

The Everlasting Covenant

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Born in South Wales, Dr. Lloyd-Jones trained at St. Bartholomew's Hospital and thereafter practiced as a physician and was assistant to the famous Lord Horder. After leaving medicine in 1927, he became the minister of a Welsh Presbyterian Church in Aberavon, South Wales. He was there until 1938 when he moved to London to share the ministry of Westminster Chapel in Buckingham Gate with the late Dr. G. Campbell Morgan, who retired in 1943. This ministry lasted for 30 years until Dr. Lloyd-Jones retired in August 1968. He then engaged in a wider preaching ministry and in writing until shortly before his death in 1981.

'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.' *Ephesians* 1:3

Here, once more, we have one of those glorious, staggering statements which are to be found in such profusion in the writings of the Apostle Paul. Nothing, perhaps, is more characteristic of his style as a writer than the frequency with which he seems to state the whole gospel in a phrase or verse. He never tires of doing this; he says the same thing in many different ways. This surely is one of his, even his, most glorious statements.

We must approach it, therefore, carefully and prayerfully. The danger when considering such a statement is to be so charmed and enraptured by the very sound of the words, and the very arrangement of the words, that we are content with some passing general effect, and never take the trouble to analyse it and thereby to discover exactly what it says. We may be content with a purely general aesthetic effect, with the result that we shall miss the tremendous richness of its content. We must be unusually careful, therefore, to analyse it, to question it, and to discover exactly the meaning and the content of every word. And we must do this in the light of the teaching of the Scriptures as a whole.

The first thing we have to do is to observe the context. First of all, in the first verse the Apostle has reminded the Ephesians of who they are, and what they are. Then in the second verse he has offered a prayer for them, and has reminded them of the things they can enjoy, and should enjoy, and should seek to enjoy — 'Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord

Jesus Christ'. Having done that he is now concerned to remind them of how it is that they have become what they are, and of how it is possible for them to enjoy these priceless blessings of grace and peace. That is the connection; and again we must emphasize the fact that this preliminary salutation is not a mere formality; it is full of the logic that always characterizes Paul the Apostle.

Having reminded them that they are 'saints', are 'faithful', and 'in Christ', and as the result of that should be enjoying grace and peace from the Lord Jesus Christ, he now proceeds to show how all that is possible in this third verse. There is a sense in which we can say truthfully that this third verse is the centre of the entire Epistle. The Apostle is concerned to do this above all else. He desires these Christian people to come to an understanding and realization of who they are and what they are, and of the great blessings to which they are open. In other words the theme is the plan of salvation, and the way of salvation, this tremendous process that puts us where we are, and points us to God and the things that God has prepared for us. He does this because he desires these Ephesian Christians and others to enter into their heritage, that they may enjoy the Christian life as they should, and that they may live their lives to the praise and glory of God. And, of course, the same applies to us. Whether we know it or not our main trouble as Christians today is still a lack of understanding and of knowledge. Not a lack of superficial knowledge of the Scriptures, but a lack of knowledge of the doctrines of the Scriptures. It is our fatal lack at that point that accounts for so many failures in our Christian life. Our chief need, according to this Apostle, is that 'the eyes of our understanding' may be wide open, not simply that we may enjoy the Christian life and its experience, but in order that we may understand the privilege and possibilities of our high 'calling'. The more we understand the more we shall experience these riches.

A lack of knowledge has ever been the chief trouble with God's people. That was the message of the prophet Hosea in the Old Testament. He says that God's people at that time were dying from 'a lack of knowledge' (4:6). It was always their trouble. They would not realize who they were, and what they were, and why they were what they were. If they had but known these things they would never have wandered away from God, they would never have turned to idols, they would never have sought to be like the other nations. There was always this fatal lack of knowledge. The New Testament is full of the same teaching.

We must therefore consider this verse very carefully because here the Apostle introduces us to this knowledge, this doctrine which leads into an understanding of what we are. We can look at it in terms of the following principles, and in the order in which they are presented by the Apostle.

The first proposition is that the realization of the truth concerning our redemption always leads to praise. It bursts forth at once in the word 'Blessed'. The Apostle seems to be like a man who is conducting a great choir and orchestra. This truth

is what Handel seems to have understood so well; it is the characteristic of some of his greatest choruses. Think of the opening note of 'Worthy is the Lamb'. The Apostle starts off with this same tremendous burst of praise and acclamation — 'Blessed be God', 'Praised be God'. He always does so. Examine all his epistles and you will find that this is so. The first thing, always, is praise and thanksgiving, and this is so because he understood the doctrine; it was the result of his contemplation of the doctrine that he praises God.

