

196 To the praise of His glory

This, our third Reflection on some of the truths explained to us in the early verses of Ephesians Chapter 1, brings us on to a phrase that occurs three times in the first fourteen verses of this spiritually-abundant chapter.

So far in these verses, we have seen how the Holy Spirit, through His servant Paul, is "going overboard" regarding the sheer riches of God's mercies and blessings bestowed upon His people! We have learned how we are already blessed with every heavenly blessing in Christ, and how the Father chose us before the foundation of the world, to be holy and without blame before Him in love (vv 3-4), the Father having done all this "according to the good pleasure of His will" (v.5).

Now we come on to another equally-rich phrase, "to the praise of the glory of His grace" (v. 6), and "to the praise of His glory" (vv 12 and 14, all AV).

Here in a proverbial nutshell is the motive for God's wonderful blessings, and it is a motive that may cause surprise in some church circles today, where the emphasis may have drifted imperceptibly away from God Himself to become more focussed instead on "me" and "us". We see this most often in some newer worship songs in which our praises are addressed to Jesus, (who in some cases is not even named as such), and are based on what Jesus has done for us, or indeed, for me. Putting it simply, we are saying to Jesus in such songs, "Lord I love you because of what you have done for us / me".

Now there is nothing wrong with such sentiments, for of course "what Jesus has done for us" is, in part, one reason why we do indeed praise Him. But we need to keep things in their proper place, that is, in the fuller, rounder dealings of Almighty God with us all. For a start, it is no bad thing to realise that the heart of God's dealings with His fallen creation is not actually Me! And furthermore, the heart of God's dealings is not ultimately even about the Lord Jesus, but about God the Father Himself.

This is not to denigrate or downplay the Lord Jesus one jot, for His role in creation and salvation is of course utterly pivotal (John 1.1-5 / John 14.6 / Acts 4.10-12 / I Corinthians 15.57 / etc). But in the days of His Gospel ministry when physically on earth, the spiritual ear of the Lord Jesus was never primarily attuned to those around Him, but always primarily towards God His Father. On this point, of Jesus' emphasis in His own ministry, it is helpful to go through St John's Gospel at some pace, ignoring much as you go along this time, but noting only the references to the relationship between the Father and the Son. It becomes very clear that Jesus is doing all that He is doing first and foremost out

of loving obedience to His Father. In the climax of Gethsemane, Jesus' final resolve to go through with what lay ahead comes with the words "nevertheless, not my will but thine be done" (Luke 22.42). Thus while His suffering was all about us, Jesus' motive was fundamentally about His love for God His Father.

So we return to that telling phrase, "to the praise of His glory" in Ephesians Chapter 1. We learn from these words that the "end of the line" over God's dealings with His creation is just this - that God's creation is to recognise, praise and worship Almighty God our Creator for who He is, in all His glorious glory, quite apart from all that He has done for us. (We can note in passing at this point that sin in its entirety, from Eden to today, springs from a refusal to do this acknowledging (eg., Romans 3.23 - a falling short of?)).

Yes, God deeply loves us and delights in blessing us, and we rightly praise Him for all His mercies towards us. In return He seeks our discipleship with all that that involves. When all is said and done, we acknowledge before God our Father, through His precious Son the Lord Jesus Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit, that this, His amazing creation, is all about Him and His own glory, and much less about itself, or us.

(For further reflection - Genesis 1-2 / Psalms 148-150 / Isaiah 6.1-3 / Revelation 4).

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