

Ephesians 1:2-3 "Be A Grace-Extender As You Bless God"

As I've been doing my research for this study through the letter to the Ephesians I've been listening to Pastor Chuck's tapes on Ephesians. And one of the things that struck a chord with me, as he was speaking, is how there's a tendency in the church today to spend all of our time considering what we need to be doing for God. And it is certainly true that we do need to be doing for God to His glory.

But as we come to this letter we'll notice that what Paul does is to establish that the primary message for all Christians is not what we do for Him as much as what He has done for us. It is because of what He's done for us through Christ that we are able to do anything for Him.

As always our focus should be on the finished work of Christ. And as we focus on that and glory in His grace our hearts should soar with gratitude and a desire to "do" for Him that He may be lifted up in our lives and that others may taste and see that the Lord is good, as they experience the love of Christ in us because of what He has done for us.

It is because of Paul's heavenly perspective of his own salvation and the work God has done in his life that he can share the things God wants us to see. Remember from last week that Paul has been chosen to be an apostle by the will of God specifically to convey the heart of our Savior to us.

This letter, as with any portion of the word of God, both Old and New Testament, is the very mind and will and heart of God. How we should long to hear from our Father as we come to His word. How we should desire to meet with Him as we ask the Holy Spirit to speak to us and encourage us and work in us, to His glory, as we come to the very word He inspired knowing that "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2TI 3:16)

Do we want to be equipped for every good work to God's glory? He's given us the means for that as we spend time with Him gleaning from Him what His will is and what His desire is for every area of life.

But it starts with what He's done for us in Christ. And that work has as its basis grace, undeserved blessings from God, but given in abundance none-the-less.

EPH 1:2-3 "Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 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."

Paul was in a very unique position. He understood that he was God's mouthpiece for the Church, not just in Ephesus, but for all time, for every generation. And what he conveys here in our text is the very word God wants you and me to hear and take to heart.

EPH 1:2 "Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

This was a common way of opening a letter in those days. Even pagans would open their letters in a similar fashion. They would extend blessings and encouragements before getting into the body of the letter. Paul was simply using the customary and cultural norm that was used throughout the world at that time.

What is unique though, with the apostle Paul, is the blessing he gives is not entirely his own. He's not the one conferring a blessing here. He's speaking on behalf of His God and Savior. And so when Paul says grace and peace he most certainly includes himself, but he is speaking of spiritual realities not just customary and cultural niceties.

It's as though Paul is saying, 'hear what God wants to say to you today'. And what God says, in this second verse, is that He is promising to each of His people, grace and peace. God's grace is not some wish, it is real. If it weren't for God's grace actively at work in our lives on a daily basis we couldn't continue to live for Him. God's grace is constantly at work in our lives even if we don't fully recognize it.

I praise God that He continually extends grace to me, that He continually gives me what I don't deserve. I don't deserve salvation. I don't deserve His love. I don't deserve a Father who loves me like His very child. But that's not how God chooses to interact with His people. He personally acts toward us in all of those ways despite the fact that we don't deserve it.

Have you ever felt that God has not heard your prayer? Have you ever felt that God has taken a vacation from your life? I know I have. But, simply because we anticipate God to act toward us as we might act toward another if they didn't meet our expectations, doesn't mean that God does this to us.

We have a tendency to deal with people as they might deal with us. If they're nice to us we'll be nice to them. If they extend kindness to us, we'll extend kindness to them. If they give us gifts we'll take them.

That's not the act of extending grace back to someone. That's simply reacting and giving back to what we've been given. But what if someone doesn't act toward us the way we like? Are we willing to extend kindness to them? Are we willing to love them? Are willing to be patient?

Grace looks at the sin and says, 'I won't let that hinder my flow of love to them.' This is what God did for us. He approached a sinful and rebellious people, who did not deserve His love and compassion and mercy, and He gave it to us anyhow.

Paul is simply reminding us, as he speaks on behalf of God, and says, not only has the grace of God been extended it is still being extended in our lives on a daily basis. What hope that should give to us. When we mess up and we sin, God doesn't abandon us, He just extends more grace and gives it so that we might get back on track and love Him all the more. But He extends that grace that we might extend it to others.

