

Ephesians: The Gospel of Grace

Review:

By way of review last week I introduced to us the Letter of Paul to the Ephesians. I gave a brief historical view of Ephesus with regards to its prominence in Asia Minor; banking and business were central to the life of Ephesus as well as involvement in the cults and organized religion, the chief being the Temple of Artemis, known as one of the Seven Wonders of the World. It was in the midst of such affluence and spiritual warfare that the church of Ephesus was established. Acts 19 is a great record of the supernatural works of God; baptism in the Holy Spirit with the gifts in action, healings, deliverances, salvations and riotous unrest. In the midst of Ephesus Paul exhorts the saints and faithful in Christ to be mindful of their praise towards God. They were to Hālal, Yādā and Zāmar in their relationship with God. As well, in the light of such spiritual warfare in Asia Minor, they were to be mindful that God has blessed us and seated us with Christ in the heavenly realms. The exhortation to stand against the effects of the demonic forces in heavenly places reminds us once again of the superiority of Christ who is far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.

Introduction:

Today we will be looking various aspects of the Gospel of Grace directed to Timothy and the faithful saints in Ephesus. The message of Grace was a radical change for the Roman and Jewish people in Ephesus. True and biblical grace is completely unique to mankind. As a result of the fall of man (loss of innocence and the gain of knowledge of good and evil), mankind has attempted for centuries to regain a place of intimacy with God. For many this involves religious attempts to appease a holy and just God and for many this requires the keeping of the Law (Jewish) or various rituals (Pagan). We will see how the grace message confronted the people of Asia Minor.

Within the first few verses of Ephesians we see the involvement of the Trinity in the Good News; the Father has blessed us through Jesus Christ and we are marked with the Holy Spirit. Paul presents the gospel by reminding us where our praise must be directed in light of the spiritual blessings we have in Christ. He sets forth the Gospel of the Grace of God by highlighting the riches we have in God's family; the riches of his grace (**Eph 1:7**), the incomparable riches of his grace (**Eph 2:7**) and the unsearchable riches of Christ (**Eph 3:8**). We would do well to remember that Paul is addressing the saints at Ephesus who to some degree aware of the wealth of their city due to it being the banking center for Asia Minor. Paul's message to the believers there was simple, "we are rich in Christ."

As well, Paul uses the words *Spirit* and *spiritual* thirteen times in Ephesians, underlining the work of the divine Spirit upon the human spirit in the midst of the highly charged spiritual region of Asia Minor. The key to this is not the relationship between the spirit as distinguished from body, but the *Spirit* proceeding from God and touching our *spirit*.

Eph 1:3-14

Eph 1:3 - Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. ⁴For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— ⁶to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. ⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace ⁸that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. ⁹And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, ¹⁰to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

¹¹In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, ¹²in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. ¹³And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. *Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit,* ¹⁴who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

He chose us:

One of the first points of the message of grace is simply this: **“he chose us in him before the creation of the world”**... The idea of being chosen by God is what theologians call the doctrine of election. Trying to explain election is confusing to the mind but not experiencing election is condemning to the soul. It is key to note that salvation begins with God, and not with man.

- The Scriptures tell us the unbeliever when left to his own ways does not seek God – **As it is written: “There is no one righteous, not even one; ¹¹there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God (Rom 3:10-11).**
- Jesus himself states **“You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you” (John 15:16).**

One of the most amazing thoughts of being chosen by God is that he did so before the creation of the *world* (in the Greek the word is *kosmos* indicating universe). This makes our salvation totally of his grace and not on the basis of anything we ourselves have done right or wrong. Before you and I were born, God had chosen us.

Does the sinner then respond to God's grace against his own will? No, I believe the unbeliever responds to the gospel 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. Both are true, and both are essential. And yet it is God in his Sovereignty who created the human will. Because of that I tend to lean towards the Sovereignty of God and his grace affecting our lives more so than the free will of man. Man's free will is not reduced to nothing but redeemed for everything.

Paul goes onto tell us that God choosing us had a purpose: to be holy and without blame. Some say the grace of God means that I can do anything I want to – good or bad. That is not the Gospel of Grace. The Scriptures clearly tell us that God's choice of us was unto holiness and blamelessness.

