

UNMERITED FAVOUR

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ. According as he hath chosen us in Him, before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love. - Ephesians 1:3-4.

This introduction to Paul’s letter to the Ephesian believers outlines the perfection and finality of the work of Christ - a work in which we had no part, assuring us of a salvation which is comprehensive and eternal.

The first KEY word used by the Apostle is ‘CHOSEN’ *“...even as he hath chosen us...”* Who is HE? - *“...the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”*. This speaks of Divine Sovereignty - God’s prerogative to choose. He is the Potter, we are the clay. In His electing grace, I am happy now to say that He chose me!

God chose Israel, not for any special merit on their part. To effect that choice, He spoke to an idolater in Ur of the Chaldees, told him to leave home and travel westward to an unknown land, which He had selected. From this land God would multiply his seed *“as the stars of the heavens, and as the sands upon the sea shore” (Genesis 22:17)*. From this one man came a nation, and out of that nation came the Messiah - Jesus the Saviour.

It was prophetically said of Him, *“He shall see his seed, He shall prolong his days and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand” (Isaiah 53:10)*. Over the centuries, succeeding generations have marvelled at the fulfilment of this prophecy. However, it will not be until He calls His blood washed, chosen possession to Himself in the coming day of His glory, that the seed of Abraham and of the woman will be finally revealed.

ALL of it, *“after the counsel of His own will!” (Ephesians 1:11)* .

II

The remarkable thing about God’s choice is that it happened before the foundation of the world!

God saw the Ephesian believers before the creation of mankind and marked

them out for His salvation. Is this choice exclusive to the Ephesians? The Apostle addresses his letter to "*the saints at Ephesus*", but quickly adds "*and to the faithful in Christ Jesus*" (v1). Chapter 6:24 also assures us that the letter was written to "*all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love*". Every believer has been chosen in Christ, from God's standpoint. This is important. Man had no part in this choice - he could not, for he had not yet been created.

Saul of Tarsus was not aware of his election when he went on his murderous escapade to Damascus, nor was he aware of the fact (as he revealed at a later date) that he had been "*separated from his mother's womb*" that God might "*reveal his son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen*" (*Galatians 1:15-16*). He just did not know that, when he set out to persecute the fledgling church. The very message which he despised and hated, he would one day proclaim "*to be the power of God unto salvation to every one that believes*" (*Romans 1:16*).

We have been chosen, this is the declaration of the God who cannot lie. But we will not know this until we believe. Election is the GOSPEL for the believer! This involves faith in God, an implicit trust that His word is His bond.

Northern Ireland, my home country, is 'big' on banners and arches! They depict heroic events, political and religious, and are paraded in processions generally in the June-to-August period each year. They have highly colourful pictures painted on both sides. I sometimes think that this idea of a message on both sides illustrates the truth of election. God has an arch, it has writing on both sides; as a sinner I survey the first message "*Whosoever believeth hath everlasting life*". I accept the message and pass underneath and look at the writing on the back side, it proclaims in unambiguous words, "*Chosen in him from before the foundation of the world!*".

We can join with Toplady's stanza:

*Chosen not for good in me,
Wakened up from wrath to flee,
Hidden in the Saviour's side,*

By the spirit sanctified.

WHAT A REVELATION!

III

“...that we should be holy and without blame before him in love” (verse 4).

There are two further things that we must not miss here. There is an objectivity to this choosing. It is not a mindless transaction, without any reason behind it.

We are chosen to be HOLY! And we are chosen to be BLAMELESS!

God is HOLY, that is one of His attributes. It is not just that He acts in a holy way, but He is holy in Himself. That is His nature. Hence the injunction written by the Apostle Peter; *“Be ye holy for I am holy” - 1 Peter 1:16.*

Holiness implies integrity, honesty and truth in the inward parts. God wants us to be like Himself so He regenerates us *“... according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour.” - Titus 3:5-6.*

He does not ask us to be sinless. In this fallen world that is just not possible. But we are given a Divine life, a regenerated life and in it there is intrinsic power. Power to resist, overcome and be victorious! We cannot take one step in holiness without this regeneration. It is one thing to be forgiven all our sins because of the sacrifice of Calvary; but unless we can now live as those worthy of the One who has forgiven us, our salvation is incomplete.

Thank God today for the washing of regeneration, a new birth from above! This is expressed in another way, by the Apostle writing to the church at Corinth. He tells them that *“If any man be in Christ, he (there) is a new creation, the old has passed away and the new has come” - 2 Corinthians 5:17.* The new creation is the living Lord within, in the person of the Holy Spirit, giving the authority and the power over sin, which still wants to reign. The Apostle emphasises this again in his treatise in Romans (6:11-23). In summary he says *“...reckon ye yourselves to be dead unto sins, but alive unto God in Christ*

Jesus, Let not sin reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey the lusts thereof.....for sin shall not have dominion over you,....and being made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness...."

