

To God Alone Be The Glory

Life is good. Cars and trucks make it relatively easy to get to work, to the store, to the doctor—and some cars even have air-conditioning. Does life get better than this? Yes. Our homes keep the rain drops from falling on our heads and the bugs from biting our ankles. Our homes have heat and lights and hot water and a bed, a kitchen, a bathroom, a screen for entertainment. Most of us have at least one stream of income from jobs or investments or social security—the poorest among us is well off by historical standards. Many of us go on vacation. Does life get better than this? Sure it does. We haven't even scratched the surface of our relationships. You all have someone in your life who brings you joy: a friend, a sibling, a child, a spouse. Even better than they bringing you joy, you have countless opportunities to bring joy to others. Doing good to others is one of the best ways to enjoy life. Does life get better than this?

If we stopped right now with this description of a great life, I hope would you all say, “Sounds good, but something’s missing.” Hmm. What if we throw in some hired help so you never have to wash dishes, do laundry, scrub floors, or clean toilets. Does life get better than this? “Still something missing.” How about a boat and all the fishing equipment you can use? How about an entertainment system with access to all the shows, videos, games and music ever made? “Nope. Still not there.”

You're right: the thing that's missing isn't a thing. We need something that's “out of this world.” We need God's grace, his love for sinners, because even the person with the most awesome life still falls short of the standard God expects us to measure up to. In today's sermon text the Holy Spirit lays out for us **GOD'S GRACE TO THE NTH DEGREE**.

The apostle Paul didn't have a car, a house, a child, a spouse, or air conditioning. He didn't have hired help or a boat for fishing. He did do a lot of camping, but he wasn't on vacation. Yet Paul could have said, “Life doesn't get any better than this,” because he knew Jesus was his Savior from sin—he knew God's grace. He was probably in a prison cell when he wrote: *³Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.* A home, a car, and toys are nice! But spiritual blessings are where a great life is at. Think about it. If you got thrown into prison for buying a car or a house or for hiring a cleaning service, would you sit in your prison cell and bubble with praise for those things? “Yep, just bought my car and was brought right to jail. Ain't cars the best?” Paul was into prison for telling people that God loved them in Jesus. Sharing God's grace cost him almost everything, and yet Paul lists seven examples of being blessed in the heavenly realms, count 'em, **seven pictures of God's grace**. His praise for God keeps gushing out of him (4-8).

1) ⁴*[God] chose us in [Christ] before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.* God chose us. God didn't reach down into the barrel of humanity and scoop people out by the handful. No, he cherry-picked us one at a time.

The choosing was done in Christ. God did not look at what we would be or do. He didn't say things like, "Well, she's going to gossip, so she's out. And he's going to feel attraction to men, so he's out." God didn't look at us. He looked at what his own Son was and would do. On that basis he announced: "My Son Jesus is going to die on the cross for them, so I'm counting them in."

Notice this choosing took place before the creation of the world. God didn't wait to see how you would turn out before choosing you. Can you imagine? "Oh, look, he did his homework today without complaining—for once. And look at her, so respectful—at least today." No, God chose you before the record of your life came into consideration. [By the way, Christians who want to combine the Bible with evolution don't just have to ignore the first two chapters of Genesis; they also have to cut out hundreds of references to the creation like this one; they end up with a mutilated Bible].

When you confessed your sins to God this morning, how many of your sins from last week were still clinging to you? None.

You are holy and blameless in God's sight because Jesus died on the cross for you. But if you think life doesn't get any better than this, Paul's got six more pictures of God's grace for you to consider.

2) ^{5a}*In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ.* The Greek word for "predestined" means to "lay down the boundaries ahead of time." God set things up in advance so that after we were born, we would be lead straight to his goal of adopting us into his family. And that's what we are now—adopted into God's family, even though we still daily disqualify ourselves by falling into behaviors and attitudes that God labels evil.

'Adoption' implies that we were not the children of God at birth. The world likes to think that all people are dear children of God who have a claim on his favor—as if God owes them. No wonder they get all upset at God for not stopping wars and averting disasters, as if God should do their bidding because they were born into his family by natural birth. But if this were so, we wouldn't need to be adopted into God's family, and this verse would make no sense.

