exaltation and reign in Ephesians and by the connection to the κεφαλή - (kefalh-) language of [1:22](#) (cf. Schlier, *TDNT* 3:682; L&N 63.8; M. Barth, *Ephesians* [AB 34], 1:89-92; *contra* A. T. Lincoln, *Ephesians* [WBC], 32-33).

26 tn *Grk* “the heavens.”

27 sn *And the things on earth.* Verse 10 ends with “in him.” The redundancy keeps the focus on Christ at the expense of good Greek style. Verse 11 repeats the reference with a relative pronoun (“in whom”) – again, at the expense of good Greek style. Although the syntax is awkward, the theology is rich. This is not the first time that a NT writer was so overcome with awe for his Lord that he seems to have lost control of his pen. Indeed, it happened frequently enough that some have labeled their christologically motivated solecisms an “apostolic disease.”

28 tn *Grk* “in whom,” as a continuation of the previous verse.

29 tn *Grk* “we were appointed by lot.” The notion of the verb κληρώω (klhrow) in the OT was to “appoint a portion by lot” (the more frequent cognate verb κληρονομέω [klhronomew] meant “obtain a portion by lot”). In the passive, as here, the idea is that “we were appointed [as a portion] by lot” (BDAG 548 s.v. κληρώω 1). The words “God’s own” have been supplied in the translation to clarify this sense of the verb. An alternative interpretation is that believers receive a portion as an inheritance: “In Christ we too have been appointed a portion of the inheritance.” See H. W. Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 226-27, for discussion on this interpretive issue.

sn *God’s own possession.* Although God is not mentioned explicitly in the Greek text, it is clear from the context that he has chosen believers for himself. Just as with the nation Israel, the church is God’s chosen portion or possession (cf. [Deut 32:8-9](#)).

30 tn Or “who had already hoped.”

31 tn Or “the Messiah.”

32 tn *Grk* “in whom you also, when...” (continuing the sentence from v. 12).

33 tn *Grk* “in whom also having believed.” The relative pronoun “whom” has been replaced in the translation with its antecedent (“Christ”) to improve the clarity.

34 tn Or “you were sealed.”

35 tn *Grk* “the Holy Spirit of promise.” Here ἡ ἐπαγγελίας (epangelias, “of promise”) has been translated as an attributive genitive.

36 tn Or “first installment,” “pledge,” “deposit.”

sn *Down payment.* The Greek word ἀρραβών (arrabwn) denotes the first payment or first installment of money or goods which serves as a guarantee or pledge for the

completion of the transaction. In the NT the term is used only figuratively of the Holy Spirit as the *down payment* of the blessings promised by God (it is used also in [2 Cor 1:22](#) and [5:5](#)). In the “already – not yet” scheme of the NT the possession of the Spirit now by believers (“already”) can be viewed as a guarantee that God will give them the balance of the promised blessings in the future (“not yet”).
[37](#) **tn** *Grk* “the possession.”

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Comments

Introduction to Ephesians

Author: Paul

Place written from: Roman prison

Time of writing: AD 60-62

Recipients: Church at Ephesus, but probably read in all of the churches of Asia

Purpose: To strengthen the faith of the believers, warn against false teachers from within and without the church, and to maintain the unity of the fellowship between the Jewish believers and the Gentile believers

Aim: To make the believers aware of how rich they are because they are adopted children of God (*Eph. 1:3*)

Salutation Eph. 1:1-2

Paul identifies himself as the author of the letter and states his qualifications as an apostle, or authority on the things he is about to write about. Paul identifies the recipients of the letter as the saints (those set apart for service to God), or the members of the church at Ephesus. The blessing is almost always stated the same way with grace mentioned first as everything else results from the grace of a loving God. The salutation ends with a statement confirming the deity of Christ as the Son of God.

Our riches in grace Eph. 1:3

Because of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, God has adopted us as His children and made us joint heirs with Christ to every spiritual blessing. Absolutely nothing has been withheld from us except the throne itself. All three members of the Godhead have joined in giving us spiritual blessings.

Grace gifts from God the Father Eph. 1:4-6

Before time began God planned the universe and everything that will take place in it, and how long it will last, before He ends time and brings His adopted family to live with Him in heaven. In verse four it is plainly stated that before the world existed God had already planned who would be redeemed. Our redemption is a result of God's gracious choice and not based on any merit, or value, on our part as the choice was made before we could have any input in the matter (*Romans 9:9-13*).

All of humankind is spiritually dead because of Adam's sin in the garden (*Rom. 3:23; 5:12*); and as dead men we cannot make any choices. God, through the Holy Spirit, has to quicken the spiritual heart of a person before they can respond to the gospel and accept Christ as their Savior. God chose whom He would call to salvation before any of us were in existence. Don't accuse God of being unfair because He does not quicken everybody's heart, because if God were strictly fair the human race would have been wiped out because of sin. Grace is not about being fair, but bringing glory to God. God **did** make the invitation to salvation to all men (*John 3:16-18*), but the natural man does not respond to that invitation (*Rom. 3:10-11*). For anybody to be redeemed God has to act first in His love; then we can respond to His call. If you feel like you would like to be a child of God, that is the Holy Spirit calling you to salvation and now is the best time to accept that call because you don't know whether you will be around to make that decision tomorrow, or not (*2 Cor. 6:2*).

When we believe, God adopts us as children. Adoption is permanent under heavenly law and most earthly law. An adopted child can never be disinherited; this was true even under Roman law. Adults could be adopted under Roman law, but then as now, adoption of children is more common. More people come to Christ for salvation as children and young teens than as adults because as people mature their hearts harden, and it is harder for them to hear the call of the Father.

Grace gifts from The Son (Christ) Eph. 1:7-12

We were slaves to sin until Christ became our sacrifice on Calvary. Now, through Christ, we are redeemed (our freedom has been bought) and forgiven (our sins have been taken away) (*Eph. 1:7; 1 Peter 1:18ff; Gal. 1:4, 5:1; Col. 1:13-14*).

Through Christ we are able to know the will of God (*Eph. 1:8-9*), because as believers we are able to discern spiritual things now and respond to the will of God.

Christ has bought for us the right to an inheritance in heaven that is beyond our wildest dreams. Because we have accepted Christ as our Savior we now are predestined to be with Him eternally in heaven (*Eph. 1:11-12; 1 Peter 1:1-4; John 17; Eph. 2:19-22, 5:22-23; Rom. 8:17*)

Grace gift from the Holy Spirit Eph. 1:13-14

The Holy Spirit becomes our guarantee of eternal life when we accept Christ as Savior. The Holy Spirit is the one who enables us to live a life that brings glory to God while we

serve Him here on earth. Through the Holy Spirit we are enabled to do the will of God and spread the good news of the gospel wherever we go.

Conclusion

All of the riches of heaven are ours through the love of God, the sacrifice of Christ, and the seal of the Holy Spirit. Don't confuse spiritual riches in heaven with the temporary riches of this world. God does not promise us earthly riches, but does promise to meet our needs. The riches that we can't lose are spiritual, eternal, and in heaven.

Resources

Deffinbaugh

The Grace of God, Part I (Ephesians 1:5-12; 2:1-10)

By: Bob Deffinbaugh

Introduction

I have a friend whose experience gives us some insight into the doctrine of the grace of God. He had just returned from Viet Nam where he had served in the Army. Upon his release he had sufficient funds to fulfill a long-time desire to own a new Jaguar. Early one morning he was driving in a remotely populated part of Oklahoma which, he reasoned, was the perfect place to find out how fast the car could go. The speedometer was easing its way past 160 as the powerful sports car reached the top of a small rise. Just beyond, a highway patrolman was waiting. A law-abiding citizen, my friend slammed on the brakes, slid past the officer at 150 miles per hour, and came to a halt some distance down the road.

Before long, the officer caught up and stood beside the sleek convertible. "Do you have any idea how fast you were going?" he inquired. "Well, roughly," was the deliberately evasive reply. "One hundred sixty-three miles per hour!" the officer specified. "That's about what I thought," my friend confessed, somewhat sheepishly. Guilt was obvious, and there was no possible excuse to be offered. My friend could only wait to discover what this fiasco was going to cost. He meekly waited for the officer to proceed. To his amazement the patrolman queried, "Would you mind if I took a look at that engine?"

The fine points of high performance automobiles cannot be discussed quickly, so both went on to a coffee shop where they could talk further. A while later, both of the men shook hands and went their separate ways. My friend was elated, for the officer had not given him a citation.

