

THE MYSTERY OF GOD'S WILL

Ephesians 1:8-10

Intro: If I have understood, at least in part, what Paul desired from the believers in Ephesus (and everywhere else that this epistle has ever by the people of God) was, that they would have the same response that he had as he wrote and thought about the wonderful salvation that we have in Christ. Well, you might ask me, “What was the Apostle Paul’s response?” You can sense it as you read and re-read these first fourteen verses of chapter 1.

I see it in verse 6, for example, in the words, “To the praise of His glory.” And you see it again in verse 12: “That we should be to the praise of His glory, who first trusted in Christ.” But you can’t get by the first word in verse 3, whether you are reading this in English, or in the original Greek, without seeing what it had done to Paul’s heart, and what Paul was hoping that the Spirit of God would cause this truth to do in our hearts.

Of course I am referring to the word, “Blessed.” This is a word in which Paul was praising God. It is a word of worship. He was exalting the Name of God. This is truth, speaking of the Gospel, which exalts from start to finish the loving, gracious, infinitely wise, and almighty character of God. And this should be our response too. We need to read the first fourteen verses of this epistle seeking to learn all that it tells us of God. To be sure, this is not the only verses in the Bible that we ought to read that way. The Bible is full of verses which set before us the glory, the majesty, the awesomeness of God.

Even when we look at creation, since our eyes and hearts have been opened to understand the truth, we don’t just marvel at a glorious sunrise, or sunset, we are not just amazed at the marvelous things we see in the world about us, but we are inclined to say with King David of Israel, “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth His handiwork” (Psa. 19:1). Our eyes are capable to seeing what others who have not had their eyes opened to the truth are unable to see.

The word “blessed” in Eph. 1:3 is an adjective, not a verb. There are many places in the Bible where we are told by a verb to praise the Lord, or to exalt Him, or to worship, but here in Ephesian 1 verse 3 it is equivalent of saying that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is *the blessed God!* He is the praiseworthy God. This word, especially in a

context like this, uniquely belongs to God. It is not a word that we can claim for ourselves; to do so would be blasphemy. He alone is worthy of our praise, our adoration, our worship, as the God of our salvation. We can also say that He alone He alone is the blessed God of our salvation. Somebody may have led you to the Lord, and you can be grateful to him, or her, for giving you the Gospel, but you don't worship them. You worship God. You say, "Blessed be God!" The Apostle Paul would not want anyone to praise him for their salvation.

So, the more you and I understand what the Apostle Paul wrote in these verses, and what we are inclined to say as we go on and read the rest of this epistle, the more we will say with him, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ . . ."

But let me add another thought to this.

In reading a part of John Owen's work which he called "Communion with God," he expressed the idea that many times in Scripture when the writers speak of God, or the Lord, they have in mind any one of the three Persons of the Godhead, or all of Them! And let me give you an illustration. One of the verses I have been reviewing from our memory work earlier this year is Hebrews 13:5. Many of you could quote it with me. This is what the verse tells us:

Let your conversation [conduct] be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.

Who said this? Well, this is generally taken to be a reference to the idea in Psalm 118:6, and that verse is about the Lord, or God. It would have to be God the Father because only a person who is omnipresent could possibly make such a promise. But didn't the Lord Jesus say to His disciples shortly before He went back to heaven, "And, lo, I am with you always [or always], even unto the end of the world." And hasn't the Holy Spirit been given to us to abide with us forever? That is what the Lord Jesus said in John 14:16! So we can take the promise of Hebrews 13:5 as applying to God the Father, to the Lord Jesus Christ, and to the Holy Spirit. What a promise this is!

Now what about our salvation? Is only God the Father involved in our salvation? Let us look at our text in Ephesians 1 to see. Paul obviously was speaking of God the Father, but it was the Lord's blood that was shed for our sins, and we couldn't have been saved without that. See verse 7.

