

and the Spirit. Such people look forward in faith to that day when, in God's grace, they will no longer be flesh and blood but the embodiment of the Spirit itself, with that granting of the incorruptible state, even immortality. Baptism is of vital importance, because by it we give witness to our belief in the death and resurrection

of Jesus, so acknowledging our need for the remission of sins, testifying that only "in Christ" can we hope to share those great and precious promises made to Abraham. Baptism is of vital importance, because "there is none other name under heaven . . . whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

"By grace are ye saved"

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THE PHRASE that forms the subject of this article is found in Ephesians 2:5,8; it is a key sentence in the letter. In order to grasp the correct meaning of the phrase, we need to appreciate the message of this letter.

Paul wrote to the Ephesian believers, not simply because he owed them a letter, but because he had a serious reason to write, the need to strengthen them against the opposition they were facing in Ephesus. This opposition is spoken of later in the letter, where they are exhorted to "stand against the wiles of the devil . . . against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (6:11,12). They faced what was truly a formidable opposition, one that was mounted "by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness" (4:14).

In order that they should withstand such onslaught from the enemies of the Truth, and not be "carried about with every wind of doctrine" (v. 14), Paul exhorted them to "be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might" (6:10). It is worthwhile noting here the use of three closely related words ('strong', 'power' and 'might') in one short sentence; the main emphasis of the sentence surely lies in the reference to the source of that strength, power and might, that is, "the Lord" (Jesus). Paul had already had much to say in the epistle about Jesus.

The problem that concerned these Ephesians was the danger of returning to the teachings of the world in which they lived, and from which they had come out: ". . . wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience" (2:2). However, to help them stand fast, they could with enlightened eyes know "the exceeding greatness of His [God's] power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of

His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ, when He raised him from the dead, and set him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named . . . and hath put all things under his feet" (1:18-22).

This letter, then, was written to instruct these Ephesian brethren in the mighty ways of "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 17), so as to guard against a return to former ways. It is in this context that the apostle uses the sentence, "by grace are ye saved".

The meaning of 'grace'

In encouraging the Ephesian brethren to hold fast, Paul uses one phrase, "heavenly places", to describe two very different situations. On the one hand, he uses it to describe the wicked ruling authority under which the Ephesians lived (6:12, mg.); on the other hand, he uses the same phrase to depict the situation in which the believers found themselves in Christ (1:3; 2:6)—sitting, as it were, together with their Master in his exaltation, ruling the earth for his Father.

This contrast is drawn to impress the Ephesian brethren with the wonder of the calling to which they had been called (4:1). Their position in Christ was in no way inferior to the apparently powerful and despotic rule of men under which they suffered. Indeed, it was vastly superior. Therefore they should never succumb to the wiles of the "devil"; as we have quoted above, this "devil" was identical to the "spiritual wickedness in high places" (6:11-13).

Paul therefore lays great emphasis on being "in Christ". After he has saluted the Ephesians in the first few verses of the letter, the following eleven verses all mention the close relationship that the brethren and sisters had with Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ (1:3) is continually set before them, his name exalted above every name

(v. 21). It is against this background that the grace of God is glorified (vv. 6,7).

When the reader arrives at the words that form our title, he has already learnt in what way the word 'grace' is being used. We shall see this shortly. The word has already been used in the opening entreaty of Paul to his Ephesian brethren, indeed twice in consecutive verses (1:6,7); the readers are clearly meant to take heed to what is implied here. In both uses of the word it is God's grace that is being praised; verse 6 speaks of "the glory of His grace" and verse 7 of "the riches of His grace". Thus Paul emphasises the blessedness of the situation in which the Ephesians found themselves; they had been "blessed . . . with all spiritual blessings" (v. 3). These spiritual blessings in "heavenly places in Christ" were meant to be contrasted with "spiritual wickedness in high places" (6:12)—the work of the devil.

Notice how the word 'spiritual' is used in both these contrasting passages. It is easy to have a vague idea as to what 'spiritual' means in the phrase "spiritual blessings"; but the idea of "spiritual wickedness" is more difficult. However, the difficulty can be resolved by appreciating that the word 'spirit' carries the idea of 'the expression of the mind'. Hence the Holy Spirit is the expression of God's mind; but the devil also has a mind, expressing spiritual wickedness.

"Spiritual blessings" in Ephesians 1:3, then, should not be thought of in a vague or general sense, but should be seen in context as blessings given "according to the good pleasure of [God's] will" (v. 5), which, when received in the mind, would resound to "the glory of [God's] grace" (v. 6). We can thus define grace in this context as the mind of the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ favourably disposed toward the Ephesian brethren who were in Jesus Christ.

