
The Book of Ephesians

Chapter 1:5-7

Ministry Reading

Opening Reading -- Ephesians 1:5-14

Ephesians 1:5-14

Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved, in whom we have redemption, through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace, wherein He hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure, which He hath purposed in Himself, that, in the dispensation of the fullness of times, He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth, even in Him, in whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will, that we should be to the praise of His glory, who first trusted in Christ, in whom ye also trusted after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, in whom also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of His glory.

God and Nature / Father and Privileges

We have already seen that God in verse 3 is presented in two ways -- as God and as Father -- and that verse 4 answers to the one and verse 5 to the other. In verse 4 we have God and nature: chosen in Him, that we should be holy and without blame. In verse 5 we have Father and privileges: marked out beforehand for sonship through Jesus Christ to Himself. That is the bearing of the Spirit of God speaking of God in two ways in verse 3.

This sonship belongs to every believer. It is not predestination to sonship for a select few within the church. Paul writes to the believers at Ephesus, and he includes himself, and he includes us -- all upon whom these great blessings have been placed. We have also spoken of the priesthood of all believers, which is a precious truth. But what we have in verse 5 rises above even that: every one who has believed has been marked out beforehand for the position of sonship before the Father.

To Himself: The Intimacy of the Father's Purpose

The words 'to himself' are not wasted words. There are no wasted words in Scripture. The Father has brought sons to Himself. This shows the intimacy of the place He has brought us into. The prodigal son, when he came to himself, thought it would be a wonderful thing to be received back as a hired servant. It was as much as he could imagine -- the joy of being employed in his father's house, after the pigsty where he had been. But that would not have satisfied the father's heart. 'Bring forth the best robe, put it on him; put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet. Bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it, and let us eat and be merry.' That is the measure, at least in part, of the heart of God and His purpose for us.

Why? According to the Good Pleasure of His Will

Very often in Christian experience the question 'why?' arises in connection with what God allows in a life. But the really great 'why' is this one: why did God do what we are reading in Ephesians 1? The answer is given: 'according to the good pleasure of His will.' There is no higher answer. There is no deeper reason to be found. It pleased Him. We know that God is both light and love -- that His holiness has been fully met by the work of Christ on the cross, and that having been so met, He can go out in sovereign love to lost sinners. He chose us. Why? Because it was the good pleasure of His will to do so. That leaves us completely out of the picture as to any contributing action. By definition, this verse has nothing to do with human free will. It is God's choice, not man's.

Good Pleasure and the Will of God

The word 'pleasure' is worth pausing over. Men are seeking pleasure continually; it is one of the great driving forces of human life. But Revelation 4 reaches the true definition: 'Thou hast created all things, and for thy will and pleasure they were, and were created.' The pleasure of God is the highest and ultimate pleasure. The Lord Jesus said, 'I always do those things that please the Father.' That was the unfailing characteristic of His pathway. And when Peter says He has left us a model that we should follow in His steps -- in His walk -- the character of that walk was exactly this: He pleased not Himself. He came to do the will of the Father.

Moreover, the pleasure here is good pleasure. There is such a thing as a difference between good and evil, however much the world around us may deny it. The will of God is connected with goodness. The good pleasure of His will is not morally neutral; it partakes of the very goodness of God.

Self-Will: The Essence of Sin

Self-will is the essence of what sin is. It entered the race in the garden when Adam, it appears with his eyes open and not deceived, exercised his own will in disobedience to God. His will no longer coincided with God's will. From that moment, the nature we receive in the fall is a nature whose will is set against God's will. Romans 8:3 designates this as 'sin in the flesh' -- sin in its principle, active within us. It is what we mean when we speak of the old nature. Its purpose is not to do the will of God; that is precisely what it resists.

The good pleasure of His will, then, is the counterpart and answer to the self-will that brought sin in. God's will and God's pleasure are where our will ought always to be. We fail -- but we do not lower the standard because of failure. The standard remains what God says about it. And self-will -- described in Scripture as iniquity and as idolatry -- is the root of all that we see in the world today.