He doesn't want us to wait until someone is meeting a certain expectation of ours before we extend it; He wants it extended today. And what encourages me about this passage is that this grace, given to us from God, is a grace which produces peace.

That's what grace will always do if we receive it and extend it. The peace we receive from God, as a result of His grace, is the peace which comes from being reconciled to the Father. We didn't deserve this reconciliation, but when God extended it by grace, through His Son, He essentially ended the war which separated us from Him because of sin.

His grace made peace with us. His grace allowed us to draw near to Him and experience His forgiveness and love and fellowship. And as we embrace this grace found in Christ by faith, we now are given the ability to extend grace to others. And as we extend

grace, guess what happens? The peace which we desire from each other is opened up and made a reality.

This is why the Holy Spirit emphasizes that His fruit working in our lives will not only allow us to taste the peace we have from God it will actually become a fruit in our lives to others. And this is why we now have the ability, in Christ, to walk in peace as we live lives in His grace.

And this is why we can do what the writer of Hebrews mentioned in HEB 12:14 "... to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord."

The effort God made to make peace with us was to send His only begotten Son to die for our sin and to rise bodily from the dead to give us eternal life as we embrace that grace in Christ through faith. The effort we make to have peace with others is to live as grace extenders, knowing that love covers a multitude of sins.

This doesn't mean we over-look sin if it becomes detrimental to the Body of Christ, but we deal with each other the same way we would want others to deal with us.

Paul points this out in COL 3:12-15 "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful."

It is this peace, which Paul brings out in verse two of our text, which has been given to us in Christ and is now to be an integral part of our lives as we walk in that grace and peace which God abundantly bestows on us in Christ. What we notice about this grace is that its source is from the Father first and foremost, but it doesn't exclude the Son, who obtained this peace for us.

EPH 1:2 "Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

What a blessing to know that a Father, our heavenly Father in Christ, personally wants us to know that He graces us and brings us peace. He personally wants us to know that His Son played a vital role in making it happen as he humbled Himself to come into

this world to fulfil this peace which was promised to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

All grace and peace comes from the Father, but it comes through His Son, Jesus Christ. And Paul is so excited about this grace and peace from God that he now goes into what commentators call a benediction from verse 3 through verse 14.

For those of you who have more of a formal or traditional Christian background you know that a benediction is usually a praise and blessing given at the end of message. We see such a benediction in JUD 1:24-25 "To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy - to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen."

But what we notice about the letter to the Ephesians is that this benediction or praise and blessing is at the beginning of the letter. Paul is so caught up with God's grace and peace that he immediately goes into worship of God.

He has just explained this blessing we are given from the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ and in the same breath he gives the blessing back to Him. This is what a proper understanding of God's grace and peace should do to our lives as we meditate upon so great a gift of salvation.

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."

The NIV uses the word praise here in our text whereas most translations use the word bless. The reason the NIV uses the word praise is partly because our conception of being able to bless God seems a bit foreign.

After all, it's thought, God is the only One who can ultimately bless with every spiritual blessing. And yet all throughout Scripture we see that we can in fact bless God. Blessing is a gift given. And we are instructed to give back to God that which He has given us.

David was a man who was blessed of God. But, could David give back to God that which would bless God? Could David give Him gold or silver? Could he give to God real estate? God owns it all,

He doesn't need any of those things. What does David give Him? His love and obedience and praise.

David exclaims in Psa.34:1-3 "I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul shall make its boast in the Lord; the humble shall hear it and rejoice. O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together."

This is what Paul is doing in our text. He is giving to God, or blessing God, with the only thing that can please God; his life, which is expressed in thanks and adoration as he approaches God in faith.

To think that you and I can bless God is an amazing concept. To think that there is anything that we can give to God to bless Him is amazing, and yet it's the very thing that pleases Him the most; lives that are dedicated to Him, willing to give Him our worship in both word and deed.

I was recently talking to someone about worship and how we should each be able to worship the living God and what that really means. Paul is showing us here that it is being able to lift our hearts to God, not only in a setting like this, but in everyday life.

We are given an opportunity to ascend to the throne of God and come into His very presence and present ourselves to Him. That blesses Him and we should do it often in praise and prayer and adoration as well as showing it forth with lives of faith and obedience.