The abundance of grace

The use of the word 'beloved' in Ephesians 1:6 instead of 'Christ' or 'him' must be significant. In the previous verse Paul wrote that the Ephesians (like other Gentile believers) had been predestined to be adopted as children, by Jesus Christ, to God. This adoption could only be as associates of the beloved Son; the Father's grace in so adopting them came through the loving relationship between the Father and the Son. The Father's love for His Son was shown in their acceptance in the Son. Such love manifested "the glory of His grace".

But what did this grace mean in practice for these brethren? It meant redemption and the forgiveness of sins (v. 7). Whilst the devil was the source of wickedness, being "in Christ" ensured the forgiveness of sins. Thus Paul vividly contrasts just what the two 'spirits' that could influence them had to offer: either wickedness, or the forgiveness of sins.

It may seem very obvious to us that the Ephesians should have been in no doubt which of the two ways would prove right for them; but the attraction of the flesh to the teachings of the devil was so strong that Paul had to remind them continually, from many points of view, of the grace of God which had been bestowed on them and which alone was bringing them glory.

It has been shown how, in this very closely reasoned first part of Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he uses the word 'grace'. But he continues to add emphasis to what he has already made clear. He adds that God's grace which had been bestowed on them in order that they might be accepted into the living Son—a grace which entailed forgiveness of sins and redemption from death—had only been achieved at the expense of the blood of His beloved Son (v. 7). How great was this grace! Because it had extended as far as the death of His only Son, he styles it "the riches of His grace; wherein He hath abounded toward us" (vv. 7,8). It was truly an abundance of grace, which had been displayed in a crucified beloved Son.

This concept of abundance of grace is referred to again in chapter 2, in which, after describing the past experience of the Ephesians as pagans (2:2,3), Paul writes: "But God, Who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved . . .)" (vv. 4,5). Thus Paul, when contemplating the great work of God, is compelled to ejaculate, "by grace ye are saved". By using this word 'grace' he is able to cover all the aspects of the work of God's salvation that he has been so carefully describing in chapter 1, as we have seen.

"In the ages to come"

This work of grace was not finished when the Ephesian brethren and sisters were "raised . . . up together, and made [to] sit . . . in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (2:6), a position they were in when Paul wrote to them. It also had promise of the life which is to come. We have already

noted the phrase, “the good pleasure of His will”, in 1:5, which there related to the bringing in of Gentiles to be God’s adopted children. In verses 9 and 10 we read of God’s “good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself: that in the dispensation of the fulness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him”.

The same promise is repeated by Paul in a slightly different way in 2:7: “. . . that in the ages to come He might shew the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus”. “Riches” (1:7) now develops into “exceeding riches”, as Paul contemplates the future outworking of the Father’s purpose with the saints at Ephesus. Thus God’s grace, the active expression of His mind, saves forever.

This point is made very clear by Paul’s declaration that, all things having been gathered together in Christ (1:10), they had also obtained an inheritance (v. 11). As adopted children (v. 5) they were predestined to the inheritance bestowed on them by their Father, Who was also Father of the Son with whom they had been quickened (that is, raised from death) together (2:5).

Paul also tells the Ephesians that God’s inheritance in the saints is “the riches of [His] glory” (1:18). Thus “the glory of His grace” (v. 6) and “the riches of His grace” (v. 7) are to be expressed in the eternal inheritance that the Father bestows on His children in His own Son, Jesus Christ.

Growing in grace

The Ephesian saints had already entered into this inheritance, being adopted sons; yet they had to be aware always that they might lose that inheritance if they were seduced by the wiles of the devil. Because of this, Paul prayed for them that “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ [*cf.* v. 3] . . . may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him” (v. 17). It was absolutely essential that the saints should have their attention continually drawn to their Father’s grace toward them. Provision was therefore made for these saints to receive the gift of wisdom, one of the gifts of the Spirit. These gifts were also the product of God’s grace, the expression of His mind toward them for the salvation of those who had been dead in trespasses and sins, but were now quickened. Indeed, in 4:7,8 such gifts are called “grace”.

If the Ephesians were to grow in their “understanding” of “the hope” of God’s “calling”, “the riches of the glory of His inheritance”, and “the working of His mighty power” in raising Christ from the dead (1:18-20), they needed this further revelation of God’s mind. There is a lesson here for twentieth-century saints. Sometimes it seems as if, having reached a certain level of growth, say at baptism, we may not appreciate the need for continual further growth by careful study of God’s Word (the modern equivalent of the Spirit gifts). If we do not, we allow the growth of all manner of tares, laying ourselves open to the wiles of the devil, that is, spiritual wickedness in heavenly places.