It is from this regenerated life that holiness issues.

Following the objective of holiness there is a significant phrase: 'WITHOUT BLAME'. Not, 'without fault' that, like sinlessness, as we have seen, is an impossibility while we remain in these bodies. God will take into account our frail and failing humanity and its many faults, some of which cannot be defined as sin. We forget or overlook something, we are at fault, but what about being to blame?

Faultlessness has to do with my NATURE; blamelessness has to do with my MOTIVES! What really matters is how I think, what is behind my thinking, why I do what I do. Is my thinking good, is my motive pure? I may have been at fault in my method of communication, or mistaken in my action; but it was never my intention to wound or hurt. This is to be "*without blame, before him in love*". Love is the lubricant, the atmosphere in which we act and interact, this allows us to be worthy of the One whom we serve and who called us out of darkness into His marvellous light.

Dr. Sidlow Baxter, when he was a little boy in a poor Yorkshire (England) home, watched his mother prepare to go to church. It was a very dark and cold night. As she dressed in the bedroom he noticed her shoes sitting nearby so he decided to warm them for her. He lifted them and put them into the oven, a space in the chimney breast, sealed off with an iron door. When his mother came seeking them and he told her what he had done, she retrieved ashes, not shoes!

Dr. Baxter comments simply "I was not faultless, but I was blameless, for I loved my mother dearly."

The Apostle, therefore, has no hesitation or qualification in exhorting his readers to be WITHOUT BLAME.

“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.” (verses 5-6).

In the Divine mind the ‘choosing’ and the ‘predestination’ are one act, independent of time. Someone has said "Election is choosing out a number, destined beforehand for a purpose". In this case, that purpose, was that He could adopt us as children. This is the sovereign act of God.

In Roman law, the adoption of a child gave him the right to the material possessions of the one adopting him. It also meant giving him a civil status - a name, so that he could take his full place in the community.

Using this as an illustration, God takes me, a believing sinner - and regenerates me. With this new life He makes me His child, and gives me the legal position of one of His sons, one of those born into His family. This is the significance of the expression *“We have been made joint heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:17)*. And marvel of marvels it is all done *“according to the good pleasure of his will”*. God’s emotions are towards me and, by His grace, in His own goodness, entirely of His own choosing, He makes me His child.

This is certainly unmerited favour. Like the Apostle, we should be thrilled with a sense of praise and glory that will lead to kindness and love to those who are so unlovable.

The truth of Adoption, above other truths of Scripture affects me very deeply.

My late father was an Evangelist and Bible Teacher. On his travels he would be asked about His family. He would usually reply in the words of the parable *“A certain man had two sons” (Luke 15:1)*. I was the older of the two and, when I was seventeen, I became aware of a recurring conversation between my father and mother. It went something like this ‘Wouldn’t it be good to have a little girl in our home, the boys would enjoy having a little sister!’

We all reached agreement that we should put the plan into action, and in due course a little girl, a few months old arrive in our home. There was great rejoicing. However, this was tempered by the fact that a series of procedures had to be gone through before the adoption was legal. It was an anxious and

uncertain time. Frequently the thought passed through our minds, and we even voiced it 'Could someone come and take her from us?' It was a marvellous day when all the legalities were completed. I can still recall lifting out that precious little gurgling bundle, holding her tight, and saying tearfully 'You are my own little sister, no one can take you from us now'.

I learned, in a very practical way that once a child is in the family, he/she is a family member for good. No amount of failure can alter it.

Someone reading this today may be despairing, as to whether you have been, or could ever be fully forgiven, and if it was possible that you could cease to be a child of the Father. Let me remind you: the truth is that your relationship to you Father in heaven is "*according to the good pleasure of his will*". Though we do not now, or ever in the future merit such a status, we have the "*right to be called the sons of God*" (1 John 3:1), and to enjoy all the rights and privileges of sonship.

V

"In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace" - verse 7.

We have been CHOSEN, PREDESTINATED and ADOPTED as sons of God. Now we are told we have been REDEEMED.

Why did the Apostle use the word 'redemption'? He was a Jew, and from his earliest days, he had been educated in the truth that atonement depended upon the sacrificial system as instituted in the Torah (the first five books of the Old Testament scripture, written by Moses). Now regenerated and taught by the Holy Spirit and by revelation, Paul centred all atonement in the one sacrifice of His Lord. He would have in mind the mercy seat, the propitiatory (the place of satisfaction), where the sprinkled blood spoke of guilt, confession and acceptance on the grounds of substitution. In the Levitical system it was the blood of animals. In contrast to this, in the sacrifice of Christ, the Offerer became the Victim and gave Himself as a substitute for our sins (Hebrews 9:26).