To the Praise of the Glory of His Grace

All of this is 'to the praise of the glory of His grace.' This phrase is of the first importance, and it connects everything together. The prodigal son, seated at the father's table in the best robe, with a ring on his finger and shoes on his feet -- the praise belongs to the giver, not the receiver. Not a word is said about what the prodigal son deserved, or how well he was doing, or how beautifully dressed he appeared. The question is: to whom does the praise go? To the father whose heart moved in grace toward his lost son. To God, whose good pleasure it was. Not to us.

It is characteristic of the flesh to want some praise for itself even out of what God has done for us. But these verses, read carefully and in connection with one another, leave no room for that. They are all connected, all building toward the same point: the praise of the glory of His grace.

The Word Glory in Ephesians 1

The word 'glory' appears five times in this first chapter, and it repays attention. First, here in verse 6: 'the praise of the glory of His grace.' Then in verse 12: 'to the praise of His glory' -- not the glory of His grace, but His glory as the source from which everything flows. Again in verse 14: 'unto the praise of His glory.' And then God is called 'the Father of glory' in verse 17, and He is said to have 'the glory of His inheritance in the saints' in verse 18. It is a characteristic word of this chapter. Wherever one looks, the glory is His.

Taken into Favor in the Beloved

Verse 6 says He 'hath made us accepted in the Beloved' -- or, more exactly, He has taken us into favor in the Beloved. The word 'accepted' in common usage can suggest that someone has simply been found tolerable or agreeable. But that is not the force of this. The verse speaks of the place into which the person has been brought, and of the character in which he stands in that place. It is 'in the Beloved' -- that is, in virtue of who He is: the satisfying object of the Father's heart. And we have been taken into favor in such a One.

We are in Christ means there is a new place in which we stand. Here it is expressed as 'in the Beloved' to bring out the love side of the one in whom we are placed. The Beloved is the one who fully satisfies the Father's heart. And in such a one -- the Father's satisfying object -- He has given us our place. That means Christ's place before the Father is our place before the Father. That is a staggering statement, but it is what Scripture says.

Christ's Place Is Our Place Before the Father

Let us think carefully about what this means. The Lord Jesus said, 'I came out from the Father and came into the world. I leave the world and go to the Father.'

He became man. As man, He accomplished the Father's will here below. And He has taken that manhood up into glory. He is there before the Father as the Beloved. And we are taken into a place of favor in the Beloved -- which means that His place before the Father as man is the Christian's place before the Father.

This is the highest thing God could possibly do for a creature. We are not deity; we do not partake of deity. But the highest possible place for a creature is the place Christ has as man before the Father. And that is the place He has given us. A brother once put it this way: every Christian blessing -- the proper Christian blessing -- is a mountain peak beyond which God could not go. That is a true statement. What more could He have done? What higher place could He have brought us to? There is none. The place Christ has before the Father is the measure of our place.

This corresponds with what we find in John's gospel, where the Lord says, 'The Father himself loveth you' -- with the same love with which He loves the Son. That is the measure of the love. There are not two kinds of love with God. His love for us is His love for the Son. And this is a place we will never lose throughout all eternity.

A Practice That Answers to Our Position

The prodigal son, seated at the father's table, should not sit and squirm, feeling he does not belong there. God has made us so that we do belong there. The more intelligently and consciously we are in the good of what it means to be in the Beloved -- taken into favor in the One who is the Father's satisfying object -- the more that will find expression in how we walk.

Every fact that is true of us in Christ requires a corresponding expression in our walk. But the expression in our walk flows from the consciousness of the position. That is why Paul wrote these things. To live in the good of these truths

is connected with self-judgment, with a humility of mind that makes nothing of self and everything of Christ. The Song of Solomon gives us a lovely picture of this: 'Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her Beloved?' One who has learned to lean on Him would find it far easier to live intelligently in the truth of what it means to be taken into favor in the Beloved.