Surely praise and thanksgiving are ever to be the great characteristics of the Christian life. Take, for instance, the Book of the Acts of the Apostles. It has been said of that Book that it is the most lyrical book in the world. In spite of all the persecution which those early Christians had to endure, and all the hardship and difficulties, they were distinguished by a spirit of praise and thanksgiving. They were people who were thrilled with a sense of peace and happiness and joy they had never known before. The same note is found, too, throughout the New Testament epistles — 'Rejoice in the Lord', 'Rejoice in the Lord always'. Even in the Book of Revelation which portrays trials and tribulations that are certain to face God's people, this note of triumph and praise is to be found running through it all. This is the ultimate peculiar characteristic of God's people, of Christians.

Praise is quite inevitable in view of what we have already seen in this Epistle. If we realize truly what 'grace' and 'peace' mean we cannot help praising. I suggest therefore, before we go any further, that there is no more true test of our Christian profession than to discover how prominent this note of praise and thanksgiving is in our life. Is it to be found welling up out of our hearts and experience as it invariably did with the Apostle Paul? Is it constantly breaking forth in us and manifest in our lives? I am not referring to the glib use of certain words. Certain Christians, when you meet them, keep on using the phrase 'Praise the Lord' in order to give the impression of being joyful Christians. But there is nothing glib about the Apostle's language. It is nothing formal or superficial; it comes out of the depth of the heart; it is heart felt.

All must surely agree that it is impossible to read through the New Testament without seeing that this is to be the supreme thing in the Christian life. It must of necessity be so, because if this gospel is true, that God has sent His own Son into the world to do for us the things we have been considering, then you would expect Christians to be entirely different from unbelievers; you would expect them to live in a relationship to God that would be evident to all, and that should above everything else produce this quality of joy. Even the Roman Catholics, whose doctrine and teaching in general tend to depress and to oppose assurance of salvation, before they will 'canonize' anyone, lay down as an absolute essential this quality of joy and of praise. At that point they are absolutely right — praise should be the characteristic of all 'saints', of all Christians. Hence we find this constant exhortation in the New Testament to praise God and offer up thanksgiving. This is what differentiates us from the world. The world is very miserable and unhappy; it is full of cursing and

complaints. But praise, thanksgiving and contentment mark out the Christian and show that he is no longer 'of the world'.

Praise distinguishes the Christian particularly in his prayer and in his worship. The Manuals on the devotional life which have been written throughout the centuries, and irrespective of particular Communion, agree that the highest point of all worship and prayer is adoration and praise and thanksgiving. Are we not all guilty at this point? Are we not aware of a serious deficiency and lack as we consider this? When we pray in private or in public what part does adoration play? Do we delight simply to be in the presence of God 'in worship, in adoration'? Do we know what it is to be moved constantly to cry out, 'Blessed be our God and Father', and to ascribe unto God all praise and blessedness and glory? This is the highest point of our growth in grace, the measure of all true Christianity. It is when you and I become 'lost in wonder, love and praise' that we really are functioning as God means us to function in Christ.

Praise is really the chief object of all public acts of worship. We all need to examine ourselves at this point. We must remember that the primary purpose of worship is to give praise and thanksgiving to God. Worship should be of the mind and of the heart. It does not merely mean repeating certain phrases mechanically; it means the heart going out in fervent praise to God. We should not come to God's house simply to seek blessings and to desire various things for ourselves, or even simply to listen to sermons; we should come to worship and adore God. 'Blessed be the God and Father' is always to be the starting point, the highest point.

But let us note that the praise and the adoration and the worship are to be ascribed to the blessed Holy Trinity. 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings.' The blessings come through the Holy Spirit. The praise and worship and adoration, indeed all worship, must be offered and ascribed to the Three blessed Persons. The Apostle Paul never fails to do this. He delights in mentioning the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Christian position is always and inevitably Trinitarian. Christian worship must be Trinitarian if it is true worship; there is no question, no choice about this. If we have the correct biblical view of salvation, then the Three Persons of the blessed Holy Trinity must always and invariably be present.

So often people stop at one Person. Some stop at the Person of the Father; they talk about God and about worshipping God and about having forgiveness from God; and in all their talk and conversation even the Lord Jesus Christ is not mentioned. Certain others seem to stop only and entirely with the Lord Jesus Christ. They so concentrate upon Him that you hear little of the Father and little of the Holy Spirit. There are others whose entire conversation seems to be about the work of the Holy Spirit and they are interested in spiritual manifestations only. There is this constant danger of forgetting that as Christians we of necessity

worship the Three Persons in the blessed Holy Trinity. Christianity is Trinitarian in its origin and in its continuance.