It is with this as his doctrine of the atonement, the apostle here introduces us to REDEMPTION. The comforting thing is, that it is in the present tense - "...*in whom we are having redemption*". Redemption is a fact that abides from the past into the present and on to the future, as we shall shortly see.

For the believer, redemption is ALWAYS undisturbed and undiluted by time. Whether today, or tomorrow, God will remain true to His word "*Your sins are forgiven for his name's sake*" - 1 John 2:12.

In the word 'forgiven' is the idea of release - letting sins go, as though they had not been committed.

It is like setting a prisoner free or discharging a debt.

The consensus among Bible scholars will define 'REDEMPTION' as releasing by the payment of a price. The price is technically described as 'ransom money'.

Kenneth Wuest says: The story of redemption can be told in three Greek words:

agorazo - to buy IN the slave
market (1 Corinthians 6:20),

exagorazo - to buy OUT of the slave
market (Galatians 3:13),

lutroo - to liberate by payment
of a ransom (Titus 2:14).

The good news, the Gospel, is that the Lord Jesus Christ bought us in the slave market of sin. He paid the ransom price - His blood - to deliver us from the tyranny of sin and its master Satan, whose slaves we were (Romans 6:17).

We learn from Leviticus 17:11 that "*the life of the flesh is in the blood*". The value in the blood of Christ lies in its ownership: it is the blood of God's beloved Son. This makes it 'precious' blood (1 Peter 1:19) which He poured out for us in His atoning death.

William Blane in his poem 'The Atonement', says:

If all the sins of all the world,

In heaven's balances were laid,

*They would be outweighed by Jesus'
death.*

The death of Christ, signified in the outpouring of His blood, satisfied the righteous demands of a just God and His holy law, which in New Testament parlance stated that *"the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God - the acceptance of the Lord's sacrifice on our behalf - is eternal life..."* (Romans 6:23). Not only are we bought OUT of the slave market, but we are out for good! We will never be dominated by sin and Satan again. The Lord Jesus has bought us, not only to liberate us, but, as we have seen, to ADOPT us as His sons.

The idea of BEING OUT OF THE SLAVE MARKET FOR GOOD is developed by the Apostle in his Colossian letter, when he talks about *"being delivered from the authority of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of the Son of His love"* (Colossians 1:13). The writer in Hebrews 9:26 also tells us that sin has been *"put away"*, the underlying thought is *'to send them away'*. This surely must be Calvary's message. Let hymnology come to aid our worshipping hearts:

*'An end of my sin has been made for me
here,*

by Him who its penalty bore,

with blood it is blotted eternally out,

and I will not remember it more'.

I am reminded of the ceremony surrounding the two little animals on the Day of Atonement. One was killed and its blood placed before God in the inner tabernacle behind the veil. God was resident there in the cloud of glory - the Shekinah. The nation's sins were confessed over the other goat, then, symbolically laden with sins it was led away into the wilderness and lost! Israel never saw that goat again!

Their sins had been removed for another year.

But our salvation is *'borne away'* *"in his own body on the tree"* (1 Peter 2:24), never to return.

The prophet Isaiah, writing Israel's redemption song, tells us that *"God will divide him a portion with the great and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he hath poured out his soul unto death"* - the fulfilment of the sacrificial goat - *"and was numbered with the transgressors and bore (away) the sins of many"* - the fulfilment of the scapegoat (Isaiah 53:12).

We had a brother in our fellowship, now with the Lord, He said three things about our sins:

1. *"As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgression from us"* (Psalm 103:12) - THEY ARE OUT OF HIS REACH.
2. *"God has cast all our sins behind his back."* (Isaiah 38:17) - THEY ARE OUT OF HIS SIGHT.
3. *"Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more."* (Hebrews 10:17) - THEY ARE OUT OF HIS MIND.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow!

Let us think now about the 'redeemer'. He must have two basic qualifications, he must be willing to redeem and he must be able to redeem.

In the story of Ruth, the nearest of kin said, *"I will redeem it"*. He was willing, until he realised that the redemption included taking Ruth as his wife. He was neither willing or able to do this. His commitments would not permit it. Our Kinsman Redeemer was both willing and able. He was one hundred percent committed! Hebrews 7:25 confirms that *"he is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them"*.

Not only does He save us daily from the POWER of sin, in the coming day He will save us from the very PRESENCE of sin claiming His purchased possession (Ephesians 1:14). The basic idea of this rather technical expression is 'to claim for oneself'. It has to do with us being God's inheritance. It is true, that as His children, we have an inheritance in Him, but it takes some mind-stretching that He has procured us for HIS inheritance!

Complete redemption means GLORY. Our souls and our spirits are presently the recipients of God's saving grace. When the Lord Jesus, our Redeemer,

returns our physical bodies will receive full and final salvation (Romans 8:23). They will be resurrected and refashioned in all respects like His body of glory (1 Corinthians 15).

