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The Gospel of God, Part 5

The Pilgrim's Progress

One of my favorite books is *The Pilgrim's Progress*. It was written by John Bunyan in the 17th century while he was imprisoned for preaching the Gospel. Next to the Bible it is perhaps the greatest literary work to ever have been written. Someone has well said that "*The Pilgrim's Progress* is the Westminster Confession of Faith with people in it."

One of the reasons why *The Pilgrim's Progress* is one of my favorite books is because it contains such deep insight into what the walk of the Christian. Take for example the Dungeon of Despair located in the castle called "Doubting-Castle." This is where the main character, Christian, ends up on account of his disobedience (he took God's promises lightly and so rebelled). Here Christian and his companion sit entrapped in a smelly, dark dungeon. All the while the owner of the castle, "Giant-Despair," encourages them to kill themselves.

Christian's pitiful existence is further described with no sign of hope or escape until we read...

Now, a little before it was Day, good *Christian*, as one half amazed, broke out in this passionate speech, 'What a fool am I, thus to lie in a stinking dungeon, when I may as well walk at liberty? I

have a key in my bosom, called *Promise*, that will I am persuaded open any lock in *Doubting-Castle*.¹

In this little account Bunyan describes the struggle he no doubt saw occurring all-too often in the lives of the Christians in his day- perhaps a struggle that he himself experienced in his own life...

- The Christian takes God's work/grace lightly and so disobeys.
- This disobedience plunges him into despair and unbelief.
- And this despair holds him captive ONLY because he has forgotten the BENEFITS he has received in Christ!

Though John Bunyan wrote this over 300 years ago, his insights into the struggles of the Christian walk are just as pertinent as if he wrote the book yesterday. Indeed, the solution for the Christian struggling with despair and difficulty is living in light of the many BENEFITS he has received in Christ!

Today we are going to look at Romans 1:7, where Paul describes the BENEFITS every Christian has received in the Gospel. I want you to do more than just take this verse and cognitively understand it. Rather, it is my prayer that this passage is engrained on your mind and in your heart so that when the struggles and difficulties of life come, you will have a KEY which will free you from those GIANTS!

Positional Benefits

Paul begins discussing the Positional Benefits which flow from the Gospel.

Romans 1:7, "to all who are beloved of God in Rome."

This is connected with the first verse such that we understand the verse to read, "Paul... to all in Rome." We begin with this important qualification. Notice that Paul's letter was for "all in Rome" – the rich and the poor, the slave and the free, the Jew and the Gentile! Truly, the benefits referenced in this verse are for ALL Christians- not just...

- The faithful.
- The one who has attained to great depths of godliness.
- The obedient.

No! ALL IN ROME! With that, notice the first benefit that flows from the gosp

Romans 1:7, "to all who are beloved of God."

Literally this reads "God's loved ones." This refers to the intimate and tender love that God has for His people. From a study of this letter we see that for Paul this phrase indicates not only that God *now* loves the believers in Rome, but also that He...

- Has loved them from eternity (Romans 5:8-12; Jeremiah 31:3), and...
- Would never stop loving them (Romans 8:31-39).

¹ p. 134

Thus, this is a statement of that great POSITION that a participant in the Gospel has: They are “the beloved of God”- the ones God...

- “First loved,” 1 John 4:19.
- Has bestowed “His great love upon,” 1 John 3:1.
- Has “demonstrated His own love towards” through the cross, Romans 5:8.
- Has set His great love upon “even when we were dead in our transgressions,” Ephesians 2:4-5!

Thus our participation in the Gospel is testimony of the fact that we are the “beloved of God”- the ones God has set His love upon.

Now in our world where the love of God has become a trite saying and so akin to a sappy, weak, powerless love that could be empowered if only the sinner would love God in return, we must see that being the “beloved of God” speaks of so much more. It is tantamount to saying...

- God unconditionally accept you in Christ.
- Though you are inclined to relate to God on the basis of your conduct, realize that while you were yet a sinner, God placed His love upon you.
- And thus of all men, women, and children, God is devoted to you, your well-being, and so your growth in grace...
 - NOT because He can’t live in a world where you don’t love Him.
 - BUT because it has pleased Him so to do.

In this context, listen to the amazement with which John speaks as he reflects upon the love of God...

1 John 3:1, 2, “Behold [the word for “behold” is an expression of amazement. We could loosely translate it as, “you are never going to believe this!” Well, what is so amazing? What is so unbelievable?] what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!... Beloved [with this John turns his focus to the consequence of being the “beloved of God”], now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we [who this very moment struggle with sin, rebellion, doubt, fear, a sense of unworthiness, and the like] shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.”