That is about as close to grace as one can come on this earth, but it is still not quite up to the standard of biblical grace. (I say that because biblical grace would be demonstrated only if the patrolman had paid for the coffee.)

The principle of grace is as fundamental to Christianity as that of justice is to Law, or love is to marriage. Christianity cannot be understood apart from an adequate grasp of grace. The doctrine of grace distinguishes the Christian faith from every other religion in the world, as well as from the cults.³⁶ Rightly understood and applied, the

doctrine of grace can revolutionize one's Christian life. It is for this reason that we have determined to spend the next three lessons on this fundamental doctrine.

Grace Defined

As I approach this study of the grace of God I am fully aware of the fact that most Christians suppose they know all they need to on the subject. A major factor in this misconception is that quick and easy definitions have been given for grace. Grace, we all know, is God's unmerited favor. In acrostic fashion we have been taught to define grace as **God's Riches At Christ's Expense** ... GRACE. These are simply inadequate, and thus we must devote this entire message to a more precise definition of grace. We will attempt to accomplish this by a series of statements or propositions which will be explained in some detail.

(1) Grace is a part of the character of God. Grace is most frequently spoken of as a commodity, that is distributed, and such it is. But first and foremost, grace is a description of the character of God, which is displayed by His gifts to men. God is a God of grace, and He desires to make this known not only to men, but also to the angelic hosts.

He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished upon us. In all wisdom and insight He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fulness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth. In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of His glory (Ephesians 1:5-12).

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus, in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:1-10).

This attribute of grace³⁷ has always been a part of God's character since God is immutable or changeless (cf. James 1:17). Some have supposed that the God of the Old Testament is someone other than the God of the New. But we know that the grace of God is frequently evidenced in the Old Testament Scriptures. Men of God knew Him as a God of grace.

But He, being compassionate, forgave their iniquity, and did not destroy them; And often He restrained His anger, And did not arouse all His wrath (Psalm 78:38).

“And they refused to listen, And did not remember Thy wondrous deeds which Thou hadst performed among them; So they became stubborn and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt. But Thou art a God of forgiveness, Gracious and compassionate, Slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness; And Thou didst not forsake them” (Nehemiah 9:17).

The grace of God was that attribute which most displeased Jonah, the “pouting prophet,” as some have called him. God called him to preach to the Ninevites, knowing that the Assyrians would later serve as His chastening rod on disobedient Israel. Jonah foolishly fled to Tarshish, attempting to thwart the will of God. By means of a storm, some sailors, and a large fish God arranged a change in his plans. Eventually Jonah did preach to the Ninevites, but his response to their repentance was disgraceful:

But it greatly displeased Jonah, and he became angry. And he prayed to the Lord and said, “Please Lord, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore, in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that Thou art a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity” (Jonah 4:1-2).

It was the grace of God that angered Jonah because this time grace was granted to the enemies of Israel. To Jonah, patriotism was more important than preaching or piety. Ironically, it was grace which kept God from dealing with Jonah as severely as his sin would require. How gently God asked Jonah, “Do you have good reason to be angry?” (4:4).

David sinned by numbering the Israelites, contrary to the advice of Joab (1 Chronicles 21:1ff.). God rebuked David through the prophet Gad, giving him a choice of one of three calamities: three years of famine; three months of defeat by the hand of their enemies; or three days at the hand of the Lord (verses 11-12). David’s response reveals his grasp of the grace of God:

“I am in great distress; please let me fall into the hand of the Lord, for His mercies are very great. But do not let me fall into the hand of man” (verse 13).

The gracious character of God was fully manifested in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the revealer of the Father (John 1:18), the exact representation of the Father (Hebrews 1:3):

And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. . . . For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ (John 1:14, 17).

Paul can therefore write to Titus:

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men (Titus 2:11).

In both His words (Luke 4:22) and His works (Matthew 9:36; 14:14; Mark 6:31, etc.) Jesus demonstrated grace. He did not come to judge or to condemn, but to forgive and to save (John 3:16-17; 8:10-11).

We can do nothing else but conclude that God is, was, and will ever be a God of grace. That is His character, and it is therefore the ultimate cause of His graciousness

toward men.

(2) Grace is epitomized on the cross of Calvary. While the grace of God is described in the Old Testament, it is not defined until the New Testament. I believe that we cannot grasp the grace of God except in the light of Calvary.

Grace is not merely a part of the plan of redemption, but it is the silver cord that runs through every facet of the work of redemption. Election, the sovereign choice made in eternity past of those who would be saved (cf. Ephesians 1:4), is called a “choice of grace” (Romans 11:5, NASV margin).³⁸ The entire work of Christ in coming to earth, dying for sinners, and being crowned with glory, is said by the writer to the Hebrews to be “*by the grace of God*” (Hebrews 2:9). In no way was this prompted by man (cf. Romans 10:6-8). Our redemption is “according to the riches of His grace” (Ephesians 1:7). Our calling (cf. Romans 8:28, 30), the sovereign act of God by which we are drawn irresistibly to Him, is said to be “through His grace” (Galatians 1:15). Justification, that judicial pronouncement that we are innocent of any guilt and whereby we are declared righteous through the work of Christ, is a gift of His grace (Romans 3:24; Titus 3:7). When all is said and done, every element of the work of salvation is the work of God through grace and not of our own making. Men believe by the grace of God:

And when he wanted to go across to Achaia, the brethren encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him; and when he had arrived, he helped greatly those who had believed through grace (Acts 18:27).

The terms “salvation” and “grace” therefore become virtually synonymous:

... which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth (Colossians 1:6).

The gospel is the “gospel of grace” (Acts 20:24); the Scriptures are the “word of His grace” (Acts 14:3; 20:32).

(3) While grace has always existed as a part of the character of God and was epitomized on the cross of Christ, it is expressed in a wide variety of forms. Grace takes many forms in the Bible, and it is well to define it so that the diversity of these forms is taken into account. Since we will discuss some of these later in greater detail, let me briefly enumerate some of the forms which grace takes.

Common grace is that benevolence which is poured out upon all men, regardless of their spiritual condition:

“But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you; in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Matthew 5:44-45).

“And in the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways; and yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with good and gladness” (Acts 14:16-17).

God is gracious in making provision for the salvation of all men³⁹ and in commanding its universal proclamation. He is also gracious in delaying judgment,

thereby giving men ample time to repent (2 Peter 3:9). One might also imply that God is gracious in not revealing more than He does to those who reject Him, since greater knowledge brings greater judgment (cf. Luke 12:47-48).

Saving grace is that generous provision of salvation on the cross of Calvary and the securing of it by divine intervention, as we have already outlined above.

“But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are” (Acts 15:11).

Securing grace is that manifestation of God’s benevolence by which Christians are kept secure in spite of sin.

Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God (Romans 5:1-2).

Through Silvanus, our faithful brother (for so I regard him), I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it! (1 Peter 5:12).

Just as a lost man cannot obtain salvation through any good work of his own, neither can the Christian maintain his salvation by doing good works. Salvation is obtained and maintained by grace alone.

Sanctifying grace is that grace which works within the true believer in such a way as to bring growth, maturity, and progress in the process of becoming Christ-like:

Now when the meeting of the synagogue had broken up, many of the Jews and of the God-fearing proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, were urging them to continue in the grace of God (Acts 13:43).

But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me (1 Corinthians 15:10).

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. (2 Peter 3:18)

Serving grace is the enablement to minister in such a way as to manifest the life of our Lord through the saints as members of His body. It refers to acts of generosity and giving (cf. Acts 4:33ff.; 2 Corinthians 8:1ff.). It specifically refers to spiritual gifts (the term “gift” is a derivative of the word “grace”).

But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift (Ephesians 4:7).

As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God (1 Peter 4:10).

Sustaining grace is grace given at special times of need, especially during adversity or suffering.

And He has said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may

receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:16).

But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, “God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6).

Perhaps some of these distinctions are a bit arbitrary, but the point remains that grace is manifested in a variety of ways. Grace seeks us and saves us; grace keeps us secure; grace enables us to serve and to endure the tests and trials of life. Grace will bring about our sanctification in this life and will ultimately bring us to glory. From beginning to end we are the object of divine grace.

(4) Grace is pure. If we were to describe grace to the chemist, we would say that grace is an element, not a compound. In more biblical terms, grace is never a mixture of divine benevolence and human effort:

Now to the one who works, his wage is not reckoned as a favor but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness (Romans 4:4-5).

