

APPRECIATION IS MUCH APPRECIATED

3 For this reason, I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles—²since you indeed have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God that was given to me for you, ³that is, the mystery that was made known to me by revelation, (as I have already written in brief.) ⁴In reading this, then, you will be able to perceive my understanding in the mystery of Christ, (a mystery ⁵that in previous generations was not made known to mankind as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit), ⁶[namely,] that the Gentiles are fellow-heirs [with Israel] and members of the same body and fellow-recipient of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. ⁷I became a minister [of the gospel] by the gift of the grace of God that was given to me by the working of his power. ⁸To me, the least of all the saints, was this grace given, [namely,] to proclaim to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ ⁹and to bring to light what is the dispensation of the mystery that has for ages been hidden by God who created all things. ¹⁰[His intent was] that now through the church the manifold wisdom of God might be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms. ¹¹[This is] in accord with the eternal purpose, which he accomplished by Christ Jesus our Lord, ¹²in whom we have boldness and confident access through our faith in him. ¹³Therefore, I ask you not to be discouraged because of my tribulations on your behalf, [for] they are your glory. (Eph. 3:1-13)

Introduction

The local newspaper carried the following story on its sports page on Sunday, April 25, 1993,

JABBAR TELLS FANS OF HIS APPRECIATION

Kareem-Abdul Jabbar, who turned the Milwaukee Bucks from an expansion team to a world champion in just three years, was honored Saturday night when his first NBA team retired his number 33 jersey.

Do you appreciate being appreciated? Or does it not matter to you if your gifts, your contributions, your services are taken for granted? Do you really mind when your one mistake is pointed out, but your many contributions are ignored?

We appreciate being appreciated. We are encouraged when our contributions are recognized. We are uplifted when our work is acknowledged.

Did these Ephesian Christians appreciate all that was done for them? They certainly did. They were very much aware of what the Apostle Paul was going through on their behalf, and they were distraught for him. He in turn exhorts them not to be troubled, because his hardships are a part of his divine calling, and they are the church's glory (i.e.; it is a great honor that someone would undergo such hardships for us.)

May the Holy Spirit grant us to learn from these Ephesian Christians to be appreciative. Rather than take for granted all that we have received by grace and at great expense, like the Ephesians, may we possess and exhibit a deep sense of appreciation.

I. Let Us Be Appreciative of the Great Blessings God has Bestowed upon Us in Christ

As Christians, we are heirs of the eternal inheritance (Eph. 3:6a.) The New Testament believer joins with the original covenant community and with Christ Himself in being an heir of God's kingdom promises, as Paul informs us, "*if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ*" (Rom. 8:17a.) Do we appreciate the inheritance that is ours in Christ; or do we complain because God has not seen fit to immediately give us all we desire in this world?

As Christians, we are members of the body of Christ (Eph. 3:6b,) as such we are exceedingly precious to Christ:

... Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her; ²⁶so that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her with the washing of water by the word—²⁷so that he might present the church to himself in glory, without blemish or wrinkle or any other such thing, but being holy and blameless ... ²⁹No one ever hated his own flesh; rather, he nourishes and cares for it, just as Christ cares for the church, ³⁰because we are members of his body. (Eph. 5:25-27,29-30)

Do we appreciate our membership in the spiritual body of Christ; or do we complain about a lack of membership in the elite groups of the society that forms a part of this present world?

As Christians, we are the recipients of "*the promise*" (Eph. 3:6c.) That is to say, we have an interest in the awesome promise God made to Abraham: "*I will establish my covenant between me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be your God and [the God of] your descendants after you*" (Gen. 17:7.) Do we appreciate the awesome relationship with God we enjoy in Christ; or do we complain that He does not permit us to any longer live like those who are without hope and without God in the world?

As Christians, we are a living display of God's wisdom (vs. 10.) As we live in fellowship with God and with our fellow believers, we are displaying to the world—and especially to the spirit world (composed of angels and demons)—God's wonderful ability to bring about true reconciliation and restoration. Do we appreciate the fact that as we live out the Christian life we are displaying God's ability (His wisdom and power) to the whole spiritual realm; or do we complain because our own (God-given) abilities are not being recognized by a handful of mortal human beings?