And we have been sealed by the Holy Spirit according to verse 13, and we know, too, that it was the Holy Spirit Who convicted us and that we have been born of the Spirit according to John 3:5. So when Paul said, “Blessed be the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ,” he could have said (and this may be implied in what he did say), “Blessed be the Lord Jesus Christ,” and/or, “Blessed be the Holy Spirit.” They are all in this chapter, and They all have a part in anyone’s salvation. So we need to be grateful for and worship God the Father. We need to be grateful for and worship God the Son. And we need to be grateful for and worship the Holy Spirit. Our salvation is a work of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,

Now as we come to verse 8, the Apostle Paul was enlarging upon what he had already said about our salvation. The emphasis here is on the verb, “abounded.” And in these three verses we have three points which the Apostle Paul was making:

- I. Where He first abounded, in verse 8.
- II. How He especially abounded, in verse 9.
- III. When it will be most apparent that He has abounded, in verse 10.

I. WHERE GOD FIRST ABOUNDED IN OUR SALVATION, ACCORDING TO VERSE 8.

Now remember that we are talking about salvation, God abounding in our salvation. The word that Paul used speaks of an abundance, not just enough, but more than enough. Remember the outline I gave you. We are in the part which speaks of our wealth as Christians, not material wealth, but spiritual wealth. In salvation God has done for us far more than we will ever need. Paul was speaking of an abundance, or abounding, in Ephesians 3:20 and 21, and it formed a fitting conclusion to what he had said about the spiritual riches that we have in Christ. The words are familiar:

20 Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us,
21 Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen (Eph. 3:20-21).

In salvation the Lord has done “exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.” We could never have come up with the plan of salvation that He ordered for us. And the first evidence of an abundance is in the last word of verse 7: the word “grace.” The first word of verse 8, “Wherein,” points back to the last word of verse 7: “grace” – “the riches

of His grace.” Salvation could not be on a merit system, because we are all sinners. Salvation could not be earned because the wages of sin is death. Salvation could not be bought because no one could pay for it. So, amazingly it is a gift of the free grace of God through our Lord Jesus Christ Who died paying our debt that we might be saved. God did not give us what we all deserved; He gave us what we could never deserve.

Notice the words, “toward us.” He was speaking of those chosen in eternity past, those predestined to be full-fledged members of God’s family by birth, the new birth.

But what did Paul mean “in wisdom and prudence.” God exercised infinite wisdom, divine wisdom, in ordaining our salvation, and “prudence” means that He also had the knowledge and power to put the plan into effect. It meant that He would send His only begotten Son to die on the Cross as the Substitute for those chosen by God. There is no person who has ever lived who could have ordained such a salvation, and then who could make it work. Remember the hymn which has the words,

“Oh, the love that drew salvation’s plan,
Oh, the grace that brought it down to man.
Oh, the mighty gulf that God did span
At Calvary.”

But let us move on to verse 9. Here we have:

II. HOW GOD ESPECIALLY ABOUNDED TOWARD US, ACCORDING TO VERSE 9.

We had the words “toward us” in verse 8. Now here in verse 9 we have, “Having made known unto us . . .”

Now I want to make perfectly clear that salvation in the OT is the same as salvation in the NT. But what Paul is telling us here that while the people of God in OT times understood that salvation was by faith, and they looked ahead to a coming Redeemer, they did not understand as much about salvation as we are able to understand now because of God’s revelation in the NT, and I will go on to say that there is much about coming events and the culmination of all things that we do not understand. Paul said here in verse 9 that God has “made known unto us the mystery of His will.” What did He mean by the word “mystery”? We use this word when we speak of something that is impossible to explain or to understand, or

also of something that is difficult to understand. In the NT it means a secret which God had not previously revealed, but which has now been made known. The Apostle Paul has defined a NT mystery several places in his epistles. He has defined it for us in chapter 3 where we need to read at least the first six verses. (Read Eph. 3:1-6.) Here in Ephesians 1:9 Paul spoke of “the mystery of His will,” that is, of God’s will.

Most of you know that what God has given us in the Bible is a revelation of His will, and that it is progressive. By this we mean that beginning with the book of Genesis God began revealing what He wanted us to know, and He did it a little bit at a time. Genesis 1:1 begins with a reference to God, and the more we read in the OT, the more we learn about God. God reveals what we can learn in no other way. Those who wrote the Bible wrote under the direction of the Holy Spirit as God was pleased to reveal it to them so they could write it down for us.

