

## GRACE IS BEAUTIFUL

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Everything is beautiful--at least according to bumper stickers!

Bald Is Beautiful.

Fat Is Beautiful.

Someday, some bumper sticker will probably announce that Ugly Is Beautiful.

Unquestionably Grace Is Beautiful. Peter said so when he described it as the "manifold grace of God" (1 Pet. 4:10). Actually he was saying that grace shows itself in various ways. But the word manifold also means many-colored or variegated. In other words, the grace of God may be likened to a full-cut, 58 faceted diamond, resplendent in all its brilliance. Yes, Grace Is Beautiful.

Grace brings a rich inheritance to the believer (Col. 1:12). Paul wrote of the "riches of His grace" (Eph. 2:7), the "riches of Christ" (Eph. 3:8), and "the riches of His glory" (Eph. 3:16). The grace of God is a rich inheritance.

While it is true that we do not experience all of our inheritance at once, we receive all of it the moment we receive the Lord Jesus as our Savior. He is our inheritance, and with Him come all the riches of His grace.

Think of some facets of that inheritance. It includes possessing "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3). These are present possessions, for He has blessed us with them. In Ephesians 1 alone they include being chosen in Him before the foundation of the world (v. 4); being adopted as sons in the family of God (v. 5); being redeemed (ransomed, removed and released, v. 7); being informed

of the mystery of His will (v. 9); and being secure because of the seal of the Spirit (v. 13).

These blessings come to us because we have been raised with Christ and seated with Him in the heavenlies (2:6). Our Lord is at the right hand of the Father, the place of honor, and we are in Him and thus honored with every spiritual blessing.

While a student, I was once invited to dinner at the home of one of my professors. Among the guests were several other students and another professor and his wife. When it came time to be seated at the table the hostess indicated that I--not the other professor or one of the other students--should sit at her right hand, the place of honor. So there I sat, the guest of honor, given every consideration and served my favorite food.

(Shall I tell you that it was my birthday?)

Our inheritance also gives us the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. This means that we are securely sealed until the day of redemption (Eph. 1:13; 4:30). It means that His presence within us guarantees that God will never leave His salvation incomplete (Eph. 1:14). It means that we have access to the Father in prayer (Eph. 2:18). It means that He brings inner strength (Eph. 3:16). It means union with all other believers (Eph. 4:3). It means control and guidance in our daily living (Eph. 5:18). These are some of the facets of our inheritance.

Think of some of the facets of our position. By God's grace we became at the moment of salvation members of a holy and royal priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5, 9); we became members of a chosen generation, a holy nation, a people for His possession (1 Pet. 2:9); we gained a heavenly citizenship (Phil. 3:20); and we became members of the family of God (Eph. 2:19).

There are, of course, three ways to become a member of a family. One is by natural birth, and everyone is born into some family. And through the new birth believers are born into the family of God (John 1:12; 3:7). The idea of being children of God (a Johannine doctrine) not only involves the new birth but also the process of Christian growth, our relation to others in the family, and the impossibility of ever being disowned.

Every believer is also adopted into the family of God (a Pauline teaching, Eph. 1:5, Gal. 4:5). Adoption means being placed as full-grown members of God's family at the moment of salvation. This does not mean we experience maturity instantly, for at the same time we are adults with full privileges, we are also children in need of growth.

This adult-child paradox might be illustrated this way. When our first child was born, someone kindly sent her a crisp dollar bill. Now what do you do with a dollar that belongs to a baby? The only thing I could think of to preserve it was to open a savings account for her. But I soon discovered that involves a lot of red tape. For one thing it required naming a trustee to make the transactions for her. So I named myself as trustee. For another, I found she needed a social security number even though she had not worked even a single hour. So I applied for one and in due time received it. Then I was able to open her savings account and put the dollar in.

Now, as far as the Social Security Administration was concerned, my infant daughter was an adult member of the citizenry of the United States and entitled to a number. As far as the First National Bank was concerned, she was an infant needing a trustee who could sign her name for her. She was both at the same time. And so is the believer in the family of God.

The third way to become part of a family is through marriage, and every believer at the moment of salvation becomes part of the bride of

Christ (John 3:29). The actual marriage comes later (Rev. 19:7), but the position as part of His bride is secured from the time of conversion.

Think of some of the provisions for living. At salvation, every believer is sanctified, set apart to God (1 Cor. 6:11). Yet each of us needs to be sanctified throughout life. In order that we might live a sanctified life, God provides freedom from the law which stirs up sin (2 Cor. 3:6-13; Rom. 7:7-11). He provides a new position or base of operation, under grace (Rom. 6:14). He effects a new union with the risen and victorious Christ (Rom. 6:4). He gives supernatural power through Christ who lives in us (Col. 1:27).

No believer needs to grow into these provisions. All have them actually and really. We all do need to grow in the use of them, but not in the acquisition of them. And these provisions, which all believers possess, ~~make it possible for sanctified people to be sanctified.~~

In my seminary days as a student I was befriended by a well-known and respected Bible teacher who was a lover of good books. He introduced me to many authors and titles I might otherwise not have known. We saw each other infrequently, but between times we would correspond about books each of us had discovered here and there. On one visit to the seminary, he told me that he was making arrangements to leave his library to me after he died. Naturally I was overwhelmed and pleased, though I had never seen his library since I had never been in his home. But I knew from his letters and our conversations together that it would be a treasure to have.

Many years later I heard from his wife, then his widow, that he had gone to be with the Lord and that true to his promise his library was now mine. All his books, without one exception, now belonged to me. Actually at that point I could not know all that meant since I had never seen his library. But all were mine.

In time his widow sent me a list of the books. Believe me, I studied

that list eagerly and gratefully. Some of the titles I recognized immediately. Some I did not know at all. But all were mine.

Later the books arrived, and I began to read the ones I did not know and became acquainted with their contents. Obviously I did not read them all at once, but I can honestly say that I did not rest until I knew what I possessed. Even today when I take a book from the shelf, I often see that man's name in the front, and I feel a deep sense of gratitude to him for the inheritance he gave me and about which I am still learning.

The analogies are obvious. But at the risk of rehearsing the obvious, let me press one more point. When the list of books came, I could have ignored it. When the books themselves arrived, I could have left them in their boxes. When they were arranged on my shelves, I could have left them unopened and unread. How foolish that would have been.

The riches of His grace. These are our inheritance. The list is written in His Word. All are my personal possession. Their facets shine more brilliantly the closer you look and the longer you study them. And the power they provide is available every day.