Paul the dispenser of grace

In Ephesians 3, Paul declares himself to be a dispenser of grace. This is the first occasion in this letter in which Paul himself claims to have been given this grace. However, it was not given for his private benefit, but for the edification of the Ephesian saints (v. 2); and this grace was shown by revelations from the Holy Spirit (vv. 3,5). What was revealed to him was the gospel, in order that he might dispense it to others (vv. 6,7). This revelation brought good news to the Gentiles.

Thus once again ‘grace’ signifies the mind of the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ showing favour towards these Ephesian saints who were “in Christ”. This mind of the Father was sent by the Holy Spirit to Paul (and other apostles), who then preached it among the Gentiles.

This theme of ‘grace’ runs right through the letter, which is wholly consistent in thought. Chapter 3 continues the themes with which Paul began the letter, “the unsearchable riches of Christ”, now preached to the Gentiles (v. 8), echoing the theme of chapter 1 of the riches of his grace bringing redemption and forgiveness of sins. And Paul uses the word ‘grace’ at both the beginning (1:2) and the end (6:24) of the letter. In view of the way in which the word is used consistently through the body of the letter, we cannot think that Paul was using it in a general sense, but was seeking to remind them of their exalted calling in Christ and the supply of the gifts of grace with which he had been bestowed for their spiritual needs.

Through faith

Much of the first three chapters is given over to a consideration of the work of the Father for

their salvation—His grace to them. They just had to respond in turn. The work for their salvation was all God's, not theirs. It was the gift of God, "not of works, lest any man should boast" (2:9). All that God required was a belief that what had been said in His Word through Paul was right; that they were indeed redeemed through Christ's blood, that their sins could be and were forgiven, that they were "accepted" in him, that they were "fellow-citizens with the saints", and that "in the ages to come" God would "shew the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness towards" them. "By grace are ye saved through faith".

The strengthening of faith

In his care for the Ephesians, and in his anxiety lest they should be seduced by the wiles of the devil, Paul tells them of his prayer for them (3:14-21). This prayer reflects all the themes of the earlier part of his letter that we have discussed in this article. His prayer is to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (*cf.* 1:3,17); he then refers to the close family relationship of the saints in him (*cf.* 1:5), and then makes direct reference to God's grace, in his use of the phrase, "the riches of His glory" (*cf.* 1:6,7). The prayer itself, that they would be "strengthened with might by His Spirit", is almost a repetition of his prayers for them as recorded in 1:16-19, where he prayed that they might receive the gift of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ. The Ephesians would be reminded by Paul's prayer for them of the promise of Jesus that he would send in his name the Holy Spirit, by which they would call to mind the work of Jesus (Jno. 14:26).

Paul prayed for them that they should receive this ongoing gift of wisdom and revelation in order that Christ would dwell in their hearts by faith. The Ephesian saints were being saved by grace through faith, but that faith had to be continually strengthened by receiving increasing knowledge concerning Christ and his love for his brethren. Such faith would lead to their

greater love of him. This was the way of salvation—to be saved by grace through faith, being created in Christ Jesus unto good works.

Faith in daily living

Such belief had to bring its own consequences in their manner of living. Being in Christ Jesus meant that they were his fellows, and walked with him (4:1; 2:10). The second part of the letter outlines what, in practical terms, these good works entailed. Basically, their faith was to be shown in their relationships one to another, remembering they were all 'in him': "... with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (4:2,3).

It would be an interesting and instructive exercise to analyse each of the exhortations in this second part of Paul's letter to determine its particular relevance to the situation in which the Ephesians found themselves as they opposed the wiles of the devil, so as to see in what way their faith demanded each particular way of living. Space does not permit such a detailed examination; I take one instance only, one which bears specifically on our topic.

Consider the exhortation, "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. And grieve not the holy Spirit of God" (vv. 29,30). These believers had themselves received "grace" through the work of the Holy Spirit through the instrumentation of the apostles and prophets (3:5,8), and particularly through Paul (vv. 2,7,8). He had communicated to them the gospel of the grace of God. They had listened to the gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth. They were to talk of this grace to each other, thus building one another up in the one Faith. Corrupt communication, which had its source in the minds of the devil and his angels, had therefore to be avoided.

Paul finds the source of everything in God. He is rich in grace (1:7) and in mercy (2:4). The predestination (1:4), the forgiveness (1:7), the inheritance (1:11), and the quickening, are all of Him. The salvation is ours through faith—not of works . . . And since salvation is provided by God, the glory is His; no man can glory [2:9]. If men could buy or earn or win salvation by their own effort or power or wealth, what pride and boastfulness would be seen! "Humble and contrite in heart, and that trembleth at my word" is the attitude that God requires. It is wise as well as right that God has arranged it thus.

The Letter to the Ephesians, John Carter, 1944, p. 53.