To illustrate the truth of REDEMPTION the story is told of a slave owner, who, one day visited the market looking for a suitable purchase. When we put this into the context of our redemption, it reminds us of the Redeemer's entry into the world - the place where men and woman are held "*captive by the devil at his will*" (2 Timothy 2:26). The ransom price was His own blood. In truth, however, the ransom price was not paid to the slave owner - the god of this world - it was paid to the Great Owner, the Creator of the universe, whose claim to the ownership of mankind had been usurped. Heaven was satisfied with the purchase money! Christ our Lord, resurrected in the power of an indestructible life, is the first fruits of a harvest of released captives.

Our illustration tells us that, once purchased, the slave is taken out of the market, his new owner treats him with unexpected kindness and generosity. He actually takes him right into his mansion, where he gives him the privileges normally accorded to children in the family.

The redemption of the Cross proclaims that we are no longer under the domination of sin. Christ is our master, while sin has been relegated to a tenant living in us. We are under new management! Scripture asserts that "*whom the son makes free, is free indeed*" (John 8:36). The erstwhile slave, now in residence in his new home, will never be back in the slave market again.

VI

"In who we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace, wherein he hath abounded towards us in all wisdom and prudence" - Ephesians 1:7-8.

"The blood of Jesus Christ, God's son, cleanses us from all sin.....if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" - 1 John 1:7-9.

Can I ask you a question? "the forgiveness of sins" What sins? Those I committed before I believed?

Yes, you say, I believe that!

But what of all the sins since I believed, are they forgiven? What about the sins of thought, word and deed today, are they forgiven?

And what of the sins of the future?

It is not what we think that counts, but what God's word says.

As I write, I see in my mind's eye a picture in an office in Bucharest, Romania.

It is of a tranquil lake surrounded by mountains. A notice stands out of the lake. On it there are two Romanian words written. As I puzzle to know their meaning, my attention is drawn to text at the bottom:

"Thou wilt cast their sins into the depth of
the sea" - Micah 7:19.

I now understand the notice reads: NO FISHING!

And God's grace has given this total forgiveness to us in "*all wisdom and prudence*".

In all WISDOM - wisdom was a favourite word with the Greeks of New Testament times. For them it conjured up cleverness, skills in handicrafts, intelligence, philosophy and other associated ideas.

When the Bible writers use the word 'wisdom' in relation to God, they were speaking about intelligence associated with goodness that far transcends all human or extra-terrestrial intelligences.

If WISDOM is Divine intelligence, PRUDENCE is putting that heavenly wisdom into effective use, in order to bring the person receiving it to a greater understanding of what God is doing.

VII

"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 the

Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory." - Ephesians 1:13-14.

The period of time between our purchase and our ultimate glorification, is taken care of by the Holy Spirit. He is not only WITH us but IN us. This is in fulfilment of our Redeemer's promise: *"I will pray the Father, and he will send you ANOTHER..... he dwelleth with you and shall be in you"* - John 14:6.

The personal pronoun 'he' is used signifying that the Spirit is a Divine Person, this is emphasised by the uses of the word 'another' - in the original language this is another of the SAME KIND. We ask who is Jesus? He is God, so we have here all three persons of the Godhead in UNITY. The Spirit, therefore is in each of us from the moment we trust Christ. He is called the 'earnest of our inheritance'. The earnest is described as deposit money, deposited by the purchaser in pledge of full payment.

My grandmother, as a girl of seventeen, went into domestic service in Glasgow. On entry she was paid one shilling which was the guarantee, that if she worked to please her mistress, she would be paid the balance of her wages at the end of six months. This advance was called the 'earls'. I have often wondered if the word was a corruption of 'earnest'.

The final key thought also reinforces the guarantee, when the Apostle refers to *"being sealed with the holy Spirit of PROMISE"*. God's word cannot be broken. His word is His bond.

The SEALING of the Spirit concludes the Apostles catalogue of blessings! To help us understand what is in mind, some of us are old enough to remember the way that letters and postal packages were sealed by the Post Office. The knots in the string that tied up the envelope or package were covered in hot sealing wax. The sealing denoted that an extra charge had been paid to secure safe arrival at the stated destination. The Postal authorities had undertaken OWNERSHIP and SECURITY of the goods until delivery.

What a comforting thought, in the midst of life's uncertainties! Our Redeemer has bought us, to possess us as His property, with a guarantee of safe arrival in the 'house of many mansions'.

AND, as if to underscore the wonder of all that we have been told in this first part of the Apostle letter to the church at Ephesus, we conclude this study with the opening words of Chapter 2:

“And YOU hath he quickened (MADE TO LIVE) who were DEAD IN TRESPASSES AND SINS”!

To come from where we were to where we are now and where we will be is quite beyond us to comprehend.

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