But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace (Romans 11:6).

Grace is entirely the work of God, unprompted by man, undeserved by man, and without regard to anything that the object of grace will later accomplish:

And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac; for though the twins were not yet born, and had not done anything good or bad, in order that God’s purpose according to His choice might stand, not because of works, but because of Him who calls, “The older will serve the younger” (Romans 9:10-12).

It was God’s choice that Jacob rule over Esau without regard to any works which either would do; in fact, Jacob was chosen even before he was born. A longer look at the life of Jacob would indicate that God’s purposes for Jacob’s life were accomplished in spite of him.

J. I. Packer describes grace this way:

What is *grace*? In the New Testament grace means God’s love in action towards men who merited the opposite of love. Grace means God moving heaven and earth to save sinners who could not lift a finger to save themselves. Grace means God sending His only Son to descend into hell on the cross so that we guilty ones might be reconciled to God and received into heaven. ‘(God) hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him’ (2 Corinthians 5:21).⁴⁰

To make even the slightest contribution to our salvation is to rule out the possibility of grace. For one thing, any contribution on our part would be exaggerated in our own minds. Someone has told the story of a man who was condemned to death for embezzlement. The royal family took pity on the man, however, and determined to help him. The king contributed \$2000 from the royal treasury, while the queen gave \$1000 and the crown prince \$980. The people in the gallery passed the plate and collected another contribution of \$19.90. The total amount of \$3999.90 was only a dime short of that which was required, but it was not enough. The king reluctantly said that the man had to die. The crowd in the gallery sighed. Suddenly the condemned man reached into

his pocket and found a dime, just what he needed. He was free!

The point of this story is that no matter how small the contribution of the condemned man, it would become, in his mind, of too great importance. God is demonstrating His grace to the world and the angelic hosts (Ephesians 1:3-12), and He will not share His glory with sinful man. It is either all of grace or it is not grace at all.

Worse yet, our efforts to contribute to God's saving grace are an affront to Him. Suppose, as someone has suggested, that the President of the United States invites you to a magnificent banquet. It is an evening that you will never forget. But as you leave that evening you greet the President at the door and wish to show your appreciation. You say to him, "Mr. President, I want to thank you so much for the wonderful evening. I know this must have been a very great expense, so I would like to make a small contribution to help cover the cost." You then press a dime into his hand and leave. That is no compliment. That is an insult! Grace does not require, nor will it accept, any contributions from its recipients.

All of this has been stated somewhat negatively. In reality, though, this is a very positive truth: the grace of God is absolutely free! We do not have to earn it—indeed we cannot earn it. This truth is not an easy one to believe because we have come to doubt that anything can really be free any more. An advertisement tells us that we will get a free pizza, but the small print informs us that we have to buy a large pizza first. We are promised a weekend on the lake with \$50 spending money, but we know that we will be open game for the salesman so long as we are there. God's grace is not like that. We cannot earn it, nor will we find that after we are saved we come to regret our decision because of some small print in God's offer of salvation.

(5) Grace is sovereign. Since we have no claim on God's grace and cannot contribute anything to it, then grace must be sovereignly bestowed. As God said to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion" (Exodus 33:19; cf. Romans 9:15). The necessary conclusion is that which follows in Romans 9:16:

So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs but on God who has mercy.

Some are greatly troubled by the fact that grace is bestowed sovereignly, but what other basis is there for its distribution? In Romans 9:14 Paul asks the question: Can God be just when grace is given to some but not to others? He answers his own question by reminding the reader that justice can only condemn all men, for all have sinned. We dare not plead for justice with God, for justice can only be satisfied by our condemnation. Grace operates on a totally different basis. Grace does not give men what they deserve, but what God delights to give, in spite of their sin. God is only unjust if He withholds from men benefits which they rightfully deserve, but He is gracious in bestowing upon men salvation and blessings which they could never merit. C. I. Scofield has been quoted as saying,

Grace is not looking for good men whom it may approve, for it is not grace but mere justice to approve goodness. But it is looking for condemned, guilty, speechless and helpless men whom it may save, sanctify and glorify.⁴¹

(6) While the Law is the standard of righteousness, grace is the source of

righteousness. While the Law defines righteousness, only grace delivers it. The Law was never intended to be a means of obtaining grace; it was given to demonstrate to men that grace was desperately needed:

Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, that every mouth may be closed, and all the world may become accountable to God; because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin. But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets (Romans 3:19-21).

At its heart, legalism is a humanly-devised system whereby a man may strive to produce his own righteousness by rigid adherence to a prescribed code of conduct. It is almost always external in nature, that is, it evaluates actions rather than attitudes and motives (cf. Matthew 6:1ff.). Worse yet, legalism tends to lower the standards God has set. In the Sermon on the Mount our Lord persisted in raising the standards set by the scribes and Pharisees, not lowering them (cf. Matthew 5:17-48). Because of their lowering of God's standards the rich young ruler could unashamedly say to our Lord, "Teacher, I have kept all these things from my youth up" (Mark 10:20). What an incredible thing to be able to say. Only a legalist could do so. While the legalists of Jesus' day placed burdens on men that they could not bear (Matthew 23:4), they found all sorts of loopholes by which to avoid the demands their traditions made on others (Matthew 23:16-24). Jesus lightened the burden, not by lowering God's standards, but by providing enablement to meet them (Matthew 11:28-30; Romans 8:1-4).

No matter how pious legalism appears on the outside, it dishonors God by revealing a deep-seated distrust of God. Stop and think about it for a minute. Why do men insist upon putting agreements in writing? Why are legal contracts necessary? For only one reason—men are fallible. At best, we tend to forget the things we have committed to do. At worst, we never intended to do them in the first place. A legal contract gives one man a basis for forcing another to do what he has promised.

Do you really believe God is so unreliable that we must create a contract which binds Him? All of the biblical covenants are those which were initiated by God, not man. And most of these covenants are unconditional; that is, they are not conditioned by any action on man's part, but only on the faithfulness of God Himself. Legalism by its very nature implies that God is so untrustworthy that we must be sure to get it down in contractual form. Far better it is to leave blessings in the hand of the One who is gracious.

I heard a true story which serves to illustrate this point. Not many years ago most employers discriminated greatly in their hiring practices (as many still do!). As a result it was necessary to attempt to correct this evil by passing Laws which punished discrimination. One afternoon an employer was called upon by a minority labor leader, who demanded that a certain number of minority laborers be hired immediately. The employer thought about it for a moment and then picked up the phone, instructing his secretary, "Miss Jones, I want you to fire the last 25 minority laborers I hired." The reason, he explained to the demanding leader, was that he had hired 25 more minority laborers than the Law had required. Now I do not wish in any way to condone or condemn what either of those men did. I simply wish to point out that the demands of the Law are only required where evil men are involved (cf. 1 Timothy 1:9-10). Where grace prevails, Law will only restrict gracious activity, not promote it. Legalism cannot co-exist

with grace:

You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by Law; you have fallen from grace (Galatians 5:4).

For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under Law, but under grace (Romans 6:14).

(7) Grace is given only to the humble. When our Lord came to the earth, He came to minister to the poor, the suffering, the needy. To the “poor in spirit” Jesus offered the riches of the kingdom of heaven. Jesus had come to this earth in order to minister to those who were in need and knew it. When Jesus chose to associate with the needy rather than with the elite of His day, it greatly offended the Jewish religious leaders:

And when the scribes of the Pharisees saw that He was eating with the sinners and tax-gatherers, they began saying to His disciples, “Why is He eating and drinking with tax-gatherers and sinners?” And hearing this, Jesus said to them, “It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (Mark 2:16-17).

Pride offended turned to jealousy (cf. Mark 15:10), so that if the religious leaders of Israel couldn’t persuade Jesus to endorse their ideology, they concluded that He must be done away with (cf. John 11:47-50).

Jesus put His finger on this matter of pride when He told the parable of the Pharisee and the tax-gatherer in Luke 18. The Pharisee had no appreciation for his own sinfulness, and thus he could pray, “God, I thank Thee that I am not like other people, swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax-gatherer. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get” (Luke 18:11-12). The tax-gatherer, however, was humbled by the awareness of his sinful condition and so petitioned a gracious God for mercy: “God, be merciful to me, the sinner!” (Luke 18:13). Jesus said it was this humble sinner who went home justified (verse 14).

