

We are Blessed Through Christ

There is a tendency among Christians to view our heavenly Father as a grouchy old man. It is easier to see Jesus as the loving member of the Trinity. Jesus, after all, gave the great sacrifice of His life for us. But the Father seems to only sit in heaven being angry at people. According to this view, it is the wrathful Father who would wipe out humanity for our sins, but the Son lovingly saves us.

Now, there is some truth in this view. The Father upholds justice and must punish the wicked. But the Father is not alone in this. The Son, Jesus Christ, also hates sin and condemns iniquity. So it is not that Jesus is the loving One and the Father is grouchy. They are both equally grouchy, so to speak, when it comes to sin.

The Father would prefer to be only loving toward us all the time. He does not want to be angry or wrathful, ever. But His justice demands wrath over sin.

For we humans have been so unloving that God's justice had to respond. We have been unloving, not only toward our fellow man, but also toward God; not only in our thoughts, but also in our words and deeds. Our human heart is so warped by our selfish sinful nature that we are incapable of truly perfect, pure love. All the while, we have pridefully believed in our ability to love, as if we were such selfless, giving creatures that surely God could not help but be pleased with us.

But what we call love is actually selfishness and pride. Our self-centred sinfulness calls for God's punishment and wrath.

If God merely ignored our sins, then His love would be cheap and meaningless. But the love of our God is true love, called grace. It is rich, limitless love. It is love that is undeserved, because it asks for nothing in advance and nothing in return. Grace is love that is willing to sacrifice all, even the most precious thing imaginable - His own Son.

In Saint Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, it is the Father who is especially singled out for His graciousness toward us. It is the Father who manifests His grace in the actions He does for our salvation. It is the Father who has restored us to His favour in Christ Jesus. The Father has solved the problem of our sin by taking action.

Here are the things He did, as mentioned by Paul:

First, the Father "*has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ!*" (Eph. 1:3). This is a summary of the multitude of benefits that the Father pours out to us through His Son.

Second, the Father has chosen us in Christ before He made the world to be "*holy and blameless in His sight*" (v. 4). The forgiveness of sins that declares us righteous in God's sight through the Gospel was planned by the Father before the Creation so that we may belong to Him.

Therefore, third, "*He predestined us to be adopted as His own sons through Jesus Christ*" (v. 5). The Father's plan all along was to bring us back into the sonship that we had lost because of our sinfulness. Without the good pleasure of His will, He would not be our Father. But in Christ, He has restored us as sons, as He chose to do before the world began.

Fourth, the Father "*did this that His glorious grace, which He bestowed on us in His dearly loved Son, might be praised*" (v. 6). The Father makes us pleasing in His sight by covering us with His grace in Christ Jesus.

Fifth, the Father lavishes us and abounds toward us with His rich grace "*in all wisdom and understanding*" (v. 8). This means that the grace of the Father is seen in the Blood of Christ. In Christ we have redemption through His Blood, the forgiveness of sins. But this is not the Son's action to placate a grouchy Father. Far from it! The redemption, the Blood, and the forgiveness all flow from the grace of the Father. It was not only the Son's love that drove Him to the Cross - it was also the Father's love. His rich grace burst into view with the bright red drops of Jesus' Blood.

So the Father's wisdom was made visible by the precious ransom He paid by giving His Son as the price to redeem us. The Father's infinite understanding saw that the Cross was necessary. He did not shrink from giving the sacrifice of His only-begotten, dearly-beloved Son. The Cross is the wisdom of the Father to deliver to us the forgiveness of sins.

The wrath of the Father should have been poured out upon us. But His wrath crashed down instead upon Christ on the Cross. Now, God's full anger and hatred toward wickedness is used up and satisfied. For us, there is no wrath, but only grace.

A person can only receive the wrath of God if they reject the Blood of atonement shed for them. Then they will find God's anger in the flames of everlasting condemnation.

But for us there is no wrath. There is only God's love and blessing. The curse was swallowed up by Christ and His death. We receive only grace.

This grace cannot be separated from the Father's Means of Grace. In the Gospel, Holy Absolution, Holy Baptism, as well as the Supper of Christ - in all these, the Father pours out His grace abundantly on you.

So the grace of the Father is not merely a concept, nor merely an emotion He feels toward us. Instead, the grace of the Father is incarnate in human flesh in Jesus, and given out in concrete form in the Divine Service. We hear and see and touch grace as the Father distributes it to us here, today.

That is why Paul also says that the Father has "*made known to us the mystery of His will*" (v. 9). For we have heard the Word of Truth, the Gospel of our salvation. And believing, we have been marked and sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the deposit guaranteeing our inheritance.