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## Living Faithfully in the Riches of God's Grace

*To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ...( Ephesians 3:8)*

### **We Are More Than “Okay” (Part 1a)**

Our Standing With God Because of the Father  
Ephesians 1:3-6

As we come to Paul's key thoughts at the beginning of this letter to the Ephesians, we are immediately met by the salvific grace of God – that is, we come to see what is the grace that saves us. Here, in Ephesians 1:3-14 we have what can only be termed as “amazing grace;” or as “grace greater than all our sins.” Unfolded before us is a very simple truth, that because of the grace of God, “We are More than ‘Okay’”. We have standing with God. God has made us right with Him. We are, in fact, righteous. As we will see, we are chosen to be holy and blameless; we are loved and predestined to adoption as sons, all by His kindness, to His praise and the revealing of the glory of His grace; all which comes to the believer in and through Christ alone. We are presented with the truth that this work of grace in saving us was fully determined in eternity past. That believers were selected out by God in eternity past to be the recipients of His saving grace is such an important truth that it is emphatically stated three times by the apostle Paul on three different occasions, in three different letters.

Beginning with the last of Paul's teachings on this matter, we read in 2 Timothy 1:9-10 these words, *9 [God the Father] who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity, 10 but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel...* Notice that our salvation is not an “us” thing; but a “God-thing”, according to His own purpose and grace, a grace granted to us in Christ and granted when? *“From all eternity.”*

Then looking at the first time Paul taught this specific truth, we read in Romans 8:28-30 of this foreknown, preplanned love and grace to save us; *28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. 29 For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; 30 and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.* This is the foreknown, predestined, salvific grace of God.

Then, in Ephesians 1:3-6, the Spirit of God tells us by the same Apostle, exactly how we were saved by God's matchless grace in Christ long before the world's foundation was laid, and he tells us that it was all accomplished in eternity, long before there was an earth saying, *3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love 5 He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.*

Beloved, if we are to live faithful and full lives that reflect the riches of the grace we have received, it begins with a recognition of the work of God in saving us, in making us right with Himself. The work of grace found in Ephesians 1:3-14, is that of our salvation as planned by the Father (1:3-6), purchased by the Son (1:7-12), and put into action by the Holy Spirit (1:13-14). This morning we see this work of grace in our salvation as planned by the Father in verses 3-6.

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This will take a bit of time to unpack all the riches, so we will take it in two parts; first, we see in verse 4 that which we will consider this morning; divine election. Then, next week, we will look at divine predestination along with divine grace. What we are focusing on in verses 4-6 is that we have standing with God (we are more than okay with God) because of what He has done for us in Christ.

As noted last week from verse 3, all of this begins with a call to recognize that the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ *has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ...* In verse 3 we are told “that” we are blessed. Now in verses 4-6 we discover just “how” God has blessed us; through divine election; divine predestination; and divine grace.

## I. Divine Election (1:4)

*just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love*

The first work of grace Paul mentions in our text is performed by God our Father and it is the divine work of sovereign election. We read in verse 4, “*just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world...*” Our eternal election is in Christ. Jesus is the source and cause of all the other benefits and blessings of grace.

The word “*chosen*” in our text is “*exlegomai*” – and literally means to speak or call out by one’s own choice. We could say that it means to “to pick out” someone or something by one’s own choice. It is used some 22 times in the New Testament and it always means chosen by another. It is used in Luke 9:35, by God the Father in speaking of Jesus, *Then a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to Him!”* We also see it used by Jesus, where the idea of picking out someone by one’s own choice is clear in John 15:16, “*You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you.*”

Another unique feature of this word “*chosen*” is that it is understood in such a way in the Greek so as to be rightly translated, “chosen by one’s self for one’s self.” In other words, the idea of choice is influenced not by the object chosen (in the case of Ephesians 1:4, those who are “holy and blameless”) but rather the choice is found in the chooser (in this case God the Father). God chose us by Himself and for Himself. This is made clear as well that statement that God the Father chose us “*in Him*” – that is in Christ; in the righteousness of Christ, in the work of Christ, in the person of Christ. So then, the Father chose us by Himself, for Himself and to Himself in the Person and work of Christ. This is the doctrine of divine and sovereign election.