EPH 1:3 "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ."

We bless Him because He has blessed us. We may sometimes think that we don't have any blessings from God. We may think, I don't have enough to get by on; I don't have my life in the order I would like it to be; I don't know if God has blessed me since I'm not always happy.

We may equate blessings with what we are able to see. God continually reminds us that the greatest blessings have nothing to do with this world, which are physical in nature and thus temporal. The greatest blessings from God have to do with those things which are spiritual in nature; those things which are eternal.

He "has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ."

By the way, this doesn't mean He won't bless in physical ways. He does this all the time. He provides for our physical needs continually. The problem is that if we only equate blessings with what we can get in this physical world it will have a tendency to focus our gaze upon the things of this world. This is why the health and wealth gospel, which is being promoted so widely in the Church today, can be so dangerous.

It may not deny the blessing of salvation we have in Christ, but it will take that blessing and use it as a ticket to be redeemed before God as we tear our stubs with a particular verse and say, this belongs to me and I'm cashing it in.

That attitude will always keep our focus on the blessing we seek in this world rather than seeing the bigger blessing God is wanting to give us which lasts for eternity. The blessings Paul speaks of in verse 3 are spiritual blessings. These spiritual blessings will certainly translate to physical blessings in many ways, but that's not Paul's emphasis in the context of this letter as he begins to relate these blessings in the coming verses and chapters.

As I mentioned in the beginning of this message, what we see in the first 3 chapters of this letter are not the things we can do for God, but what God has done for us. The last three chapters deal with our response to what He's given us. And that response is shown in lives of obedience, in gratitude and thanks for so great a blessing we have in Christ.

It's kind of ironic as we look at verse 3 when Paul is elevated in praise and worship to God as he considers these blessings, because at this point in his life he's in prison, unable to experience any of the blessings we would consider vital for being able to serve God.

Most of his freedoms were taken away. He didn't have access to these churches except through letters. His ability to enjoy the creature comforts were totally dependent on other people bringing him food and clothing and things to write on.

Being in prison in those days was a tough thing for people. The state did not always provide even the most basic needs. You had to depend on the grace of relatives or friends or different groups who took it upon themselves to see to the needs of prisoners.

Praise God that He provided these needs for Paul through other saints. But this isn't the thing that lifts Paul's heart in an attitude of praise and adoration. He's looking to the heavenly blessings he has.

This is where most of us make the mistake of thinking that if we can only experience the physical blessings then we can praise God. What if everything were taken from you tomorrow? Could you still bless God as Paul does here?

Could we say with Job, even "if God slays me, yet I will praise Him"? Job was no masochist. He simply understood that there are blessings beyond this world that are worthy of our praise to God. And as we keep our eyes on them we will be able to bless God and be used by Him. It's when we decide to bless God on our terms that we become discouraged and defeated.

Keep in mind that Paul was not some super-saint who had a special access to God. He was indwelt with the same Holy Spirit you and I have. The difference is he saw with heavenly eyes as he embraced these heavenly blessings.

Notice the blessings he talks about in verse 3. How many blessings does God give? All of them; every spiritual blessing. That includes them all. Whatever blessing God has He is able to give and does in fact give to His people. What we do with those blessings is sometimes another matter.

Let's take the most basic and yet greatest heavenly blessing we have which is Christ Himself. I wonder how many times in my own life has the Father said, what will you now do with My Son?

Here we have the greatest privilege to love Him and serve Him and yet sometimes we're waiting for some phantom blessing to move us to follow and serve Him. He's already given us every spiritual blessing. We already have everything we need to move forward with Him. The question He has for us is, 'what will you do with what you already possess?'

We look for solutions in the world or we look to something bigger, quicker, and better to solve all of our problems. If only we had this or if we only had that, then God would bless. No, He's already blessed us with every spiritual blessing. He just wants us to use what we've got and when we begin to use those blessings we'll see the fruit of it in our lives and in the lives of others and the communities in which we live.

The reason Paul identifies these blessings as heavenly is because he is showing us the source for them. They come from the very throne of God. These are very special blessings to be highly regarded and cherished because they are being dispensed from the hand of a heavenly Father who knows the needs of His children.