But not only must we be careful always that the Three Persons are in our minds and our worship, we must be equally careful about the order in which they are introduced to us in the Scriptures — the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit. There is what our forefathers called a divine economy or order in the matter of our salvation among the blessed Persons themselves; and so we have always to preserve this order. We are to worship the Father through the Son, by the Holy Spirit. Many evangelical Christians in particular seem to offer all their prayers to the Son, there are others who forget the Son altogether, but the two wrongs do not make one right. So we notice here at the commencement of this Epistle that the Apostle not only praises, but praises the three blessed Persons, and ascribes unto them thanksgiving and glory in this invariable order.

The second principle is that God is to be praised. My first principle was that a true realization of the nature of salvation leads to praise. Now we turn to consider why the blessed Persons of the Holy Trinity should be thus praised. There are many answers to that question, but we must concentrate on the one which the Apostle emphasizes specially in this verse. God is to be praised because He is what He is. The ultimate characteristic or attribute of God is blessedness. It is indescribable, but if there is one quality, one attribute of God that makes God God; (I speak with reverence) if there is one thing that makes God God more than anything else, it is blessedness. And God is to be praised. We are to say 'Blessed be God' because of what God is and what He does.

God is also to be praised because He has blessed us: 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings.' Before we come to that, however, we note that the Apostle has gone on to something else. God is to be praised and to be blessed because of the way in which He blesses us. I have already been hinting at that in reminding you of the importance of our relationship to the Three Persons in the blessed Holy Trinity. In other words, the greatness emphasized in this verse is the planning of our salvation; and not only the planning but the way in which it has been planned, the way in which God has brought it about. Once more must we not plead guilty to a tendency to neglect and ignore this? How often have we sat down and tried to contemplate, as the result of reading the Scriptures, the planning of salvation, the way in which God worked out His plan, and how He put it into operation? Our salvation is entirely from God but because of our morbid preoccupation with ourselves and our states and moods and conditions, we tend to talk of salvation only in terms of ourselves and of what is happening to us. Of course that is of vital importance, for true Christianity is experimental. There is no such thing as a Christianity which is not experimental; but it is not only experience. Indeed it is the extent of our understanding that ultimately determines our experience. We spend so much of our time in feeling our spiritual pulses and talking about

ourselves and our moods and conditions that we have but little understanding of the planning of what God has done. But the Apostle generally starts with this, as also does the Bible.

I call attention to this matter, not because I am animated by some academic or theoretical interest, but because we rob ourselves of so much of the glories and the riches of grace when we fail to take the trouble to understand these things and to face the teaching of Scripture. We tend to take a chapter at a time; we pass on; and we do not stop to analyse and to realize what it is saying to us. Some even try to excuse themselves by saying that they are not interested in theology and doctrine. Instead, they want to be 'practical' Christians and to enjoy Christianity. But how terribly wrong that is! The Scriptures give us this teaching, the Apostle Paul wrote these letters that people like ourselves might understand these things. Some of the people to whom Paul wrote were slaves who had not had a secondary or even a primary education. We often say that we have not the time to read — shame on us Christian people! — the truth being that we have not taken the trouble to read and to understand Christian doctrine. But it is essential that we should do so if we really desire to worship God. If there is no praise in a Christian's life it is because he is ignorant of these things. If we desire to praise God, we must look at the truth, and expand our souls as we come face to face with it. If we want to say 'Blessed be God' from the heart we must know something about how He has planned this great salvation.

God's great plan is suggested in this verse. There was a great eternal council held between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The next verse tells us when it was held: 'According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.' Do we realize that our salvation was planned before the world was planned or created? It is the realization of this fact that makes a man stand on tip-toe and shout out praise to God — 'chosen before the foundation of the world'. The three blessed Persons in the eternal council were concerned about us — Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In the first chapter of the Book of Genesis we read that God said, 'Let us make man in our image', but, thank God, that council not only considered the creation of man, it went on to consider also the salvation of man. The Three Persons met in conference (I speak with reverence, in terms of Scripture) and planned it. Let us get rid for ever of the idea that salvation was an afterthought in the mind of God. It was not a thought that came to God after man had fallen into sin — it was planned. 'before the foundation of the world'. The Apostle tells us that the work was divided up between the three blessed Persons, each One agreeing to engage in particular tasks. This is what led the old theologians to talk about the 'economic Trinity'. The three blessed Persons in the Trinity divided up the work — the Father planned, the Son put it into operation, and the Holy Spirit applies it.