Beloved, apart from God freely choosing us in Himself and to Himself, there are no blessings of grace either here and now or in glory to come. But for these who are chosen; these who are elect of God; all the blessings and blessedness of grace and glory are sure. All God’s blessings of grace in salvation flow to sinners “*just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world.*” And the graces of our salvation are precious and many; adoption, acceptance with God, redemption and forgiveness, regeneration, preservation, resurrection, and the glory of an eternal inheritance are all awaiting us; these are all are ours; these are all sure to all who are the “*chosen*” – the elect, according to this election of grace! All who are chosen will possess all these things according to the eternal purpose and plan of God.

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It bothers me that we hear so many preachers speak about the fact Christ came into the world, but very few seem to have any real idea who He is or why He came. We are presented with a "good" God who obviously loved us and died for us; supposedly because we were worth it. Yet Scriptures and this text in particular would present us not with merely a "good" God; I don't want a merely "good" God - but a "great and glorious" God who sent His only Son to live and die for sinners, not because the sinners were worth it, but because God chose to love us and reveal to unworthy sinners the greatness, the grandeur, the gloriousness of His saving grace – it is always *to the praise of the glory of His grace*. The Son of God came to save His people, a people who were chosen by and given to the Son by the Father, that the Son might deliver them from the penalty, power and presence of sin (Matthew 1:21). This is the God who has chosen us. Now, the rest of the verse reveals to us just how God has chosen us. We will note four things:

### **A. The Channel – “in Christ”**

*“just as He chose us in Him.”*

We already noted last week that Christ is the only channel; the only source of any and all spiritual blessings. Paul makes it clear that salvation is included, as our being chosen by God the Father is not because of something in the “chosen” but rather is found in God Himself; in the second person of the Trinity who gave Himself for us. We were chosen in Christ. This doctrine of divine election, like every other blessing of grace is found only *“in Him.”*

The Son of God is both our Mediator (our go between) and our Surety (our guarantee) of salvation. He stood before the Father as the Head and Husband of His Church from before eternity. We were chosen of God as His bride, to be Christ's help-meet in proclaiming the good news of redemption and reconciliation between sinful people and our holy God. It was not good in the Father's sight that the God-man should be alone (Genesis 2:18) and so the Father chose the Church as a Bride for His Beloved Son, to be His companion and one to whom He would lavish all grace upon both now and in eternal glory. All of this was done for the glory of Christ, that He might be, in the words of Ephesians 1:22-23, *“...head over all things to the church, 23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”* Christ is the channel of this salvific grace granted to us by God the Father. But there is more...

### **B. The Chronology – “before the foundation of the world”**

Look at Ephesians 1:4 again. The Holy Spirit tells us that the time of our election was *“before the foundation of the world.”* The gospel of Christ is the revealing of *“THINGS HIDDEN SINCE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD.”* (Matthew 13:35). This divine choice by God and for God was completed in eternity. This phrase, *“the foundation of the world”* – is used a number of times in the New Testament.

We see it in Revelation 17:8, referring to those whose names were not written in the Lamb's book of life from the foundation of the world; meaning that there are those whose names have been written. The apostle Peter reminds us that the plan of salvation God conceived in eternity past was so certain to come to pass that we read of Jesus being the unblemished, spotless Lamb of God who was *foreknown before the foundation of the world* (see also Revelation 13:8). And in Hebrews 4:3, we are actually told that *“His works were finished from the foundation of the world.”* All the plans, all the purposes, all the choosing of the elect, all the details of their