Grace is the goodness of God on behalf of sinners who humbly acknowledge their own deficiency and thus their dependence upon God’s grace for forgiveness and salvation:

But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, “God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6; cf. 1 Peter 5:5).

(8) While sin is an occasion for grace, grace is never to be an occasion for sin. Many of the objections to the biblical doctrine of grace originate from the abuses of this doctrine in the lives of Christians. Any biblical doctrine can be misapplied in such a way as to justify sin in our lives. In Romans 5 Paul taught that “*where sin increased, grace abounded all the more*” (verse 20), but he quickly went on to say that this is no incentive to careless living:

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? (Romans 6:1-2)

We who have died to sin cannot casually and carelessly persist in sin, for it is inconsistent with our new life in Christ. Grace must never be used as an excuse for sin:

Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as

bondslaves of God (1 Peter 2:16).

(9) Grace is always granted in harmony with God's other attributes. It is possible at this point to misunderstand the grace of God by supposing that grace somehow is granted at the expense of God's holiness or His justice. Nothing could be further from the truth. Grace does not set aside the requirements of justice; it satisfies them. The Christian is no longer guilty before God and need not stand under the condemnation of God for sin. But someone does have to pay the penalty for sin. For the Christian that person is our Lord Jesus Christ:

He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Corinthians 5:21).

In Romans 3 Paul dealt with the need for grace to be shown in such a way as not to violate the justice of God:

Being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus (Romans 3:24-26).

Grace, then, meets the demands of justice and holiness rather than to set them aside. Grace is never granted at the expense of any of God's attributes. This is a comforting thought which we should pause to ponder. Can you possibly conceive of a God who is all-powerful and all-knowing and yet whose power could be employed at a mere whim? During the Hitler regime the Nazis had seemingly unlimited power combined with an intelligence network that was frightening. That knowledge and power were frequently exercised at the expense of justice, truth, and mercy. God is not like that. God's infinite power and wisdom are always employed in accord with His attribute of grace. Praise God for that!

(10) Grace is both positive and negative in what it gives. Grace is the outpouring of God's unsolicited and undeserved goodness upon sinful men. This goodness, however, may not always be recognized, for sometimes it comes in the form of pain and suffering. Paul wrote to the Philippian saints:

For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake (Philippians 1:29).

The word "granted" is the verb form of the word "grace." Few would disagree that belief in Christ is a gift of God's grace, but Paul insists that suffering is every bit as much a gift from God. This is so because trials are sent into the life of the saint in order to perfect his faith and to draw him nearer to the Savior (cf. Hebrews 12:1ff.; James 1:2-4).

Stated another way, God is gracious to men not only in what He provides, but also in what He prohibits. Look at the grace of God in the garden of Eden. Adam and Eve were told that they could freely eat of every tree of that garden, save one. That was a provision of grace. What an abundance of good things that garden must have contained. But God also forbade them to eat of the fruit of one tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Now Satan successfully diverted the attention of Adam and Eve from the

gracious provision of God to His one prohibition. What they did not realize (and Satan surely did not point out) was that God was not only gracious in the provision of the garden with all of its delights, but also in the prohibition not to eat of the one tree. How painful for Adam and his wife and for mankind were the consequences of partaking of what God prohibited!

My friend, God is good not only in what He gives, but also in what He withholds and what He takes away. While we may not understand the reasons why, if we believe that God is a God of grace we must be able to say like Job, “The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord” ([Job 1:21](#)).

Conclusions

Let me conclude with just a couple of observations and applications of the doctrine of the grace of God, remembering that we have not yet completed our study on this great doctrine.

First of all, I have come to see the doctrine of the grace of God as one of the dominant themes of the Bible. In musical terms, the grace of God is like the melody line of a beautiful song. As a rule, only one note carries the melody, and all of the other notes serve to compliment that note with a harmony. I believe that grace is the dominant note in God’s dealings with man. His justice, His holiness, His omnipotence, and His omniscience are all an integral part of the music of His character and activities, but grace stands apart and above them all.

Is that really the way that you and I view God most of the time? I must confess that it is not so with me. Often times I find myself thinking of God in less complimentary ways. I am surprised when “good things” come into my life, and I know they are from God. And when suffering or trials enter my life, I tend to think that God is somehow punishing me or giving me what I deserve rather than dealing with me according to grace.

There is nothing Satan would rather convince you of than that God’s way is the way of drudgery and the dismal. God, according to Satan, never has a smile on His face, but always a frown. Yet Paul refers to his God, the God of grace, as the One who “richly supplies us with all things to enjoy” ([1 Timothy 6:17](#)). It is Satan who desires to keep us from enjoying the good things of life:

But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods, which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, if it is received with gratitude ([1 Timothy 4:1-4](#)).

This study of the grace of God has reminded me of the goodness of God in His dealings with mankind in general, and with me in particular. Whatever comes into my life, it has come from the God of all grace, who has purposed to enrich my life by His gift, whether it be in what He gives or what He denies me.

Another thing that has come to mind in this study is the startling realization that it is the grace of God that fallen men most detest. If lost men really thought that God is a harsh and cruel deity who deals severely with all who offend Him, they would cower in His presence, and they would do everything possible to avoid His wrath. Men do not fear

God, however; they disdain Him. They interpret His grace as weakness and His delay of judgment as inability to achieve His purposes. Men who are sinners do not want to admit their own guilt and thus do not want to petition God for grace. They will have heaven on their own terms or not at all. Thus lost men will go to hell because they hate grace and will have none of it.

Man does not like to think of God showing grace. “Grace—which means the full and free forgiveness of every sin, without God demanding or expecting anything from the one so forgiven—is a principle so opposed to all man’s thoughts and ways, so far above man, that he dislikes it. His own heart often secretly calls it injustice. He does not deal in this way and he does not like to think of God doing so.”⁴²

My unsaved friend, if you have never realized it before, God is gracious. In His grace He has spoken to men through His Word, informing them that they are sinners and warning them of the wrath that is to come. In His grace God has sent His Son to the cross of Calvary in order to satisfy the requirements of His justice by punishing His Son in their place. If you will but admit your sin and your helpless state and call upon Him for salvation, you will be saved. God’s grace is for sinners like you and like me. He will either deal with you in grace, or you must face the consequences of rejecting His gracious offer of salvation.

36 “Furthermore, the concept of grace is the watershed that divides Roman Catholicism from Protestantism, Calvinism from Arminianism, modern liberalism from conservatism. The Roman Catholic Church holds that grace is mediated through its priests and sacraments, while Protestantism generally does not. The Calvinist feels that he glorifies the grace of God by emphasizing the utter helplessness of man apart from grace, while the Arminian sees the grace of God cooperating with man’s abilities and will. Modern Liberalism gives an exaggerated place to the abilities of man to decide his own fate and to effect his own salvation entirely apart from God’s grace, while conservatism holds that God’s grace is necessary for salvation. Man is evolving, according to Liberalism, into a kind of superman who is coming to the place where he needs no outside help, certainly not the grace of God.” Charles C. Ryrie, *The Grace of God* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1963), pp. 10-11.

37 Many are the theologians who have recognized grace as an attribute of God. Buswell, for example, writes: “The goodness of God in this sense—that is, the grace of God—is the most amazing theme in all the Bible. The most astounding truth ever proclaimed is that God is and remains absolutely just and at the same time He justifies—He makes just and right—the one who, being unjust, unrighteous, defiled, and guilty, puts his faith in Jesus (Rom. 3:26).

“Oh the goodness of God, the goodness of God! This is the gospel message. This is what the Bible is all about, from the sacrifice of Abel, all through the generations of man’s sin and God’s longsuffering, until the new heavens and the new earth ‘wherein dwelleth righteousness’ (2 Peter 3:13).” J. Oliver Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962), I, pp. 69-70.

38 I realize that in Romans 11 the choice made is that of a nation (Israel) rather than an individual. While there are other differences as well, the point here is that

election in principle (whether of individuals or nations) is a matter of grace, not works.

39 There is a lively discussion at this point on the subject of limited atonement. I will only say this: I believe the death of Christ made provision for the salvation of all men (cf. 1 Timothy 4:10, 2 Peter 2:1; 1 John 2:2). I believe the death of Christ actually purchased the salvation of only the elect. I believe the death of Christ thereby provides the basis for a universal offer of salvation while recognizing that only some (namely, the elect) will be saved.

Some believe that this creates an inconsistency within the Godhead: “How can Christ die to save all men if God only chose to save some?” I believe God purposed the death of Christ to be broader than just procuring the salvation of the elect, but also in providing payment for all.