- God's grace produces holiness. And yet some today see holiness as a means to grace; this is totally backwards. Grace has been defined in many ways; unmerited favour, God's ability to be all that he meant us to be and to do all that he means us to do. I believe that I am holy because of the grace of God I have received in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The effect of his grace and holiness is in our spirit and is further revealed and practiced in **Eph 4 -6**. The foundation of holiness is God's grace and choice of us before the foundation of the world. To be holy has two primary ideas; to be set apart and to possess moral qualities that agree with who God is.
- God's grace produces blamelessness; (this is the same root word we use for blasphemy). In this case, to be without blame speaks of being without fault before God. Once again this is his choice for us before the foundation of the world. In the context of Scripture to be without blame or fault is something we bring before God as our Judge because of his grace in our lives. We are without spot or wrinkle because that is the way God choose us in the eternity past.

He redeemed us:

If God has already chosen us in the past how does God's grace affect us today and into the future? You will note that all three Persons of the Godhead are involved in our salvation. What began before the creation of the universe was finished on the cross and will continue for now and into the future until Christ returns. It is the combination of all three persons of the Trinity which fully reveal God's grace to us.

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; the Good News of Salvation carries onto the person and work of Jesus Christ. **Eph 1:7** tells us **“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace...”**

Redemption can be defined as the deliverance from some evil by payment of a price. It is more than deliverance from evil but speaks of total release. This is likened to prisoners of war being completely released on payment of a price which was called a 'ransom'.

In this frame of thinking Christ's death may be regarded as 'a ransom for many' transferring us out from the authority of Satan. Again, this can be seen as slaves being fully released from the power, guilt and effects of sin.

In the light of the culture in Ephesus, Paul uses something similar to their cultish temple worship; a fictitious purchase by a god of the slave would pay the price of his own freedom into the temple treasury. Then he would go through the solemn formality of being sold to the god 'for freedom'. In principle he was still the slave of the god, and would have to perform some religious blood sacrifice for his freedom.

Paul presents gospel of grace in a culturally appropriate way, telling the believers in Ephesus that Jesus has redeemed them through his blood releasing to them the forgiveness of sins. The requirement of the Jewish Law with regards to the forgiveness of sins was a blood sacrifice. The rites of passage for the cults in Ephesus also required blood sacrifice. Our redemption and forgiveness through Christ's blood brought us into relationship with an infinite and now personal God.

He marked us:

As much as God the Son is concerned, you were saved when he died for you on the cross. However, the good news of our salvation does not stop at the Cross of Jesus. Paul goes onto to describe **"having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory (Eph 1:13-14).** Our experience of God's grace carries on in being marked and sealed in the Holy Spirit. Regarding the Spirit of God, you were saved when you yielded to his conviction and received Christ as your Saviour. The Spirit of wisdom and revelation helps us to grow in our knowledge of Jesus Christ (**Eph 1:17**) and helps give us access to the Father (**Eph 2:18**).

Paul again uses terminology that relates to the cults that surrounded Ephesus. Many of the cults would mark themselves with tattoos or scars that would make them distinct to their temple of worship. Paul tells us the Holy Spirit himself is our seal, guaranteeing our inheritance and redemption in the future. The first stage of the good news is secured by the blood of Christ, which secures the forgiveness of our sins, but, its final completion, is kept on deposit with the Holy Spirit until the **"day of redemption" Eph 4:30.**

In Conclusion:

The Gospel of Grace goes beyond the commonly accepted definitions of God's unmerited favor and his ability in us to do that which we could not do ourselves. As we can see by looking at Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus, the 'good news' has its beginnings before we were ever

created. God's grace precedes the powers of darkness accusing, deceiving and twisting mankind. God's grace is before we ever did something right or wrong.

The grace of God continues in the person of Jesus Christ – **John 1:14 - The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.** And the grace of God does not stop there in relationship to the Trinity, we are told later on in the Scriptures (**Hebrews 10:29**) to beware of insulting “**the Spirit of grace**”.

Many within the body of Christ today need the revelation of the Father's choice of them. Knowing and experiencing the Love of the Father is foundational in the gospel. In relationship to Jesus, many believers have a relationship with Jesus based on what we can do for him, losing sight of what he has done for us. As well, many believers completely miss the point of the good news as related to our bond with the Holy Spirit. We may start in grace like the Galatian' church only to find ourselves ending with our own efforts (**Gal 3:3**). We must let go of our religious pride, lay aside our righteous efforts to gain God's approval or grace.

In Application:

Let's take Communion together.

Ask for the revelation of being chosen by the Father before you were ever born.

Accept God's grace as your holiness and blamelessness.

Admit to God your tendency towards self righteousness and accept Jesus as Saviour.

Acknowledge your need of experiencing the Grace of God in relation to the Holy Spirit.

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