This is made clear in our chapter. In verses 4-6 we are told of the Father's part; in verses 7-12 we are told about the Son's part; and in verses 12 and 14 we are

told about the part of the Holy Spirit; and note that in each case the description ends with the phrase, 'to the praise of the glory of his grace', or similar words. The divine council considered everything 'before the foundation of the world' and the work was divided up and planned in that manner. The Father has His purpose, the Son voluntarily says He is going to carry it out, and He came and did it, and the Holy Spirit said He was ready to apply it.

But before we leave it, I must add this, that what really happened in that eternal Council was that God drew up a great covenant called the covenant of grace or the covenant of redemption. Why did He do so? Let me ask a question by way of reply. Why does the Apostle say, 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ'? There are those who say that the answer is that He wants us to know the kind of Father God is. I agree with that. I remember an old preacher saying once that if you told certain people that God is a Father they would be terrified and alarmed. There are some people, he said, to whom the term 'Father' means a drunkard who spends all the family's money and comes home drunk. That is their idea of a father; it is the only father they have ever known. So God in His kindness, and in order that we may know the kind of Father He is, says: I am the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Son is like the Father; but even that does not go far enough, there is much more than that here.

This new description of God is one of the most important statements in the New Testament. Go back to the Old Testament and you will find God described as 'the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob'. God also speaks of Himself as 'the God of Israel', but now we have 'the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ'. This is in order to teach us that all the blessings that come to us come in and through the Lord Jesus Christ, and as a part of that covenant that was made between the three blessed Persons before the foundation of the world. Even the blessings that came to the Old Testament saints all came to them through the Lord Jesus Christ. Before the foundation of the world God saw what would happen to man. He saw the Fall, and man's sin which would have to be dealt with, and there the Plan was made and an agreement was made between the Father and the Son. The Father gave a people to the Son, and the Son voluntarily made Himself responsible to God for them. He contracted to do certain things for them, and God the Father on His side contracted to do other things. God the Father said He would grant forgiveness and reconciliation and restoration and new life and a new nature to all who belonged to His Son. The condition was that the Son should come into the world and take human nature and the sin of mankind upon Himself and bear its punishment, stand for them, and suffer for them and represent them. That was the covenant, that was the agreement that was made, and it was made 'before the foundation of the world'. God was able to tell Adam about that in the Garden of Eden when He told him that 'the seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head'. This had been planned before creation, and God began to announce it even there.

Later certain subsidiary arrangements were made. A covenant was made with Noah, with Abraham, with Moses. These are not the original covenant, the covenant made with the Son. They were temporary, but all these subsidiary covenants point to this great covenant. The types and ceremonial offerings and sacrifices were all pointing to Christ. 'The law was our schoolmaster to lead us to Christ' and His great offering. The law given to Moses does not annul the covenant made with Abraham, but that, in turn, points back to the great covenant made with the Son Himself in eternity.

Thus we begin to see why Paul says, 'The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ'. God before time, and before the world, saw our predicament and entered into this agreement with His own Son. He has taken an oath, He has signed, He has pledged Himself in a covenant, He has committed Himself. Everything is in Christ. He is our Representative, He is our Mediator, He is our Guarantor — all blessing comes in and through Him. Who can realize what all this meant to the Father, what all this meant to the Son, what all this meant to the Holy Spirit? But that is the gospel and it is only as we understand something of these things that we shall begin to praise God.

Look at the matter in this way. Here are you and I, miserable worms in this world, miserable worms with our arrogance and our pride and our appalling ignorance. We deserve nothing but to be blotted off the face of the earth. But what has happened is that before the foundation of the world this blessed God, these three blessed Persons, considered us, considered our condition, considered what would happen to us, and the consequence was that these Three Persons, God, whom man hath never seen, stooped to consider us and planned a way whereby we might be forgiven and redeemed. The Son said, I will leave this glory for a while, I will dwell in the womb of a woman, I will be born as a babe, I will become a pauper, I will suffer insult in the world, I will even allow them to nail Me to a Cross and spit in My face. He volunteered to do all that for us, and at this very moment this blessed Second Person in the Trinity is seated at the right hand of God to represent you and me. He came down to earth and did all that, and rose again, and ascended to heaven; and it was all planned 'before the world' for you and for me.

Do you still say that you are not interested in theology? Do you still say that you have not time to be interested in doctrine? You will never begin to praise God or worship or adore Him until you begin to realize something of what He has done for you. 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.' We are in the covenant; and we shall now try to consider some of the consequences of that covenant.

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