40 J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973), p. 226.

41 Scofield is quoted by William McDonald, *The Grace of God* (Oak Park, Ill.: Midwest Christian Publications, 1960), p. 6.

42 J. N. Darby as quoted by McDonald, *The Grace of God*, pp. 20-21.

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PIPER

Sealed by the Spirit to the Day of Redemption

By John Piper

May 6, 1984

Ephesians 1:11-14

11) In him, according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will, 12) we who first hoped in Christ have been destined and appointed to live for the praise of his glory. 13) In him you also, who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, 14) which is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

God's great desire for his people is that we feel secure in his love and in his power. Everything else in life may be unstable—our health, our family, our job, our education, our society, our world. At any of these levels you may feel as if you are out on a ledge forty stories up in an unpredictable wind. You feel yourself losing balance and falling, and every brick you grab pulls out of its mortar.

Feeling Secure in the Most Dangerous Mission

So let's make sure we understand this from the outset: when you swore allegiance to Jesus Christ, you signed up for the most dangerous mission in the world. How did Paul describe it? Tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, sword—we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered (Romans 8:35–36). Listen to this condensed

autobiography of the apostle:

Three times I have been beaten with rods; once I was stoned. Three times I have been shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brethren; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And apart from other things, there is the daily pressure upon me of my anxiety for all the churches. (2 Corinthians 11:25–28)

How could a man so frequently subject to danger, so opposed from every side, so weak with hunger and sleeplessness—how could he avoid a nervous breakdown? And not only avoid a nervous breakdown, but be so stable and powerful in his soul as to carry the weight of many floundering mission churches and write letters that changed world history and dream as an old man of yet reaching Spain with the gospel! The stability and power of the apostle Paul came from one great discovery: that God's desire for his people is that we feel secure in his love and in his power, even if everything else in the world is uncertain. That's what I want you to feel today as a child of God.

Scriptures That Seem to Rob Us of Security

One of the great obstacles to the enjoyment of this security is the apparent contradiction found in so many New Testament Scriptures. Just when we start to feel that we are eternally secure in his love, along comes a passage of Scripture that threatens us and seems to rob us of security. And I don't think there will be any deep, abiding sense of security in God until we own up to these passages of Scripture and see how they relate to the assurance of God's love and power.

Nine New Testament Witnesses

For example, take this sampling from nine New Testament books.

- *Romans 11:20–21*, "Unbelieving Israelites were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast only through faith. So do not become proud but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you."
- *1 Corinthians 10:12*, "Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall." Also *15:2*, "I preached to you the gospel . . . by which you are saved if you hold it fast—unless you believed in vain."
- *2 Corinthians 13:5*, "Examine yourself to see whether you are holding to your faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you—unless you fail to meet the test!"
- *Galatians 6:9*, "Let us not grow weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we do not lose heart."
- *Philippians 2:12*, "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling."
- *Colossians 1:21–23*, "You who were estranged . . . Christ has reconciled . . . in order to present you holy and blameless . . . provided that you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel."

- *Hebrews 12:14*, "Strive for peace and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord."
- *1 Peter 1:17*, "If you invoke as Father him who judges each one impartially according to his deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile."
- *Revelation 2:10*, "Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life."

All of these passages teach that the test of genuineness for the Christian is *perseverance* in faith and *holiness* of life. They warn us that the attempt to offer security apart from lasting faith and loving lives is perilous. We might succeed and give someone security at the price of destruction.

God Threatens Our Security in Everything but God

But it would be a terrible misunderstanding if we thought that these Scriptures were written to threaten our security in God. Exactly the opposite is the case. They are written to threaten our security in everything but God. If you find your security in health, the Bible is a threat to you. If you find your security in your family or job or money or education, the Bible is a threat to you. And in threatening all these utterly inadequate foundations of security, the Bible drives us relentlessly and lovingly back to the one and only eternal and unshakable foundation for security—God. All the threats and warnings of the Bible declare with one voice: *sin* is an effort to feel secure in anything other than God.

Therefore, when God demands on the one hand, "Turn from sinning or you will die," and on the other hand, "Feel eternally secure in my love and you will live," he is not demanding two different things. Sin is what you do when you replace security in God with other things. So when God threatens our feelings of security in the world, it's because he wants us to feel secure in his love and power. The threats and promises of Scripture have one message: seek your security in God alone.

God's Desire for His People to Feel Secure in Him

Now let's look at this morning's text and see one of the clearest statements that God's great desire for his people is that we feel secure in his love and power. Ephesians 1:12–14: "We who first hoped in Christ have been destined and appointed to live for the praise of his glory. In him you also who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, which is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory."

God's Purpose to Glorify Himself

The first and most important thing to see in these three verses is that they begin and end with God's ultimate purpose to glorify himself. Verse 12: "We were destined and appointed to live *for the praise of his glory*." Verse 14: he has guaranteed our inheritance *to the praise of his glory*. The most basic fact you can say about the righteousness of God is that he has an unwavering commitment to his own glory. Everything he does, he does to heighten the intensity with which his people praise him for his glory.

Those Who Believe

The second thing to see is that the people whose inheritance God guarantees are the people who *believe* the gospel (v. 13). ("You who have believed were sealed.") There is a direct connection between believing God's Word and living for the praise of his glory. One of the greatest ways to honor people is to trust them. And since God is committed to his own honor above all things, therefore he is utterly committed to those who trust him.

God's Decisive Steps to Magnify His Glory Forever

Therefore, the third thing to see from this text is just what you would expect. Since God does all things for the praise of his glory, and since believing his Word magnifies that glory, therefore God takes decisive steps to secure for himself the magnification of his glory forever: he *seals* the believer with the Holy Spirit, and *guarantees* that we will come to our inheritance praising his glory. God is so passionately committed to having a people for his own possession who live forever for the praise of his glory that he is not about to let our eternal destiny depend on our native powers of willing or doing. He commissions his Holy Spirit to enter our lives and to make us secure forever.

What Does "Sealed" Mean?

There are two great words here that aim to help us feel secure in God's love and power: the word "*sealed*," and the word "*guarantee*." Let's see if we can unseal this word "sealed" and look inside. What does it mean that believers have been *sealed by the Holy Spirit* (v. 13)? The word is used at least three different ways in the New Testament.

1. In Matthew 27:66, the tomb of Jesus was secured by *sealing* it and putting guards around it. In Revelation 20:3 God throws Satan into a pit and *seals* it over so he can't escape. So one meaning is locking something up, closing it in.
2. Another is found in Romans 4:11 where Abraham's circumcision is called the sign and *seal* of the righteousness he had by faith. And in 1 Corinthians 9:2 Paul says that his converts are the *seal* of his apostleship. So a second meaning of sealing is giving a sign of authenticity.
3. A third meaning is found in Revelation 7:3 where the *seal* of God is put on the forehead of God's servants to protect them from the wrath coming upon the world.

So what did Paul mean in Ephesians 1:13 when he said that believers are sealed with the Holy Spirit? No matter which of these meanings you use the basic truth is the same.

1. If the Spirit *seals shut*, the point must be that he seals in faith and seals out unbelief and apostasy.
2. If the Spirit seals us as a *sign of authenticity*, then he is that sign and it is the Spirit's work in our life which is God's trademark. Our eternal sonship is real and authentic if we have the Spirit. He is the sign of divine reality in our lives.
3. Or if the Spirit *marks us with God's seal*, he protects us from evil forces which won't dare to enter a person bearing the mark of God's own possession.

However you come at this message contained in this word "sealed," it is a message of safety and security in God's love and power. God sends the Holy Spirit as a preserving seal to lock in our faith, as an authenticating seal to validate our sonship, and as a protecting seal to keep out destructive forces. The point is that God wants us to feel secure and safe in his love and power.

What Does "Guarantee" Mean?

The other word Paul uses to drive this home is the word "guarantee" in verse 14. "You were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit which is the *guarantee* of our inheritance." Noël and I ran out of gas at the intersection of 66th and Penn on Thursday. I ran up the street to Al's service station and got a can with two dollars' worth of gas and said I would be right back and buy 15 dollars' worth. But I had to leave my driver's license. Why? Because it was a *guarantee* I would come back and finish my business. They knew that driver's license was valuable enough to me to give them a sense of security that I would come back with their can and pay for my gas.

