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## GOD'S REDEEMING GRACE

Much is written and said regarding the subject of “self-esteem.” A realization of the importance of having a positive “self-image” is growing and influencing many dimensions of the matrix of life. We teach our children the essence of positive thinking with stories about the little engine that said “I think I can, I think I can.” We see it dramatized in plays and movies such as *My Fair Lady*. We hear it in the words of Paul who tells us, “I can do all things through Christ Who strengthens me.” To be sure, we can find differences in the sources or reasons upon which our confidence is based. Most of the teaching resources do not address this issue, some point to our humanity as all sufficient, and others look to man’s relationship to God. One could argue that it makes no difference what the source is, it is the outcome that is important. While identical outcomes may be achieved in the short-term, eventually the finiteness of our humanity will fail us. Then the basis of our belief will crumble and in the end we may find ourselves lamenting “Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.” (Eccl 1:2)

As Christians, we find worth in ourselves based solely on the fact that “while we were yet sinners Christ died for us” to redeem us. Because of God’s grace, we can come into a completely new relationship with Him. Our self-image then takes on a completely new dimension in which we find that we are saints rather than sinners, we are children of God and not merely human, and we are citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven and not just the community of earth.

**EPHESIANS 1:1-2** We can do much to influence the way people “see themselves.” Notice that Paul addressed the Christians at Ephesus as “saints” and “the faithful.” Too often we hear people giving their testimony and using words that are full of defeatism. They will say, “I’m just a sinner, saved by grace.” In Christ we have experienced a change in our basic nature. We are a “new creation.” (2 Cor 5:17) Before Christ, we were sinners *by nature and by action*. After we have been born of the Spirit of God, we have a new nature that is not disposed toward sinfulness. This is not to deny that sin is *committed*, but sin is not a *way of life* anymore.

We can also influence people by encouraging them to focus on the blessings of life rather than problems. Paul encouraged people to see “grace and peace” in their lives that comes to them from God. It should encourage us to realize that God loves us based on Who He is and not on our own merit. This is grace! Because of His grace, we can have a twofold peace: peace with God and the peace of God.

**EPHESIANS 1:3-6** A spontaneous burst of praise erupted from Paul as he was engulfed by the realization of the surpassing bounty and infinite mercy of God toward those who are in Christ Jesus. We see that God is extravagant in blessing us with **every** spiritual blessing in Christ. Nothing will He withhold.

We can see the significance of what God has done for us in Christ. In Him, we find the fulfillment of what God had intended for people from before the creation. God’s purpose in creating us was for us to be His children. Since we were born into the family of Adam, then it was necessary that we be reborn into the family of God. This is what the new birth is all about. The adoption that Paul mentions is the formal recognition and acceptance of us as full members of God’s family with inheritance rights. For this great blessing, we should be grateful and offer praise to God all the time.

While we may experience temporal blessings (or difficulties) in this life, we must realize that the blessings (or problems) are nothing compared with what God has prepared for us “in the heavenly realms.” We must be careful to NOT focus on this present life and assess God’s love based on worldly standards of “good and bad.” We can hear people testify of the goodness of God because they have a good standard of living and good health. Where does that leave Christians who are struggling financially and have health problems? Paul plainly stated that God “has blessed in the heavenly (spiritual) realms . . . in Christ.” Part of our transformation (be transformed by the renewing of your minds - Rom 12:2) is adjusting our focus from the physical to the spiritual. We should note also that these blessings are ours **ONLY in Christ**.

It is in Christ we are seen (in His sight - v. 4) to be holy and blameless. The plan to restore “lost mankind” was worked out before the creation. In His foreknowledge, God knew that mankind would fail and require help so that we could be restored to a right relationship with Him. The predestined plan was that all who were in Christ would be adopted as His sons. This was and is the means (the way) whereby salvation would occur. All who put their trust in the completed work of atonement on the cross are “chosen” because all who are in Christ are chosen and God predestined that all who are in Christ would be holy and blameless (in right relationship) in His sight.