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salvation was completed from before the foundation of the world. As one preacher has put it, "No new will, or act of will, can arise in God, or any decree be made by Him, which was not from eternity" (John Gill). God is not in the process of making it up as He goes along; but rather, as we read in Ephesians 1:11, *it is God who works all things after the counsel of His will.*

What is the point we are seeking to drive home? Beloved, as you consider God; as you consider the greatness of your salvation; remember that the election of your soul was a free, unconditional act of God's sovereign choice and love. This is the testimony of not only Ephesians 1:4, but many other passages. For example, in Romans 9:13-16, what do we find? We read, *13 Just as it is written, "JACOB I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HATED." 14 What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! 15 For He says to Moses, "I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION." 16 So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.*

Beloved, why do we need to know and believe what God has so plainly revealed here? If we fail to see and appreciate that God chose us before the foundation of the world, "in" or because of Christ; not us; we will tend toward pride (I was worth it); and entitlement (God owes me this good because of who I am). Rather, let the words of John 15:16 ring constantly in our ears; *"You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit... How do we respond to such a truth? In humble adoration, "Thank You, Lord for saving me and choosing me to be your servant!"*

So, the channel of our divine election is found "in" the person and work of Christ; its chronology was actually before there was time, before the foundation of the world, next we see...

### **C. The Course – "that we would be holy and blameless before Him"**

The Lord God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, *"that we would be holy and blameless before Him."* God's choice of us in Christ was for this purpose, this particular course of action, *"that we would be holy and blameless before Him."* How can I give a brief explanation of those words so full of meaning?

It is one thing to be *holy*; which you may remember means being set apart for God's special use; no longer then to be defiled and common; but rather special as unto the Lord for His purposes alone. This is what it means to be *holy* – to be a holy one; or a saint. But being made holy speaks of what happens once we come to Christ. But what of our sinful lives before Christ. In this we need to be made blameless. The word *"blameless"* means "without a spot, blemish or flaw." There is nothing from my past that is being transferred into my present or future that can or will affect my standing with God. I am more than just okay with God. This is because Jesus took care of my past; He died for my blemishes of sin.

I hope this illustration helps. Some of us struggled with acne as teenagers (I certainly did taking various medications for it). We found our faces riddled at times with blemishes; sometimes to the point of self-conscious disappointment; sometimes to the mocking and teasing of others; and for some, even to the scarring of the skin. What if there had been a remedy, that when taken would not only take care of present acne, but also removed the past blemishes as well as guaranteed no future blemishes to harm your appearance. Not only would that be a miracle cure, but the one who discovered it would be a millionaire. Well, think of sin as severe, scarring acne that never goes away. This is condition of all people in sin. Even if they could temporarily cover

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the present acne, their scars reveal they have it; and future outbreaks are inevitable. But in Christ, the problem has been taken care of; past, present and future blemishes are covered by His perfection. This is what it is to be blameless; without spot or blemish.

What is mind-boggling about this course, this status of being both *"holy and blameless"* before God, is that He has always, since before time, viewed His people as a perfectly holy people and altogether without spot or blame in Christ. God divinely and sovereign elected, chose, pick us to be this way. This is the only view our Father has of us, the only view He has ever had of us, the only view He shall ever have of us, and the only view He constantly has of us. He sees us in Christ, in Christ's perfection; in Christ's righteousness; holy and blameless; and therefore we are more than okay with God; we are also justified and glorified in Christ. And remember, Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8).

It is true that we all sinned and fell in our father Adam. It is true that we became corrupt in our nature, just like all other people; that we were born with Adam's fallen and depraved nature, just like all other people. But that which we experience in time, in this present state, does not and cannot, in any way, alter how God both chose to view us in Christ as well as what God did for us in Christ, all determined when? *"before the foundation of the world..."* This is God's course for us who are in Christ. Our fall and sin in Adam could not destroy the holiness and blamelessness that was given us in Christ in eternity. We must, in time, experience what God determined in eternity; but what a spiritual blessing, that in Christ, we were chosen to be made holy and blameless. What does this mean? Biblically, let me remind you of what this means:

- ***In our redemption we receive the imputed righteousness of Christ.***

When Jesus offered Himself for our sin on the cross, not only did Jesus redeemed us from all iniquity; remove from us our sin; but according to Hebrews 10:14, Jesus has "perfected for all time those who are sanctified." The perfection and righteousness of Jesus is now imputed, charged to our account; forever!