The Motivating Principle: Position, Not Law

The motivating principle which flows from a true apprehension of our position is entirely different from the principle of law. Law says: here is what is required of you, and if you fail there will be consequences. It beats men into compliance. But that is not the New Testament principle. The New Testament tells us what we are -- what God has made us in Christ, whose place is our place, in whom we stand before the Father as the Beloved. And that truth, believed and felt, motivates a walk that answers to the position.

It is like a child who has been washed clean and dressed in his best clothes. His father sets him beside a mud puddle and says he will return shortly. What keeps the child out of the mud? The law would say: fear of a spanking. The New Testament says: the child should say to himself, 'I am too clean for that mud puddle.' The consciousness of what he is -- of the purity that has been given to him -- is the motivating principle. God says to us, in connection with Numbers and Balaam, 'I have not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither have I seen perverseness in Israel.' It is God who says so. And when the voice came from heaven over the Lord Jesus, it said, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' There they come together -- beloved and well pleased -- in one voice from the Father. That is our place, because He has placed us there.

The Cost: Redemption Through His Blood (Verse 7)

None of these things are to be received lightly, as though they cost nothing. Verse 7 brings us to the cost: 'In whom we have redemption through His blood.' These high things -- this place in the Beloved, this sonship, this favor before the Father -- were purchased at the infinite cost of the precious blood of Christ. They are not like the rain that falls from the sky without cost or labor. They are here because of what was accomplished on the cross in those three hours of darkness, at the cost of the blood of One whose person -- as God and man -- imparts infinite value to every drop. A finite mind cannot measure the value of His blood. It is immeasurable.

Redemption means to buy back, and then to set free. A slave who is sold is still a slave when bought back, unless he is also freed. Redemption is the buying back and the setting free. That is our privilege: to have been bought back and set free by the precious blood of Christ -- and then, in response, to devote ourselves willingly and voluntarily to the Savior who redeemed us.

The Forgiveness of Sins According to the Riches of His Grace

The forgiveness is 'according to the riches of His grace.' Notice what the verse does not say. It does not say 'the forgiveness of your sins' or 'the forgiveness of my sins.' The verse was not written to make us think about ourselves. It was written to lift our eyes to the One in whom we have this redemption. The sins were all ours -- not one was His, who did no sin, who knew no sin, in whom is no sin. But the verse's focus is not us. Its focus is the One who paid the price.

How rich are the riches of His grace? They are immeasurable, for the measure is His own person. His person as God and man poured its infinite value into the precious blood. There is no finite standard by which the riches of His grace could be measured. What we could never pay -- what lies infinitely beyond our means -- He has provided. It is the gift of God. And note the verbs in this section: He blessed us, He chose us, He predestinated us, He made us accepted, He abounded

toward us. We need look only for our own contribution: 'the forgiveness of sins.' Sins is about the only action that can be attributed to us in the whole passage.

Our Place Distinguished from Israel's

Israel in the coming day will have the forgiveness of sins; it will be covenanted to them. They will have it by covenant. We are not under covenant; we do not have this by covenant. But there is a further and decisive difference: Israel will have the forgiveness of sins, but not 'in whom.' That small expression -- repeated so impressively throughout this chapter -- is distinctively Christian. It is connected with our place before the Father in the Beloved. Everything in Christianity is connected in that way.

As high as it is for Israel to have their sins and iniquities remembered no more by covenant, it is infinitely higher to have the forgiveness of sins in the Beloved -- in Christ -- where all these blessings are located. Earth's blessings come by covenant. But the Gentile has been brought in entirely apart from covenant, with no claim whatsoever. The connections of things make all the difference. All of what we have in Ephesians 1 is connected with our place before the Father as sons, taken into that place in the Beloved -- and therefore of an order infinitely above the earthly.

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Lord willing.