God's Message to Every Believer

So then, what is God saying to us when he gives us his Holy Spirit and calls him a guarantee or a down-payment? He is saying, "My great desire for those who believe in me is that you feel secure in my love. I have chosen you before the foundation of the world. I have predestined you to be my children forever. I have redeemed you by the blood of my Son. And I have put my Spirit in you as a seal and a guarantee. Therefore, you *will* receive the inheritance and praise the glory of my grace forever and ever. And I tell you this here in Ephesians chapter 1 because I want you to feel secure in my love and my power. I don't promise you an easy life. In fact, through many tribulations you must enter the kingdom (Acts 14:22). I don't promise always to speak in soft tones of approval, but to warn you in love whenever you begin to seek security in anything but me."

"Let me say it again: I have chosen you," says the Lord. "I have predestined you; I have redeemed you; I have sealed you by my Spirit. Your inheritance is sure, because I am passionately committed to magnify the glory of my grace in your salvation."

When peace like a river attendeth your way, When sorrows like sea billows roll, Whatever your lot—I have taught you to say, It is well, it is well, with your soul.

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WIERSBE

CHAPTER ONE

SAINTS ALIVE!

Ephesians 1:1–3

She had gone down in history as “America’s Greatest Miser,” yet when she died in 1916, “Hetty” Green left an estate valued at over \$100 million. She ate cold oatmeal because it cost to heat it. Her son had to suffer a leg amputation, because she delayed so long in looking for a free clinic that his case became incurable. She was wealthy, yet she chose to live like a pauper.

Eccentric? Certainly! Crazy? Perhaps—but nobody could prove it. She was so foolish that she hastened her own death by bringing on an attack of apoplexy while arguing about the value of drinking skimmed milk! But Hetty Green is an illustration of too many Christian believers today. They have limitless wealth at their disposal, and yet they live like paupers. It was to this kind of Christian that Paul wrote the Epistle to the Ephesians.

The Author (Eph. 1:1a)

Some names in history we identify immediately, and “Paul” is one of them. His name was originally “Saul” (Acts 7:58); and, since he was from the tribe of Benjamin (Phil. 3:5), it is likely he was named after the first king of Israel (1 Sam. 9). Unlike his namesake, however, Saul of Tarsus was obedient, and faithfully served God. As a devoted rabbi, Saul became the leader of the antichristian movement in Jerusalem (Acts 9:1–2; Gal. 1:13–14). But in the midst of this activity, Saul was “arrested” by Jesus Christ and was converted (Acts 9:3ff; 26).

Saul of Tarsus became Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15). While he was ministering in the church of Antioch, he was called by the Spirit to take the Gospel to the Gentiles, and he obeyed (Acts 13:1–3). The Book of Acts records three missionary journeys that took Paul throughout the Roman Empire in one of the greatest evangelistic endeavors in church history. About the year 53, Paul first ministered in Ephesus but did not remain there (Acts 18:19–21). Two years later, while on his third journey, Paul stayed in Ephesus for at least two years and saw that whole vast area evangelized (Acts 19:1–20). During these years, he founded a strong church in the city that was dedicated to the worship of the goddess Diana. For a description of Paul’s ministry in Ephesus, read Acts 20, and for an explanation of the opposition to Paul’s ministry there, read Acts 19:21–41.

It was nearly ten years later when Paul wrote to his beloved friends in Ephesus. Paul was a prisoner in Rome (Eph. 3:1; 4:1; 6:20), and he wanted to share with these believers the great truths the Lord had taught him about Christ and the church. Compare Ephesians 6:21–22 with Colossians 4:7–9 and Philemon to get a better understanding of the historical background. Onesimus, a slave, ran away from Philemon, his master, who lived at Colosse. While in Rome, Onesimus met Paul and was converted. Tychicus, one of the pastors of the church at Colossae, which may have met in Philemon’s house, was also in Rome to discuss some problems with Paul. So Paul took advantage of the presence of these two men to send three letters to his friends: the Epistle to the Ephesians, the Epistle to the Colossians, and the Epistle to Philemon. At the same time, he sent Onesimus back to his master.

So, the letter was written from Rome about the year A.D. 62. Though Paul was on trial for his life, he was concerned about the spiritual needs of the churches he had founded. As an *apostle*, “one sent with a commission,” he had an obligation to teach them

the Word of God and to seek to build them up in the faith (Eph. 4:11–12).

The Assembly (Eph. 1:1b-2)

Are you surprised to find Paul addressing his letter to *saints*? After all, saints are dead people who have achieved such spiritual eminence that they have been given that special title, *saints*. Or are they?

No word in the New Testament has suffered more than this word *saint*. Even the dictionary defines a *saint* as a “person officially recognized for holiness of life.” Who makes this official recognition? Usually some religious body, and the process by which a person becomes a saint is technically known as *canonization*. The deceased person’s life is examined carefully to see whether he qualifies for sainthood. If the candidate’s character and conduct are found to be above reproach, if he has been responsible for working at least two miracles, then he is qualified to be made a saint.

As interesting as this procedure is, we do not find it authorized in the Bible. Nine times in this brief letter, Paul addresses his readers as saints (Eph. 1:1, 15, 18; 2:19; 3:8, 18; 4:12; 5:3; 6:18). These saints were alive, not dead, though once they had been “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1–3). And it is clear that they had never performed any miracles, though they had *experienced* a miracle by trusting Christ as Saviour (Eph. 2:4–10). The word *saint* is simply one of the many terms used in the New Testament to describe “one who has trusted Jesus Christ as Saviour.” The person is “alive,” not only physically, but also spiritually (Eph. 2:1). You will find Christians called *disciples* (Acts 9:1, 10, 19, 25–26, 36, 38), *people of the Way* (Acts 9:2) and *saints* (Acts 9:13, 32, 41).

The word *saint* means “one who has been set apart.” It is related to the word *sanctified*, which means “set apart.” When the sinner trusts Christ as his Saviour, he is taken out of “the world” and placed “in Christ.” The believer is *in* the world physically, but not *of* the world spiritually (John 17:14–16). Like a scuba diver, he exists in an alien environment because he possesses special equipment—in this case, the indwelling Holy Spirit of God. Every true believer possesses the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 6:19–20), and it is through the Spirit’s power that the Christian is able to function in the world.

Now for the important question: How did these people at Ephesus become saints? The answer is found in two words: “faithful” and “grace” (Eph. 1:1–2). When Paul addresses his letter to the “saints... and faithful in Christ Jesus” he is not addressing two different groups of people. The word *faithful* carries the meaning of “believers in Christ Jesus.” These people were not saved by living faithful lives; rather they put their faith in Christ and were saved. This is clear from Ephesians 1:12–14, 19.

The word *grace* is used twelve times in Ephesians, and refers to “the kindness of God toward undeserving people.” Grace and mercy often are found together in the Bible, and they certainly belong together in the experience of salvation. *Grace* and *faith* go together, because the only way to experience grace and salvation is through faith (Eph. 2:8–9).

The phrase “in Christ Jesus” is used twenty-seven times in this letter! It describes the spiritual position of the believer: he is identified with Christ, he is in Christ, and therefore is able to draw on the wealth of Christ for his own daily living.

The Aim (Eph. 1:3)

Each book in the Bible has its own special theme and message, even though it

may deal with many different topics. Genesis is the book of *beginnings*; Matthew is the book of the *kingdom*; Galatians is the book of *liberty*. Ephesians 1:3 states its theme: *the Christian's riches in Christ*.

The source of our blessings. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” God the Father has made us rich in Jesus Christ! When you were born again into God’s family, you were born rich. Through Christ, you share in the riches of God’s grace (Eph. 1:7; 2:7), God’s glory (Eph. 1:18; 3:16), God’s mercy (Eph. 2:4), and “the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Eph. 3:8). Our Heavenly Father is not poor; He is rich—and He has made us rich in His Son.

J. Paul Getty, one of the richest men in the world, was worth an estimated \$1.3 billion. The weekly income of some of the “oil sheiks” runs into the millions. Yet all of this wealth is but “pennies” when compared with the spiritual wealth we have in Christ. In this letter, Paul explains to us what these riches are and how we may draw on them for effective Christian living.