- ***In our regeneration we received the imparted righteousness of Christ.***

When we were born again (John 3:3), the Holy Spirit puts within us a new, righteous, holy, and blameless nature. In other words, the Holy Spirit imparts to us the righteous, sinless nature of Christ. The imputed righteousness of Christ is how God sees us. In imparted righteousness of Christ is what God gives us to live for Him. Thus we read of *"Christ in you, the hope of glory"* (Colossians 1:27); we read in 2 Peter 1:4 that we are now *"partakers of the divine nature."* In Ephesians 4:24, Paul speaks of this new nature as *"the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth."*

- ***In our resurrection we will receive an immutable righteousness.***

When we are finally brought home to glory by Christ, in the day of resurrection, we will be forever and unchangeably found in Him; holy and blameless before God. Our unchanging, and glorious Savior will, at the time of our resurrection, present us to God as a glorious Church – and now not Ephesians 5:27 describes the church as *"having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless."*

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In speaking of what God has done to make us right with Him, in saving us, listen to what Paul declares in Ephesians 2:7, *so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.* Our salvation, which is not simply going to heaven, but being made fit for heaven, being made absolutely holy and blameless, is a feat, an action that only God can do and one that therefore reveals His power and grace. The half-brother of Jesus declared the same thing in Jude 24-25 saying, *24 Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, 25 to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.*

So, we have seen that divine election is through the channel of Christ, finds its chronology before the foundation of the world; has as its course the goal of our being holy and blameless; and finally, we see...

### **D. The Cause – “in love”**

It is difficult to say whether the last two words of verse 4, “in love,” should be read as the end of verse 4 or the beginning of verse 5. Let me read it both ways for you and the fact is; both are true and both ought to be precious thoughts to us. - *“just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him, in love: or, is it — In love 5 He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will.”*

I am not sure of the best reading here, but this is what I am sure of; something that ought to cause our souls to rejoice. We know that it is...

- Because of His love that the Father blessed us;
- Because of His love that He chose us in Christ
- Because of His love that He sees us as holy and blameless before Him;
- Because of His love that He predestinated us to adoption as sons; and.
- Because of His love that He has accepted us in Christ, the Beloved.

Oh that our hearts would explode in expressive praise! Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; for He has loved us now; He has loved us from all eternity; and He shall love us forevermore with a love that is beyond great; it is infinite, immutable, and eternal. It is a love that serves as the very fountain of all grace and salvation in Christ! I have no other words to give you and I pray these words break you down and then recreate you in awe-giving praise; that the God of Glory loves His people in Christ; that He loves His people because of Christ; and that He loves His people just as He loves Christ! Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Let me close by reminding you of our Savior's purpose in redeeming us. We know what this purpose was because He prayed for it in His High Priestly prayer as found in John 17. And just what was that purpose? Let us read the words of our Savior beginning in John 17:21-24; *21 that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. (one with Christ means we are holy and blameless) 22 The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; 23 I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved*

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*them, even as You have loved Me. 24 Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.*

### Discussion Questions:

1. When you stop to consider your salvation; what is it that you find truly amazing? Be specific!
2. In your own words (as pointed out in the message); what is the distinction between being "holy" and being "blameless"? How do you see this worked out in your life?
3. As we have been studying Ephesians 1 (particularly consider verses 1-14 and other sited verses); what would you say to others if asked, "What is the purpose of salvation?"

*Soli Deo Gloria*

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