God "adopted you as sons." In Bible times only sons inherited directly. So Paul is saying, "All you men and women who believe in Jesus—you all have inherited GOD'S GRACE TO THE NTH DEGREE."

3) Why did God do all this? Just because it *pleased* him (5b). You've probably done something similar in your life. You weren't trying to get in good with someone; you weren't making a peace offering; you didn't owe someone a favor. But you went out of your way to do something nice for someone. Maybe they didn't even know the favor came from you. But it sure made you happy. You did it just because it pleased you. So you can understand why God chose you in Christ. It tickled him all over on the inside to choose you.

4) This grace, this gift of God's love, is *freely given* (6). We couldn't earn it, because we keep coming up short of God's standards. I don't have to prove that you sinned last week. That would be like proving the people in the doctor's office have an illness. If you were perfect, you wouldn't have come here where sinners gather to admit their shortcomings and to hear the glorious news that God has chosen not to count those sins against us because of Jesus. And what does it cost us? Nothing. God's grace is freely given.

5) ^{7a}*We have redemption through [Jesus'] blood*. If you shop with coupons, you know what redemption is. Today we say you redeem your coupons, but really the store redeems the coupons from you. You are holding the coupons hostage. And the store pays you a ransom when you surrender the coupons to the store. What a picture of grace! We were held captive by sin; Jesus paid the ransom. The ransom

price was his life. His shed blood was proof that he gave up his life. We have redemption through his blood.

6) ^{7b}*The forgiveness of sins*. 'Forgiveness' is 'the sending away' of a debt. You come before God and say, "Look what a mess I made," and he says, "Get out of here!" When you turn to leave, he says, "No, not you, my precious child." Confused, you go back to where you were and try again to show God the mess you made, but you can't find it to show him. He told it to get out of here. He sent it away. It's gone. Forgiveness is a sending away of your sin-debt.

7) All this happens in accordance with ^{7c-}*the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us*. Our God isn't a miser. He never says, "It costs too much for me to keep forgiving you day after day. I'm cutting the budget." Count up all the sins you've committed in a day. No matter how big your number gets, God's grace is bigger. "*Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound*" (Romans 5:20). He lavished his grace on us. Our many sins are gone.

Do you see why Paul was so full of praise for the Lord? He knew GOD'S GRACE TO THE NTH DEGREE. As far as Paul was concerned, life doesn't get any better than being right with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. If you're right with God, it doesn't matter if you lose your job or home or a body part or a friend or a spouse or a relative or an ability or

everything—you still have God’s grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

If you think that’s great, there’s even more. God decided to save you from eternity! We call this the doctrine of **Election** (4,5,11), sometimes also called “predestination.” If there was ever proof that being in a right relationship with God has everything to do with grace and nothing to do with our good works, the doctrine of election goes above and beyond.

The doctrine of election is easy to understand as long as you keep your eyes on God’s grace. God revealed this doctrine to us for no other reason than to comfort us and strengthen our faith in him. But the doctrine of election doesn’t make sense if you take your eyes off of God’s grace. That’s when the questions start rolling in.

“If God predestined us believers for heaven, did God predestine anyone to hell?” No. In Ezekiel 33:11 God says, *“As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live.”* And 1 Timothy 2:4 says, *“God wants all to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.”*

“So then why are some saved and not others?” If anyone is saved, it is solely due to God’s grace. *“For it is by grace*

you have been saved through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9). On the other hand, if someone is not saved, it is solely on them. Jesus said, *“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, ...how often I have longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing”* (Matthew 23:37).

“Why did God choose me, and not them?” It’s not because you resisted less, or they resisted more, or you were more willing, or they were less willing, or you had fewer sins, or because God looked ahead and saw you would believe and then elected you. If we look for a cause of election in us and think we have found it, we will turn this doctrine into some form of works righteousness instead of grace righteousness. God chose you by grace, not by works.

“Then how do I know if I’ve been predestined?” Take your eyes off yourself. Look at the cross. Did Jesus die for the sins of the whole world? [Yes!] Are you part of the world? [Yes!] Is Jesus your risen Savior? [Yes!] Then do like Paul and praise God for the riches of his grace which he has lavished on you. You know **GOD’S GRACE TO THE NTH DEGREE**. And because of God’s grace, life on earth does not get any better than this.