As Christians, we have the right and privilege of coming with confidence before God and gaining access to His throne (vs. 12.) Do we appreciate our privilege of having direct access to the throne of God; or do we complain because we are denied access to some of the more desirable things of this present world: such as a “paradise vacation,” because of lack of funds; or membership in an exclusive club, because of lack of social status?

Let us appreciate what God has bestowed upon us in the Beloved; namely, *“the unfathomable riches of Christ”* (vs. 8.)

II. Let Us Be Appreciative of the Means God has Used to Bring Us His Blessings

Paul relates how he was appointed to bring Christ to these Gentile and Jewish Ephesians. He received a stewardship of the grace of God that was to be ministered to these Ephesian people; he was entrusted with the task of ministering *“the grace of God”* (i.e.; Christ and His divine riches) to them (vs. 2.)

In verse 13 Paul exhorts the Ephesians, *“I ask you not to be discouraged because of my tribulations on your behalf, for they are your glory.”* The fact that these Ephesian Christians were concerned for Paul’s present predicament, (as a prisoner for Christ,) indicates their appreciation for him and what he had done for them.

Do we appreciate those people whom God has used to bring Christ to us and to minister the grace of God to us? Perhaps there were godly parents and grandparents who told you of the Savior, who prayed for you and taught you how to pray, and who lived lives in whom you could see Christ. Perhaps there were faithful ministers of the Word who preached the whole counsel of God, who diligently sought to expound and apply the Word of God to your life, who carried on a consistent ministry of prayer on your behalf, and who sought to minister the grace of Christ to you. Perhaps there were faithful Bible teachers who taught you some of the first Bible stories you ever learned, and who encouraged you to seek Christ, trust in Him as your Savior, and grow in your relationship with Him and service to Him. Perhaps there were elders and/or deacons who sought to minister to you and care for your soul on a personal level and in a practical way.

Paul also acknowledges the hardships he endured for these people who were precious to God and to him; he was presently addressing them from the confinement of Roman imprisonment (vs. 1.) The Ephesians were well aware of the manifold tribulations he endured for their sake (vs. 13.)

Do we appreciate the sacrifices, the labors, the hardships, of those who minister Christ and His grace to us? Perhaps it is our own parents with their daily earnest prayers, with their effort to set a godly example, with their struggle to discipline their children in love, and maybe even with their sacrifices to provide Christian education. Perhaps it is our Bible teachers with their labors to first understand

and then communicate and apply the Word of God to our lives; and their continued efforts to do so even when at times they encounter indifference or resistance to their teaching of God's Word. Perhaps it is our elders who spend sleepless nights grappling with problems in our lives that are not their own, out of love for Christ and for us seeking to minister the truth in love.

Paul emphasizes the fact that it was the Lord who sent him, as he points out in verse 2, he was entrusted with a divine stewardship; note, also, verse 7, speaking of the gospel, Paul writes, *"I became a minister of [the gospel] by the gift of the grace of God that was given to me by the working of his power."*

Do we appreciate the fact that it is God Himself who has provided those godly people who have ministered to us? In some cases they were godly parents, or faithful preachers and teachers, or diligent and devote elders and deacons. Whatever Christian influence and training we have received, it was God in His mercy to us who ultimately provided it for us by bringing into our lives the godly people who ministered Christ and His grace to us.

Let us appreciate all those who minister Christ and His grace to us—and let us appreciate the fact that God Himself has provided each one of them because of His love for us.

Conclusion

May the Holy Spirit help us to be more appreciative of what we have—all that we have—in Christ Jesus. As the Apostle Paul expresses it in Ephesians 1:3, *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms in Christ."*

May the Holy Spirit help us to be more appreciative of all those—and each of those—whom God in His providence and love has seen fit to use to minister Christ and His unfathomable riches to us.