The scope of our blessings. We have “all spiritual blessings.” This can be translated “all the blessings of the Spirit,” referring to the Holy Spirit of God. In the Old Testament, God promised His earthly people, Israel, material blessings as a reward for their obedience (Deut. 28:1–13). Today, He promises to supply all our needs “according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:19), but He does not promise to shield us from either poverty or pain. The Father has given us every blessing of the Spirit, everything we need for a successful, satisfying Christian life. *The spiritual is far more important than the material.*

The Holy Spirit is mentioned many times in this letter, because He is the one who channels our riches to us from the Father, through the Son. Not to know and depend on the Holy Spirit’s provision is to live a life of spiritual poverty. No wonder Paul began his Ephesian ministry asking some professed Christians if they really knew the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:1–7). We might ask professed Christians today, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed? If the answer is no, then you are not saved.” “Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His” (Rom. 8:9). Unless you have the *witness* of the Spirit (Rom. 8:15–16), you cannot draw on the *wealth* of the Spirit.

The sphere of our blessings. Our blessings are “in heavenly places in Christ.” Perhaps a clearer translation would be “in the heavenlies in Christ.” The unsaved person is interested primarily in *earthlies*, because this is where he lives. Jesus called them “the children of this world” (Luke 16:8). The Christian’s life is centered in *heaven*. His citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20); his name is written in heaven (Luke 10:20); his Father is in heaven; and his attention and affection ought to be centered on the things of heaven (Col. 3:1ff). Evangelist D.L. Moody used to warn about people who were so “heavenly minded they were no earthly good,” but that is not what Paul is describing. “The heavenlies” (literal translation) describes that place where Jesus Christ is right now (Eph. 1:2) and where the believer is seated with Him (Eph. 2:6). The battles we fight are not with flesh and blood on earth, but with satanic powers “in the heavenlies” (Eph. 6:12).

The Christian really operates in two spheres: the human and the divine, the visible and the invisible. Physically, he is on the earth in a human body, but spiritually he is seated with Christ in the heavenly sphere—and it is this heavenly sphere that provides the

power and direction for the earthly walk. The President of the United States is not always seated at his desk in the White House, but that executive chair represents the sphere of his life and power. No matter where he is, he is the President, because only he has the privilege of sitting at that desk. Likewise with the Christian: no matter where he may be on this earth, he is seated in the heavenlies with Jesus Christ, and this is the basis of his life and power.

When she was young, Victoria was shielded from the fact that she would be the next ruling monarch of England lest this knowledge spoil her. When her teacher finally did let her discover for herself that she would one day be Queen of England, Victoria's response was, "Then I will be good!" Her life would be controlled by her position. No matter where she was, Victoria was governed by the fact that she sat on the throne of England.

The fact that Paul is writing about wealth would be significant to his readers, because Ephesus was considered the bank of Asia. One of the seven wonders of the world, the great temple of Diana, was in Ephesus, and was not only a center for idolatrous worship, but also a depository for wealth. Some of the greatest art treasures of the ancient world were housed in this magnificent building. In this letter, Paul will compare the church of Jesus Christ to a temple and will explain the great wealth that Christ has in His church. Paul has already used the word riches; but you may want to check other "financial" words such as *inheritance* (Eph. 1:11, 14, 18; 5:5) and *fullness*, or *filled* (Eph. 1:10, 23; 3:19; 4:10, 13; 5:18). Paul is saying to us, "BE RICH!"

The Analysis

Paul's letter to the Ephesians is as carefully structured as that great temple of Diana, and it contains greater beauty and wealth! We *inherit* the wealth by faith and invest the wealth by works. Without this balance, our spiritual riches do us no good.

CHAPTER TWO

HOW RICH YOU ARE!

Ephesians 1:4–14

One of the funniest cartoons I ever saw showed a pompous lawyer reading a client's last will and testament to a group of greedy relatives. The caption read: "I, John Jones, being of sound mind and body, *spent it all!*"

When Jesus Christ wrote His last will and testament for His church, He made it possible for us to share His spiritual riches. Instead of spending it all, Jesus Christ paid it all. His death on the cross and His resurrection make possible our salvation.

He wrote us into His will, then He died so the will would be in force. Then He arose again that He might become the heavenly Advocate (lawyer) to make sure the terms of the will were correctly followed!

In this long sentence, Paul names just a few of the blessings that make up our spiritual wealth.

Blessings from God the Father (Eph. 1:4–6)

He has chosen us (v. 4). This is the marvelous doctrine of *election*, a doctrine that

has confused some and confounded others. A seminary professor once said to me, “Try to explain election and you may lose your mind. But try to explain it away and you may lose your soul!” That salvation begins with God, and not with man, all Christians will agree. “Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you” (John 15:16). The lost sinner, left to his own ways, does not seek God (Rom. 3:10–11); God in His love seeks the sinner (Luke 19:10).

Note that God chose us even before He created the universe, so that our salvation is wholly of His grace and not on the basis of anything we ourselves have done. He chose us *in Christ*, not in ourselves. And He chose us for a purpose: to be holy and without blame. In the Bible, election is always *unto* something. It is a privilege that carries a great responsibility.

Does the sinner respond to God’s grace against his own will? No, he responds because God’s grace makes him willing to respond. The mystery of divine sovereignty and human responsibility will never be solved in this life. Both are taught in the Bible (John 6:37). Both are true, and both are essential.

You will note that all three Persons in the Godhead are involved in our salvation (see also 1 Peter 1:3). As far as God the Father is concerned, you were saved when He chose you in Christ in eternity past. But that alone did not save you. As far as God the Son is concerned, you were saved when He died for you on the cross. As far as God the Spirit is concerned, you were saved when you yielded to His conviction and received Christ as your Saviour. What began in eternity past was fulfilled in time present, and will continue for all eternity!

He has adopted us (v. 5). Here we meet that misunderstood word *predestination*. This word, as it is used in the Bible, refers *primarily* to what God does for saved people. Nowhere in the Bible are we taught that people are predestined to hell, because this word refers only to God’s people. The word simply means “to ordain beforehand, to predetermine.” Election seems to refer to *people*, while predestination refers to *purposes*. The events connected with the crucifixion of Christ were predestined (Acts 4:25–28). God has predestined our adoption (Eph. 1:5), and our conformity to Christ (Rom. 8:29–30), as well as our future inheritance (Eph. 1:11).

Adoption has a dual meaning, both present and future. You do not get into God’s family by adoption. You get into His family by regeneration, the new birth (John 3:1–18; 1 Peter 1:22–25). Adoption is the act of God by which He gives His “born ones” an adult standing in the family. Why does He do this? So that we might *immediately* begin to claim our inheritance and enjoy our spiritual wealth! A baby cannot legally use this inheritance (Gal. 4:1–7), but an adult son can—and should! This means that you do not have to wait until you are an old saint before you can claim your riches in Christ.

The *future* aspect of adoption is found in Romans 8:22–23, the glorified body we will have when Jesus returns. We already have our adult standing before God, but the world cannot see this. When Christ returns, this “private adoption” will be made public for everyone to see!

He has accepted us (v. 6). We cannot make ourselves acceptable to God; but He, by His grace, makes us accepted in Christ. This is our eternal position which will never change. Some translations read “which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved” (NASB).

Or, “He has *be-graced* [literal translation] us in the Beloved.” The idea is the same. Because of God’s grace in Christ, we are accepted before Him. Paul wrote *Philemon* to encourage him to accept his runaway slave, Onesimus, using the same argument. “If he owes you anything, I will pay it. Receive him as you would receive me” (Phile. 17–19, paraphrased). The parallel is easy to see.

Blessings from God the Son (Eph. 1:7–12)

We should not think that each Person of the Godhead works independently, because they all worked together to make possible our salvation. But each Person has a special ministry to perform, a special “spiritual deposit” to make in our lives.

He has redeemed us (v. 7a). To *redeem* means “to purchase and set free by paying a price.” There were 60 million slaves in the Roman Empire, and often they were bought and sold like pieces of furniture. But a man could purchase a slave and set him free, and this is what Jesus did for us. The price was His own blood (1 Peter 1:18ff). This means that we are free from the Law (Gal. 5:1), free from slavery to sin (Rom. 6), as well as free from the power of Satan and the world (Gal. 1:4; Col. 1:13–14). If we were slaves, we would be poor, but because we are sons, we are rich!

He has forgiven us (v. 7b). The word *forgive* means “to carry away.” This reminds us of the ritual on the Jewish Day of Atonement when the high priest sent the scapegoat into the wilderness (Lev. 16). First the priest killed one of the two goats and sprinkled its blood before God on the mercy seat. Then he confessed Israel’s sins over the live goat, and had the goat taken into the wilderness to be lost. Christ died to carry away our sins so they might never again be seen (Ps. 103:12; John 1:29). No written accusation stands against us because our sins have been taken away! Sin made us poor, but grace makes us rich.