Such is the amazing, unthinkable, and yet unconditional love of God! And yet this only is half of the Positional Benefits we have in Christ. Notice the second one...

Romans 1:7, “-to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints.”

Literally this reads, “saints by virtue of having been called.”

When a person is savingly called by God they are “set apart” and so “separated” unto God. What does this mean? The word for “saint” is the same word used throughout Scripture for “holy.” For example, it is used of...

- Scripture (Romans 1:2).
- The law and the commandment (Romans 7:12).
- The kiss with which Christians should greet one another (Romans 16:16).
- The Spirit, (John 14:26).
- The outer part of the Temple- the Holy Place, (1 Kings 8:10).
- The inner part of the Temple- the Holy of Holies, (Exodus 26:33).
- The tithe of the land, (Leviticus 27:30).
- The priests, (Leviticus 21:6-7).

From this you must see that being “a saint” does NOT convey the idea of outstanding ethical achievement. Rather, it refers to being set apart unto God for His purpose and service! It means that you are wholly devoted to the Lord and so have been claimed by Him.

Chosen Last

Most recall lining up for a pick-up game of football, baseball, or basketball where two captains stood up front and choose their players one by one. I recall how sad it was to be the one chosen last. There was no stronger statement of rejection than this to an eight year old that no one wants you on their team.

I have no doubt that that is the conviction of most of you when it comes to the Kingdom of God. You're thankful that you are saved- you are the beloved of God. But you know that if all were lined up in this room, God clearly wouldn't choose you first, second, or even somewhere in the middle. You are too much of a sinner! You are unworthy of any such status.

Christian! Don't you understand what it means to be a saint? God not only has chosen you to be in His family (on His team), but in Christ all of us without distinction enjoy the status of sons and daughters of God most High! We've been set apart unto this end. In fact, when it came to choices we would expect that if Christ truly is “the firstborn among many brethren” (Romans 8:29), then He of course would ever and always be chosen first when it comes to the one who is most precious to God.

Yet, at one time in the history of this world, God was faced with a horrible choice— either protect His only begotten Son or allow Him to die in our place. What did God do? He chose to sacrifice His Son in order to save... YOU!

This and much more is what is involved in being “called as saints.” God not only loves us, BUT He has chosen us hand selected us- to be in His family, in His service, unto His glory!

These are Positional benefits we have in Christ this day. They are not something we earn. Rather, through the love and sovereign choice of God each and everyone of us in Christ are...

- The Beloved of God.
- Saints by Calling.

Practical Benefits in Christ

This leads us to the practical benefits we have in Christ, grace and peace.

Romans 1:7, “grace to you and peace.”

This greeting is a combination and adaptation of the Greek greeting (which was “rejoice”- χαίρειν) and Hebrew greeting (which was “peace”- שְׁלוֹמֶיךָ). Together “grace to you and peace” conveys the Practical Benefits each and every one of us receive in Christ. Let’s consider them one by one.

Romans 1:7, “grace to you.”

As we saw last time, grace is God’s unmerited or undeserved favor. When we think of this favor, the first thing that ought to come to mind is that undeserved favor of God whereby we are saved.

Ephesians 2:8-9, “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast.”

With this, notice that Scripture describes this grace as that which enables the Christian to...

- Conduct themselves in “holiness and godly sincerity,” 2 Corinthians 1:12.
- Exercise the spiritual gifts he has been given, Romans 12:6; 1 Corinthians 1:4ff; 1 Peter 4:10.
- Have “joy” in the midst of trials, 2 Corinthians 8:1-2.
- Have all their needs “sufficiently met,” 2 Corinthians 9:8.
- Glorify Christ, 2 Thessalonians 1:12.
- Have “eternal comfort” and “good hope,” 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17.
- Have “help in time of need,” Hebrews 4:16.
- Be “strengthened and established” even in the midst of incredible suffering, 1 Peter 5:9-10.

These and much more are the PRACTICAL BENEFITS that the recipient of the Gospel of God receives on account of “grace to you!” Yet you must see that unlike the position benefits referenced in Romans 1:7 7a these do not come in their fullness upon salvation. They are the by-product of something we do as Christians! Paul is writing to ones who had already received the saving grace of God. Thus for Paul to wish that they might enjoy more of the grace of God indicates that this grace is not something that everyone in Christ receives automatically. Rather, this grace is reserved for those in Christ who do something! What is that “something”? Follow with me...

John 1:17: says, “For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.”

We begin with the conviction that if ever we are going to know the grace of God it will only be as we are in Christ. Grace is realized only through Him! Yet how do we come to know this grace more and more?

In Acts 6:8; 7:55-56 we read of Stephen “performing great wonders and signs among the people” because he was “full of grace and power.” How did He get such grace? What was it that enabled Him to do such powers? The answer is found in Acts 7:55-56: “But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, ‘Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.’”

All that Stephen did, and for that matter all that Paul, Peter, the Prophets and Holy Men of Old, was on account of his gazing at the Lord the salvation that He wrought on his behalf- and so relying upon the cross for acceptance! In fact notice how Paul defines the grace of God.

2 Corinthians 8:9, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich."

That is the substance of grace. As we by faith behold the cross of Christ and so receive it as our sacrifice, our propitiation, our acceptance before Almighty God, we enter more and more into the grace of God whereby we enjoy its many benefits: joy, security, gladness of heart, confidence, etc. Isn't that what we read in Scripture? Speaking of Christ Paul writes this:

Romans 5:2, "Through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand..."

When in Doubting Castle we need to know that all our sin- past, present, and future- has been taken care of! This will loosen the chains of despair and set us free from this horrible giant.

Hebrews 13:9-13, "Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings; for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, through which those who were thus occupied were not benefited. [If we are not strengthened in grace via the sacrificial system, then how are we strengthened in grace? The text continues...] We have an altar, from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat. For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy place by the high priest *as an offering* for sin, are burned outside the camp. Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate. Hence, let us go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach."

In other words, if we are going to be "strengthened in grace", if we are going to know more and more of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ- we must...

- Go to Christ daily... moment by moment.
- Live in reliance upon His cross-work, His providence, plan and purpose.
- Entrust our souls daily to a faithful Creator in doing what is right! (1 Peter 4:19).

Now doesn't it stand to reason that if grace is enjoyed as we rely upon Christ, then that which God has given us to strengthen us in our faith and reliance in the Lord, the word, will necessarily encourage us if we imbibe by faith?

Acts 20:32, "And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build *you* up and to give *you* the inheritance among all those who are sanctified."

In light of all of this we conclude that as children of God, to us belongs the grace of God which brings with it many practical benefits. Yet this grace will only be realized as we go to the word, written and given/received, behold the Savior, and rely upon Him all the more. Do this and you will enter more and more into grace!

Yet there is one more practical benefit:

Romans 1:7, “grace to you and peace.”

In Scripture, this always follows grace.² It is because of God’s saving grace that we can have peace. And what is peace? The Greek world understood this to refer to the “absence of war or strife.” But in the Bible the word is used in a positive way. It denotes one or both of the following...

- The STATE of being reconciled with God (Romans 5:1-2), and...
- The resulting CONDITION of contentment, knowing that all is well!

Now in this context, the emphasis is on the spiritual well-being that results from a right relationship with God. In Christ, the believer has the assurance that regardless of what is occurring in the world and in his life, all is well between himself and God! Now with this we ask...

- How is this peace realized in our lives? Clearly it is not equally enjoyed by all! So...
- How can I have this benefit of salvation?

Once again, we find that the answer is bound up in reliance and trust! Speaking of the effect of prayer, which in Scripture does not necessarily imply a formal prayer, but rather speaks of a God-ward look of dependence and devotion.

Philippians 4:6-7, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

That is the peace spoken about in this text. And that is the peace that is part and parcel of the practical benefits that flow from the gospel! Now if there were any doubt at this point as to how the grace and peace of God are enjoyed by the believer, Paul closes out his introduction of The Gospel of God saying that these benefits come from³ God our Father [stressing the love and tender concern that God has for His people] and the Lord Jesus Christ [speaking of our sovereign, saving, Messiah]: how are we to enjoy the Practical Benefits that accompany the Gospel? By relying upon and so communing with God!

Oh what wonder! How amazing! Through the gospel...

- We receive the testimony that God has always and will always love us.
- We are set apart unto God for His purpose and end.
- We become the heirs of God’s grace through which we stand.
- We receive the disposition of peace which says that all is well even in the most difficult times of life.

And yet in spite of these BENEFITS, like Christian in Doubting Castle, we so many times ignore them, and go it alone when the trial comes- we throw away our faith (Hebrews 10:35)!

² cf. 1 Corinthians 1:3; 2 Corinthians 1:2; Gal. 1:3; Ephesians 1:2; Phil. 1:2; Col. 1:2; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:2; 1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2; Tit. 1:4; Philm. 3; 1 Peter 1:2; 2 Peter 1:2; 2 John 3; Rev. 1:4.

³ Here the preposition *from* governs “God our Father” and “the Lord Jesus Christ” thus indicating their equality and unity!

A very Peculiar Passage, Mark 14:51-52.

We are all familiar with the account of Christ's betrayal and arrest.

- After the Passover meal, Christ and the disciples went to the Garden of Gethsemane, Matthew 26:26-36.
- Here Christ took Peter, James and John with Him, and they went away from the rest of the disciples to pray, Matthew 26:36-46.
- Yet, this time of prayer was cut short by the crowd led by Judas, Matthew 26:47-50.
- After a little skirmish in which Peter cut the High Priest's servant's ear off, the disciples are quickly calmed down and subsequently flee, Matthew 26:51-56.
- From here Christ is arrested, tried, and crucified, Matthew 26:57-27:56.

Now a passage which belongs in this account, and yet one which seldom is read is...

Mark 14:51-52, "And a certain young man was following Him, wearing *nothing but* a linen sheet over *his* naked *body*; and they seized him. But he left the linen sheet behind, and escaped naked."

This text seems quite silly. Doesn't it? What could be more ridiculous than seeing a man flee for his life naked! In fact, I have heard many a youngster laugh at the thought of it. Why would God record such a passage in Scripture?

Yet do you know that this text does not seem silly to me at all? It is quite sad! This text records the account of a young man...

- So frightened by the crowds...
- So possessed by the longing to escape the heat of being associated with Christ that he is willing to do anything to flee- including running naked through the streets!

He considered that it was better to suffer the shame of nakedness than the shame of Christ!

And this is a picture of us! We have been clothed in Christ with so many benefits! Yet, so often we cast them all off in our attempt to flee to safety when difficulty comes.

- How many of us when the heat is on forget the BENEFITS referenced in this verse?
- How many of us when we encounter hardship are quick to forget that we are the "beloved of God?"
- How many of us, when the temptation to sin arises, disregard
 - The holy POSITION to which Christ has set us apart (beloved)?
 - The holy POSSESSION we are to God (called as saints)?
 - The holy PRIVILEGE we have to enter into His presence (grace/peace)?
- How many this past week lived in Dungeon Despair neglecting these glorious benefits on account of doubt?

I dare say, I have described each and every one of us! How quickly we cast aside these benefits when the time of trial is upon us!

Let me give you just one example. Let's take the benefit of grace that is our on account of the gospel! Listen to the testimony of Paul when it came to Doubting Castle...

2 Corinthians 12:7-10, "And because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me—to keep me from exalting myself! Concerning this I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.' Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me."

So many times we're like Paul here. In our Christian lives we find ourselves confronted by...

- Persecution.
- Difficulties.
- Weaknesses.
- Insults.
- Incredible stresses.

And our tendency is to respond with...

- Worry.
- Vows of revenge.
- Insecurity.
- Prayers for miraculous-type deliverances.
- Longing for...
 - A better job.
 - A bigger bank account.
 - A different situation.

And yet notice God's response to all of this.

2 Corinthians 2:9, "...my grace is sufficient...": "You have My grace; what else do you need?"

Now brothers and sisters, the God of this world- our infinite, eternal, and unchangeable God, before whom the nations tremble says...

- You have MY Love.
- You have MY Approval.
- You are the apple of MY eye.
- All that you ever could need in life I have given you in Christ, 2 Peter 1:3!

In light of this grace, by faith we can- we must- respond with Paul...

2 Corinthians 12:10, "Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong."

Such glorious words of faith! Similar applications arise from the knowledge of the other Benefits mentioned in this text: God's love, choice, and peace.

- An intimate knowledge that God has set His love upon us should produce in us a HEART OF LOVE, 1 John 4:10-11.
- An intimate knowledge that God has taken us and set us apart unto a holy purpose and end should make us MORALLY PURE, 1 Corinthians 6:19-20.
- An intimate knowledge that we have peace with God should produce in us the DISPOSITION of contentment, and joy, John 16:33.

Our time is up. May God give us the grace to live according to the glorious benefits which flow from the cross!

About Bethel Presbyterian Church

The Bethel Presbyterian Church Ministry of the Word is published regularly. It is distributed via the internet.

VISIT US WHEN IN Broomfield, COLORADO

Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10th Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

All our sermons can be accessed via the World Wide Web. This sermon can be found at [Freed from Despair and Doubt](#). The web address for all sermons at Bethel Presbyterian Church can be found out as follows: <http://bethelpresbyterian.sermonaudio.com>

About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on October 4, 2009. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church.