All of this was done based on God’s merit and not our merit. It is not something we can purchase and then enjoy the benefit of it without being in Christ. “No man can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for

him -- the ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough--" Psa 49:7-8. Though we cannot buy our redemption we can receive it as a gift from God IF we are in Christ. If we are in Christ, then we are aligned with God's will and it is His will that gives Him pleasure.

**EPHESIANS 1:7-10** The means by which we are brought into this special relationship with God is by the death of Jesus (through His blood) on the cross. In this death, God redeemed us from our slavery to sin and in bringing us into His family we receive as a free gift (grace) the forgiveness of all our sins. God's purpose in all this is to culminate in the complete fulfillment of the Lordship of Jesus Christ over all creation -- "... every knee shall bow ... and every tongue shall confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father." (Phil 2:10,11) This is the mystery of His will. We may think, "I knew that -- that not so mysterious." It is not mysterious to us because God has made it known to us. Before the first advent of Christ, God's purpose was not clearly understood. Being in the family gives us access to the family treasures of the **wisdom** and **prudence** of God. We also learn some of the family secrets of what God is up to in this overall event that we loosely refer to as Creation. This mystery is that God is gathering everything together under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. This "all" includes the physical and spiritual worlds. We don't normally think of the physical world as being part of the reconciling act that God is carrying out, but Paul reminds us in Romans 8, that all of Creation groans (as with birth pains) in anticipation of the revelation of the Sons of God at which time, Creation itself will be redeemed.

The concept of redemption implies buying back something that one had in a previous time. The price of our redemption is the blood of Jesus. The blood of Christ paid the price of the penalty of our sins and provided forgiveness. Again, Paul stressed the unmerited extravagant generosity of God -- "riches of God's grace that He lavished on us." This was not done on a whim, but was a deliberate and planned process that was based on the perfect wisdom and understanding of God.

**EPHESIANS 1:11-12** God created the worlds by Jesus and the culmination of all things will be that all things will be under the Lordship of Jesus. Jesus is the beginning of all things and the end of all things. He is Alpha and Omega. Another way to put this is that Jesus is the inheritor of all things. Now, because we are also God's children by the new birth and by adoption into His family, then we have also obtained an inheritance along with (in) Christ. The purpose of this is to show the goodness of God so that we might reveal His glory to all beings, physical and spiritual.

Usually when we think about being chosen in Christ, we tend to think about all the benefits to us. There is also a benefit that God derives. The essence of vs. 11 and 12 can be summarized as "We were also chosen so we might be for (to) the praise of His glory." We could say this passage means we should praise God because of His redeeming grace. We should most certainly do that! This passage could also be saying that we (who we are and what we do) are (will be) a "statement of praise" of God's glory. This can be a present reality in that our very lives should bring praise to God and show the world that God's wisdom and God's way are the obvious best choices. It will be a future reality in the Day of Judgement in which God's justice and His mercy will be vindicated before a world that has continued to reject God and rebel against Him.

The difference in our situation and that of "the world" is that we believed the gospel message of salvation when we heard it. Consequently, we have been included in all that God is doing in Christ. To be sure, we have not seen the full consummation of our purchased redemption; however, God has provided a pledge to us by giving His Holy Spirit. His presence is our guarantee (deposit) of our inheritance (as coheirs with Christ) until that day when the redemption is completed and we see Him face to face. That too will be to the praise of His glory.

**EPHESIANS 1:13-14** The route by which we arrived at this position of being in Christ so that we can share in His inheritance (which is all things) is that we first heard the gospel, we believed and trust in Jesus and then we received the validation of our faith, namely, the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. This validation is like the seal of a king that certified the authenticity of documents. We also can see God's presence in our lives as a foretaste of what is to come when the final stage of our salvation takes place in heaven.

God's plan seems very clear and the character and nature of God is evident in the person of Jesus. It doesn't get any clearer than that. This gospel is God's final word to mankind about Himself. We will not receive any clearer revelation.