He has revealed God’s will to us (vv. 8–10). This letter has much to say about God’s plan for His people, a plan that was not fully understood even in Paul’s day. The word *mystery* has nothing to do with things eerie. It means a “sacred secret, once hidden but now revealed to God’s people.” We believers are a part of God’s “inner circle.” We are able to share in the secret that God will one day unite everything in Christ. Ever since sin came into the world, things have been falling apart. First, man was separated from God (Gen. 3). Then man was separated from man, as Cain killed Abel (Gen. 4). People tried to maintain a kind of unity by building the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11), but God judged them and scattered them across the world. God called Abraham and put a difference between the Jew and the Gentile, a difference that was maintained until Christ’s death on the cross. Sin is tearing everything apart, but in Christ, God will gather everything together in the culmination of the ages. We are a part of this great eternal program.

He has made us an inheritance (vv. 11–12). The *King James Version* reads, “In whom also we have obtained an inheritance,” but “in whom also we were made an inheritance” is also a possible translation. Both are true and the one includes the other. In Christ we *have* a wonderful inheritance (1 Peter 1:1–4), and in Christ we *are* an inheritance. We are valuable to Him. Think of the price God paid to purchase us and make us part of His inheritance! God the Son is the Father’s love gift to us; and we are the Father’s love gift to His Son. Read John 17 and note how many times Christ calls us “those whom Thou hast given Me.” The church is Christ’s body (Eph. 1:22–23), building

(Eph. 2:19–22), and bride (Eph. 5:22–23); Christ’s future inheritance is wrapped up in His church. We are “joint-heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:17), which means that He cannot claim His inheritance apart from us!

Blessings from God the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13–14)

We move now from eternity past (Eph. 1:4–6), and history past (Eph. 1:7–12), to the immediate experience of the Ephesian Christians. The Holy Spirit had worked in their lives, and they knew it.

He has sealed us (v. 13). The entire process of salvation is given in this verse, so we had better examine it carefully. It tells how the sinner becomes a saint. First, he hears the Gospel of salvation. This is the good news that Christ died for our sins, was buried and rose again (1 Cor. 15:1ff). The Ephesians were Gentiles, and the Gospel came “to the Jew first” (Rom. 1:16). But Paul, a Jew, brought the Gospel to the Gentiles as he shared the Word of God with them.

The Ephesians “heard the Gospel” and discovered it was for them—“your salvation” (Eph. 1:13). Even though the Bible teaches election, it also announces, “Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). A soul-winner does not discuss election with unsaved people, because it is a family secret that belongs to the saints. He simply announces the truth of the Gospel and invites men to trust Christ, and the Holy Spirit does the rest. D.L. Moody used to pray, “Lord, save the elect—and then elect some more!” The same God who ordains the end, the salvation of souls, also ordains the means to the end, the preaching of the Gospel in the power of the Spirit.

Having heard the Word, the Ephesians believed; and it is this faith that brought salvation (Eph. 2:8–9). This pattern follows what Paul writes in Romans 10:13–15, so read that passage carefully. It is God’s plan for evangelism. When the Ephesians believed, they were “sealed with the Spirit.” “After that ye believed” should read “*when ye believed.*” You receive the Spirit immediately on trusting Christ. This is not an experience subsequent to conversion. (Read Acts 10:34–48.)

What is the significance of this sealing of the Holy Spirit? For one thing, it speaks of a *finished transaction*. Even today, when important legal documents are processed, they are stamped with the official seal to signify the completion of the transaction. This sealing also implies *ownership*: God has put his seal on us because He has purchased us to be His own (1 Cor. 6:19–20). It also means *security and protection*. The Roman seal on the tomb of Jesus carried this meaning (Matt. 27:62–66). So, the believer belongs to God, and is safe and protected because he is a part of a finished transaction. According to John 14:16–17, the Holy Spirit abides with the believer forever. It is possible for us to grieve the Spirit and thereby lose the blessings of His ministry (Eph. 4:30). But He doesn’t leave us.

Another use for the seal is as a mark of *authenticity*. Just as a signature on a letter attests to the genuineness of the document, so the presence of the Spirit proves the believer is genuine. “If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His” (Rom. 8:9). It is not simply our lip profession, our religious activity, or our good works, but the witness of the Spirit that makes our profession authentic.

He has given us an earnest (v. 14). *Earnest* is a fascinating word! In Paul’s day, it meant “the down payment to guarantee the final purchase of some commodity or piece

of property.” Even today you will hear a real estate agent talk about earnest money. The Holy Spirit is God’s first installment to guarantee to His children that He will finish His work and eventually bring them to glory. The “redemption of the purchased possession” refers to the redemption of the body at the return of Christ (Rom. 8:18–23; 1 John 3:1–3). “Redemption” is experienced in three stages:

- We *have been redeemed* through faith in Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:7).
- We *are being redeemed* as the Spirit works in our lives to make us more like Christ (Rom. 8:1–4).
- We *shall be redeemed* when Christ returns and we become like Him.

But the word translated *earnest* also means “engagement ring.” In Greece today you would find this word being used that way. But, after all, isn’t an engagement ring an assurance—a guarantee—that the promises made will be kept? Our relationship to God through Christ is not simply a *commercial* one, but also a personal experience of love. He is the Bridegroom and His church is the bride. We know that He will come and claim His bride because He has given us His promise and His Spirit as the “engagement ring.” What greater assurance could we want?

We have examined a number of basic Bible doctrines in this chapter, all on the theme of our riches in Christ. It would be profitable for us to review what these verses teach us.

1. *True riches come from God.* It is a source of great encouragement to know that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all working on my behalf to make me rich. God not only gives us “richly all things to enjoy” (1 Tim. 6:17), but He gives us *eternal* riches without which all other wealth is valueless.

A distraught wife sought out a Christian marriage counselor and told her sad story of a marriage about to dissolve. “But we have so much!” she kept saying. “Look at this diamond ring on my finger. Why, it’s worth thousands! We have an expensive mansion in an exclusive area. We have three cars, and even a cabin in the mountains. Why, we have everything money can buy!”

The counselor replied: “It’s good to have the things money can buy provided you don’t lose the things money can’t buy. What good is an expensive house if there’s no home? Or an expensive ring if there’s no love?”

In Christ, you and I have “what money can’t buy,” and these spiritual riches open up to us all the wealth of God’s vast creation. We enjoy the gifts because we know and love the Giver.

2. *All of these riches come by God’s grace and for God’s glory.* Did you notice that after each of the main sections in Ephesians 1:4–14, Paul has added the purpose behind these gifts? Why has God the Father chosen us, adopted us, and accepted us? “To the praise of the glory of His grace” (Eph. 1:6). Why has the Son redeemed us, forgiven us, revealed God’s will to us, and made us part of God’s inheritance? “That we should be to the praise of His glory” (Eph. 1:12). Why has God the Spirit sealed us and become the guarantee of our future blessing? “Unto the praise of His glory” (Eph. 1:14).

We often have the idea that God saves sinners mainly because He pities them, or

wants to rescue them from eternal judgment, but God's main purpose is that He might be glorified. His creation reveals His wisdom and power, but His church reveals His love and grace. You cannot deserve or earn these spiritual riches; you can only receive them by grace, through faith.

3. *These riches are only the beginning!* There is always more spiritual wealth to claim from the Lord as we walk with Him. The Bible is our guidebook; the Holy Spirit is our Teacher. As we search the Word of God, we discover more and more of the riches we have in Christ. These riches were planned by the Father, purchased by the Son, and presented by the Spirit. There is really no need for us to live in poverty when all of God's wealth is at our disposal!

My friend was discussing money matters with his wife and neither of them realized that their little son was listening. Finally the boy broke in with the suggestion, "Why don't you just write one of those pieces of paper?" Junior did not understand that it was necessary to have money in the bank to back up "those pieces of paper." But we never face that problem when it comes to our spiritual wealth.

A little devotional book by Charles Spurgeon is entitled *A Checkbook on the Bank of Faith*. A promise from the Bible was given for each day of the year, along with a short devotional message. The author described each promise as being as good as money in the bank to anyone who would claim it by faith, as a person would write a check against his bank account. By faith we can claim God's promises and draw on His limitless wealth to meet every need we may face. ¹

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¹Wiersbe, W. W. (1996, c1989). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Eph 1:1). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.