But the word “mystery” tells us that there were some things which God did not reveal until NT times. He kept secret some of His plans. And let me say that He has given all now that He wants us to know, but there are other things that we will know when we are with the Lord. Paul wrote to the Corinthians regarding the present and the future, “For now we know in part, and we prophesy in part” (1 Cor. 13:9). But then in verse 12 of that same chapter he added:

For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known (1 Cor. 13:12).

Paul said this even knowing all that he did about the truth of God. There are some questions to which the person who is most knowledgeable in Scripture, has to say, “I do not know.” But God revealed a special secret which He had kept until He made it known to Paul. It was that the Gospel which had been given to the Jews, and for the Jews, was now going to go to the Gentiles, and that both Jews and Gentiles were to be united in “the same body,” which we know now is the Church, the body of Christ. And this is the task that the Lord gave to Paul initially, and the message that we are to proclaim down to the present day. This is why the epistle to the Ephesians was written. Many people say that God turned to the Gentiles because the Jews as a nation rejected Him. That is how it came about, but this was not Plan B with God. He has no Plan B. This was His plan from the very beginning, but not made known until the Lord had finished His personal mission on earth, and returned to heaven. This was not an afterthought with God. This was His plan from the beginning, and we are

seeing it carried out now. This was not because the Jews took the Lord by surprise, and He had to do something else. God is never taken by surprise. He orders all things according to His will. What God is doing today is, as verse 9 tells us, “according to his good pleasure which he hath purpose in Him,” not Himself, that is, in Christ.

But now let us look briefly at verse 10. Here we read, not all of the details we would like to know, but just what the Lord wants us to know:

III. WHEN IT WILL BE MOST APPARENT THAT GOD HAS ABOUNDED TOWARD US, ACCORDING TO VERSE 10.

I hope that you have noticed in your reading of Ephesians that in verse 11 which we will get to next Sunday, the Lord willing, that we are “predestinated according to the purpose of Him Who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will.” Political parties are lining up to be able to do what they want to do, or what they *will* to do. Who is in charge of the United States of America? God is. Whose will is going to prevail – the will of the Democrats, or the will of the Republicans, or the will of some third party? None of these. God’s will is going to prevail. And God is moving all things toward “the dispensation of the fulness of times.” What is this? It is the culmination toward which God has been moving all things from the very beginning of time. Oh, it looks like there have been times when not even God is in control. But don’t believe that for a moment. As I speak to you this morning God reigns over all the earth, over every nation, and over every individual on the face of the earth. Man thinks he is in charge, and for the present the Lord is letting us see what a mess man can make of everything.

Now you would think that at this point in Paul’s thinking he would go on to lay out for us in great detail what we can expect God to do in the future. We have a lot of prophecy given to us in Scripture. But Paul did not do that. Instead, he wrote *by the Holy Spirit* what God is anticipating as far as His people are concerned. Now I don’t know how extensive this will be, whether it includes Israel as well as the Church. But the emphasis here in Ephesians is upon the Church, the body of Christ, those people today who really know Jesus Christ as their Savior. But look at what Paul said. God’s fully intends “to gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth,” those who really are “in Him,” eternally united in Christ. What a glorious day that will be! We know from our Lord’s prayer in John 17 that one thing that grieves

our Lord the most, is the disunity that exists among ourselves as the Lord's people. This is not an organizational unity. This is not a unity that sets aside the Scriptures. This is a unity in Christ Jesus, standing on the truth of Scripture, and united for the glory of God through our Lord Jesus Christ. And the Lord is the One Who is going to do it. If you are listening to the Word, and obeying the Word, you are being prepared for that day when the saints when those who are in the Church of Jesus Christ will be seen as what they actually are: one body in Christ.

God has more that He is doing now, and will do later. But we need to be concerned about what He is doing with us, and yield ourselves to do His will for the glory of His Name. This is the message of Ephesians.

Concl: Just seeing what we have seen today out to make our heart rejoice in the Lord that He has saved us, and that He has made us a part of His Church, and that all of the forces of hell will not be able to keep the Lord from fulfilling His purposes which He predetermined before the very foundation of the world. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ."