

## 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 5:8-13

### The Blessing of an Apostolic Benediction

*But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you – v. 10.*

As far back as the days of Moses, the Aaronic priests were instructed to bless the people of God with an invocation that called for God to do certain things for them. So we read the charge given to Moses in Num. 6:22 *And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, 23 Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying, On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, 24 The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: 25 The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: 26 The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. 27 And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them.*

This is perhaps the most well known and most used benediction in all the Bible. It continues to be used down to the present hour and rightly so. And if you were asked what exactly is a benediction, the answer would be that it's an invocation which simply means that it's a prayer. It's a prayer for the Lord's blessing and for His keeping and sustaining power. It's a prayer for the recipient to know the reality in his heart of God's favor and God's peace. It's no wonder that such a benediction continues to be used today especially when the passage in Numbers 6 makes it so clear that this benediction was written by God Himself. It was God who gave this benediction to Moses and instructed him to pass it on to Aaron and his sons that they in turn might convey it to the people of God as a whole.

The Apostle Paul conveyed his own benedictions on the readers of his epistles. Listen to his invocation on his readers of his epistle written to the Romans. This is found in Rom. 15:13 *Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.* It may be with the Aaronic benediction in mind that we find him writing in 2Cor. 13:14: *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, [be] with you all. Amen.*

And now as we come to the close of Peter's epistle, we find that Peter too pronounces a benediction in which he invokes God to bestow certain blessings upon the followers of Christ: Verse 10: *But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.* In this case the benediction continues into v. 11 and adds a very important element to Peter's benediction: *To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.*

Such benedictions as these become very important aspects of our Christian lives. They're not meant to be simply a closing word that sends the signal that the epistle or the sermon or the worship service is just about over. It's interesting to note here how Peter's benediction begins with the word *But* – *But the God of all grace who hath called us...*

This benediction, therefore, is presented to us in contrast to what precedes. And what precedes the benediction is Peter's statement about the Christian's spiritual warfare. *Your*

*adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour.* And we're exhorted to resist this strong and cunning foe by maintaining a sober disposition and being ever on our guard. But lest you feel inadequate for the task and you find yourself so humbled by a sense of your own weaknesses and sins that you conclude that you'll be easy prey for the devil, Peter pronounces this benediction which conveys the glorious and needed truth that you're not on your own. God sees you and God knows what you're going through and God cares for you and He will watch over you and to that end Peter prays *But the God of all grace who hath called us into His eternal glory by Christ Jesus after that ye have suffered awhile, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.*

Do you see how in its context this benediction becomes a word of assurance and encouragement? I want to look more closely at this Apostolic benediction as we close out our studies in this 1<sup>st</sup> epistle of Peter. What can we expect from such a benediction? Or perhaps more specifically –

### What do We See in such an Apostolic Benediction?

I'd like to answer that question today by drawing your attention to 3 things by way of analysis of Peter's words. Consider with me first of all that in our text we see:

#### I. The Resource We Draw From

Notice how Peter's benediction begins – *But the God of all grace.* God is, of course, our ultimate resource. We are completely dependent on Him. Christ said it and you know it's truth – *without me ye can do nothing* (Jn. 15:5). But Peter is not drawing our attention to God in a broad and general way. He has a particular way of identifying the God that we're dependent on. Notice that the God of Peter's benediction is *the God of all grace.*

The progress you make in your sanctification, the blessings you delight in, the peace you experience, the joy that you know all spring from your recognition that your God is the God of all grace. It's when you fail to see God as the God of all grace that your sanctification stalls and your joy evaporates and your peace vanishes, and your strength fails you.

Aren't you glad, therefore, that Peter identifies God as the God of all grace? If your God is the God of all grace then you are in the realm of God's favor. You're able to bask in His love and His mercy. You're able to walk in the assurance of sins forgiven. Grace is one of those words that is very large in all that it encompasses. Listen to this definition of grace that comes out of a Greek dictionary:

Grace is that which affords joy, pleasure, delight, sweetness, charm, loveliness: good will, loving-kindness, favor – of the merciful kindness by which God, exerting his holy influence upon souls, turns them to Christ, keeps, strengthens, increases them in Christian faith, knowledge, affection, and kindles them to the exercise of the Christian virtues

I like to think of grace under an alliterated formula that involves 4 P's. Grace, you can say, is the Principle that governs God's dealings with our souls. *By grace are ye saved through faith and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not works, lest any man should boast* (Eph. 2:8,9). Grace can also be viewed as a Position in which you stand. *Ro 5:2 By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.* Grace is sometimes spoken of in terms of the virtues it produces. This becomes the Power of grace.

When Paul writes to the Corinthians and commends them for their generous giving he says in *2Co 8:7 Therefore, as ye abound in every [thing, in] faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and [in] all diligence, and [in] your love to us, [see] that ye abound in this grace also.* Do you see how every one of these virtues is counted as a grace – faith is a grace, utterance is a grace, diligence and love are graces and Paul's point is that the saints at Corinth abound in the grace of giving just as they abounded in these other graces.

But perhaps most importantly grace can and should be viewed as a Person – the person of Jesus Christ. *Joh 1:17 For the law was given by Moses,* John writes in *Jn. 1:17 but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.* And a few verses earlier in *Joh 1:14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.*

Do you see how Christ is the very personification of grace? I love the way Dr. Cairns use to remind us that when God gave us His Son, He gave us the very richest treasure that heaven possessed. And He gave Him to those that deserved nothing but the wrath that was due to them for their sins.

How you should glory in the God of all grace. This is your strength and your confidence that He's the God of all grace. This is what enables you to resist the devil when he roars as a lion. There is content in the devil's roars you see. He's quite happy to shout at you that you're a sinner. He would roar in your ear that your guilty of many sins and you couldn't possibly be the recipient of God's favor. Your reply must be that the God you worship and serve is the God of all grace and because He's the God of all grace you do bask in His favor.

And though your sins are many, the testimony of the gospel is that where sin abounded, grace did much more abound (*Rom. 5:20*). Very early on when we first began our studies in this epistle, I conducted a study on what I called the mathematics of grace. My text for that message was found in *1<sup>st</sup> Pet. 1:2* where Peter writes *grace and peace be multiplied unto you.* Aren't you glad that grace and peace are multiplied. They're not simply added in small measures but are added many times over which is what multiplication does.

And would you note from our text the use of that little word *all*. Our God is the God of all grace. It brings to mind the beginning of Psalm 103 - *Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. 2 Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: 3 Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; 4 Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender*

*mercies; 5 Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's.* ALL His benefits and ALL your iniquities forgiven and ALL your spiritual diseases healed. Grace, you see, leaves nothing undone. And your God is the God of all grace.

This is the source, then, from which all our blessings flow – the God of all grace. There's a hymn in our hymnbook that is something of a favorite among many Free Presbyterians. It's Samuel Davies hymn "Great God of Wonders." Davies certainly recognized the greatness of God's grace. Listen to how that hymn begins:

*Great God of wonders! All thy ways Are matchless, Godlike, and divine; But the bright glories of Thy grace Above thine other wonders shine, Above thine other wonders shine. And then the refrain: Who is a pardoning God like Thee? Or who has grace so rich and free? Or who has grace so rich and free?*

This is the God, then, who will bless us. This is the God that Peter invokes in his benediction. He's the God of all grace. But we must move on to think from this benediction not only of the resource we draw from but let's think next on:

## II. The Blessings We Benefit From

What does the God of all grace do for His people? He does much more than. Look at how Peter lists these blessings. They begin with our effectual calling. The God of all grace *who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus* our text says. He's called you through the gospel of Jesus Christ. He's called you to everlasting life and a home in heaven. He's called you to that which is so much more durable than anything you can gain in this world.

And He's called you in such a way that you perceived in the depth of your soul the reality of the truth of the gospel. Your spiritual eyes were opened; your ears were unstopped; your heart was regenerated and your will was renewed and you became convicted of your sin and misery but you also became convinced that Jesus Christ was mighty to save and was willing to save you if you would flee to Him.

Whenever you think of your salvation you should never lose sight of the fact that when you gained a saving interest in Christ, you were the recipient of a powerful miracle. A lost and dead sinner, coming to Christ, you see, is no less a miracle than Christ calling forth Lazarus from the tomb where he had been placed for four days. The call was just as effectual to your soul as it was when Christ called forth Lazarus.

In this day when we find ourselves crying to God for the manifestation of gospel power don't ever forget that you've been the recipient already of nothing short of resurrection power. And the power that brought you forth to eternal glory will be the same power that sees you safely through the devil's afflictions and the world's allurements.

Listen to what John Calvin says about this calling: "This, as I have said, serves to increase confidence, because God is led not only by his goodness, but also by his gracious benevolence, to aid us more and more. He does not simply mention calling, but he shews

wherefore they were called, even that they might obtain eternal glory. He further fixes the foundation of calling in Christ. Both these things serve to give perpetual confidence, for if our calling is founded on Christ, and refers to the celestial kingdom of God and a blessed immortality, it follows that it is not transient nor fading.”

So that’s the first blessing – the blessing of being called. But notice next that the God of all grace who hath called you to eternal glory is being invoked by Peter to *make you perfect*. This blessing looks ahead to God’s work in you being brought to perfection. Paul shows the same confidence as Peter when he writes in Php 1:6 *Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform [it] until the day of Jesus Christ*.

If we see ourselves aright while we struggle in this sin cursed world with our sin natures still a part of us then we’ll see ourselves as anything but perfect. We’ll be more inclined to see ourselves as wretched men and women – the same way Paul saw himself in Romans 7. And though you love God’s law, yet you lament how far short you come to measuring up to God’s law. In the 119<sup>th</sup> Psalm the Psalmist often times expresses his love for the law but he just as often laments how far short he falls of its standards. And especially striking is the very last verse of the longest Psalm in the Bible. What a sad conclusion but how true to our condition when we hear the Psalmist pray - *I have longed for thy salvation, O LORD; and thy law is my delight. Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee; and let thy judgments help me. I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments* (Ps. 119:174-176).

Your progress in sanctification may be slow and hard but God will see the matter through and you will be perfected. *Beloved*, John writes in his first epistle 3:2 *now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is*. Here is your perfection – seeing Christ and being like Christ. You’re on your way to that. And I shouldn’t cite that verse without citing the verse that follows which shows us the impact of such truth on our souls. *And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure* (1Jn. 3:3).

So there’s the blessing of our calling to eternal glory; and there’s the blessing of our sanctification – we will be made perfect. We strive for it now because we’re on our way to it. And then there’s the blessing of stability. *The God of all grace who hath called you to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus...make you perfect, stablish you*.

When you know and believe the story of redemption then you gain the benefit of seeing purpose in everything. You’re able to tell that even in the midst of fiery trials and a world of chaos and violence that everything is nevertheless headed toward a grand climax which will be the return of Christ and the ushering in of a new heaven and new earth. The thing that makes this world so unsettling to those that are not Christians is the absence of any sense of direction. If all this world amounts to is a lot of random, competing forces that clash against each other to gain the preeminence then there is no solid footing to this world

– there is no stability. The God of all grace grants to you as followers of Christ that sense of stability. And it was that sense of stability that enabled the first martyr, Stephen, to look his executioners calmly in their faces and to plead with God not to lay the sin of his death to their charge. It's that stability that enables you to be calm in the midst of all the storms of life.

So there's the blessing of stability and there follows the blessing of strength. The God of all grace will strengthen you. Isa. 40:30,31 *Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.*

That's what we're here in church for this morning – to wait on the Lord. Waiting on the Lord, you see, is not just a passive kind of activity the way you wait for a bus or wait for a cab. No, waiting on the Lord involves service and worship. We're here this morning waiting on the Lord. And the benefit you gain from this active service and worship is that you become strengthened – strengthened as Paul describes it in his prayer for the saints at Ephesus *strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man* (Eph. 3:16). This is where you gain needed fortitude to stand true to your Savior especially in a world that is hostile toward Christ.

So the God of all grace grants His followers stability and He grants them strength and He grants them peace. Isn't that the blessing that corresponds to God settling you? Listen to the words of our text again: *But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.*

Stop a moment and reflect on the setting of Peter's epistle. It's a setting of manifold afflictions and fiery trials. It's a setting of spiritual warfare and hostility from the world. How easy it would be to become unsettled in such circumstances but the God of all grace grants His people a settled peace within that enables them to be settled. So while this world reels to and fro like a staggering drunkard about to topple and fall then follower of Christ knows peace within his soul. He knows peace because He knows Christ. He knows peace because He's been reconciled to God through Christ. He knows peace because in his effectual calling he's been enabled to cease from his rebellion against God and to surrender to God to the saving of his soul.

These are the blessings, then, that Peter invokes for the readers of his epistle. We can confident that such blessings will be bestowed because they come from the God of all grace. What do we see, then, in this Apostolic benediction? We see the Resource we draw from which is the God of all grace. We see the Blessings we benefit from which include our calling, our sanctification, our stability, our strength and our peace. Let's think finally and briefly that in this benediction we not only see the resource we draw from and the blessings we benefit from but we also see:

### III. The Perspective We See From

You could say that we are able to formulate our world view from this Apostolic benediction. This benediction, you see, helps us formulate our view of God and Christ. He is the God of all grace. He has called us to eternal glory by Christ. And that phrase *eternal glory* also shapes our outlook on the things of this world. We're looking way beyond this world. This world at its best is sinful and all that this world affords is temporal.

Can you see the contrast in this benediction between our view of glory and our view of this world in its present state? It's with reference to glory that Peter speaks of eternity. We're looking ahead to eternal glory. It's with reference to this present world that he notes that we *suffer a while*. Just about every other English translation utilizes the phrase *a little while – after that ye have suffered a little while*.

Peter and Paul certainly thought alike when it came to their worldview. A verse that in recent years has become a favorite of mine is Paul's words to the Corinthians in 2Cor. 4:17,18 *For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.*

I've come to love these verses not only for the truths they convey but for their practicality as well. The key to viewing your afflictions as light and transient lies in your ability to see not the things which are seen but the things which are not seen. If you can see those unseen spiritual realities that speak of eternal glory then your afflictions will be light and will seem transient. But if, on the other hand, your afflictions seem incredibly heavy to the point of being unbearable and they also seem to be very long then chances are you're seeing the things that are seen and are viewing them as if they are eternal and you're seeing the unseen things as if they were so distant and remote so as to seem unreal. May the Lord grant us all spiritual sight and increase in our faith in Christ. For then will we perceive eternal glory and will be able to contrast it to sufferings that are for a little while.

Let me close by pointing out that v. 11 should be included in the benediction. And this verse also contributes to our world view. Listen to what it says: *To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.* We're tempted at times to think that redemption is all about us but in fact it's all about God and Christ. We benefit from it to be sure. And it may be because we benefit from salvation so much we're sometimes tempted to think that it is all about us – but it's not – it's all about God and all about Christ. Salvation is to the praise of the glory of His grace. And so long as we keep that in mind, it should help to sustain us amidst our trials and afflictions.

So we have before us a very rich Apostolic benediction in which the God of all grace is being invoked to bestow great blessings upon the followers of Christ. May you be in the recipient of the wonderful and blessed benediction this day.