Every blessing from our Heavenly Father has a purpose, and that purpose is two-fold: to bring glory to Himself and to be a help to us. There is no blessing He imparts that is bad for us. What's funny is that sometimes we don't even see the blessings, or recognize them when they come, because we're busy looking for something entirely different, sometimes something temporal.

Most of you with children know how this works. You desire to give your children something for their benefit. No parent who loves his children wants to give them anything for their detriment. Imagine giving a three year old a can of spray-paint and say, play nice now and stay here in the living room.

What kind of blessing is that? No, we bless them with everything they need. A can of spray paint is not what a three year old needs. They may think so, but your walls and carpet would say otherwise.

And yet you give that same three year old peas and carrots and they may give you one of those faces you see in side shows at carnivals. You blessed them with what they need, but they may not recognize it. Do we withhold the blessing because it's not perceived as a blessing? I hope not.

But, do we contort our faces into something unnatural when God decides to bless us with what we may need at any given moment in our lives? He may choose to bless us with a circumstance that would take us out of our comfort zone. Or He may choose to bless by testing our faith which is designed to produce endurance.

Interestingly enough, God had blessed Paul with a trial of imprisonment. This is not to suggest that being in jail is a blessing. What it does mean is that God turned it into a blessing from heaven.

And isn't this what God promises in ROM 8:28 "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.", with the idea of conforming us into the image of Christ.

Do you think Joseph, the son of Jacob, thought it was a tremendous blessing to have been thrown down a well and sold into slavery and then taken to Egypt? Probably not. But what did God do with that situation? He turned it into a blessing not only for Joseph, but his entire family and then for the nation of Israel and then ultimately for us as Jesus Christ was brought through the line of David who would come to die for the penalty of our sins.

It's often difficult to see the extent of the "blessing" because we may not consider the "Blesser" who loves us and only has our best interest in mind as a parent has for his children.

I like the way Jesus put it in MAT 7:11 "If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!"

He desires to bless us with every spiritual blessing. But what He is continually teaching us is to know what to ask for. Patience can be a spiritual blessing as God gives it. How many here have ever prayed for patience? Have you ever said, I don't think I'll ever pray for that again? And yet God wants that fruit to be abundant in our lives.

How many see suffering as a blessing and an opportunity to grow? Now I will be the first to admit that I've never prayed for suffering and I'm not so sure that that is something we need to pray for. But how many three year olds ask for peas and carrots? Sometimes God will bless through things in life that couldn't bring the blessing He desires unless it was through a hard situation.

Most of us pray for wisdom, or protection, or anything else we deem nice and not bad. And we should pray for such things. But don't despise the blessings which are wrapped in inconvenient and sometimes difficult packages. If it's being given to us from our Father in heaven it is meant to be used to bring us closer to Him.

And don't ever forget that all of these heavenly blessings come through the One our Father sent into this world to die for us. What a blessing our Lord is and what a blessing His death, burial and resurrection gave us. The Father didn't withhold His only Son because the trial He would suffer on our behalf seemed to be too great.

Every spiritual blessing we have, most of which we would see as wonderful and glorious, are in Christ Jesus. Our Lord and Savior

who sits at the right hand of our God and Father is the One who intercedes on our behalf and only wants to bless us. Everything passes through the Father who loves us and then He passes them on through His Sons' hands to us.

I can't think of anyone I would trust more than My Heavenly Father and Savior Jesus Christ to pass on to me just the blessings I need. We can trust Him and know that all blessings are for our good and they are all good, because our God is good. He is the giver of every good gift. He doesn't dispense bad gifts. He can't.

EPH 1:3 "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ."

May our hearts ascend to our Father and Lord and Savior as we consider the blessing of life eternal with Him. Paul saw the blessings of God in his life because he saw them through the eyes of Christ and the heart of Christ.

Paul saw Himself as a citizen of a better country and that is what moved him to long for that country and to raise his praise and adoration to a level that would rise above his jail cell. He put it well when writing the Philippian church.

PHI 3:20-21 "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

PHI 4:1 "Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends!"

Stand firm in His love and His grace and in the blessings which come from His throne and be thankful with hearts overflowing with gratitude. And may we all be grace-extenders because of the grace extended to us through Christ.