

we are seated with Yeshua in the heavenly places. This has at least two important realities for all who are “in Messiah.” The first is that the metaphor of being seated with Messiah in the heavenly places means that all who are His have ready access to the Father. While the ancient Tabernacle and Temple were divided so that only the high priest could enter the most holy place where the visible glory of God was seen, we who have been raised with Messiah have, in a spiritual sense, ascended with Him into the heavenly places. This means that even as Yeshua is fully received into the very presence of the Father, so we, through the Ruach HaKodesh, have full access to the Father as we seek His blessings and provision in our lives. The admonition of the author of Hebrews speaks to this very reality.

Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Heb 4:16)

The second important truth we glean from this reality, that we are seated with Yeshua in the heavenlies, is that our future place in the world to come, in eternity with Yeshua, is absolutely secured for all who are “in Him.” For our future, physical existence in the world to come is just as sure as is our present union with Messiah, seated now with Him in the heavenly places. As John teaches us:

By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world. (1Jn 4:17)

7 so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Messiah Yeshua.

Now, in this concluding verse of chapter’s opening paragraph, we are given the ultimate purpose for God’s sovereign and gracious actions as detailed in vv. 4–6. Believers have “been made alive together with Messiah,” “saved by His grace,” “raised up with Him,” and “seated with Him in the heavenly places.” Surely the purpose of God’s saving acts is that He would rescue lost sinners, bringing them unto Himself for eternal fellowship. But an even greater purpose is expressed by Paul here, namely, that the very eternal and infinite character of the triune God would be manifest to the universe in the display of His grace and love. Surely His infinite righteousness will be demonstrated in the

destruction of the wicked, for even among mankind it is expected that those who rebel against an earthly king will become the objects of his power and retribution. But for a king to extend such love to his enemies that they become members of his family and rulers within his kingdom would truly be something out of the ordinary.

Yet this is the very the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob has done. We who were dead in trespasses and sins, that is, engaged in egregious rebellion to the King of the universe, have been brought to life, made given close and enduring friendship with the King's Son, and brought into the King's family as eternally sons and daughters.

Here, in our verse, Paul has brought us back to what he stated in the opening chapter.

He predestined us to adoption as sons through Yeshua Messiah to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. (Eph 1:5-6)

Ultimately our eternal salvation is "to the praise of the glory of His grace."

so that in the ages to come – The Greek *ἵνα* (*hina*), translated "so that," marks the purpose for which the previous actions were undertaken. God pours out His grace upon those He would save to fulfill His divine purposes, and here the purpose is that He would be glorified.

How are we to understand the phrase "in the ages to come"? The Greek word here translated "ages" is *αἰών* (*aiōn*) from which derive our English word "eon," meaning "an immeasurable or infinite space of time; a long space of time; an age."¹ Paul has used this word already in 1:21 and in 2:2 and we will meet this word three more times in Ephesians (3:9, 11, 21). Considering all of these, it is clear that *aiōn* is used by Paul of the "current age" (1:21, 2:2) as well as to describe "eternity" (3:21). In our verse, it seems best to understand "ages to come" to refer to eternity, that is, when the heavens and earth are destroyed and a new heavens and earth are created. It is in the consummation of all things that God manifests the final success of His saving plan. And it is God's purpose in saving a host of people beyond number that He would show the abundance of His grace to them throughout eternity. As the very source of life itself, only the Almighty is able to assure eternal life for all who those who are His.

¹ Webster's Dictionary (1913).

He might show the surpassing riches of His grace – When Paul defines the riches of God’s grace as “surpassing” (ὑπερβάλλω, *hyperballō*), to what it compared? What does it surpass? Some have noticed that Paul uses words in this phrase which have been found in inscriptions extolling the goodness of emperors in the Augustan age.

For those who first read Ephesians, or heard it read, this language might have recalled the effusive language used in inscriptions recognizing the benefactions of emperors of the Augustan age. Here too forms of the verb “surpassing” were used to describe the emperor’s goodwill, benevolence, courage, love of fame, love of honor, greatness of mind, moderation, merit, and ancestral honor, all of them specific manifestations of the emperor’s “grace.”¹

The point is clear: the love, mercy, and grace of God is abundantly greater than anything mankind could muster. And all of God’s grace flows from His mercy, for previously in v. 4, Paul speaks of God being “rich in mercy” which is made known by His love “with which He loved us.”

in kindness toward us in Messiah Yeshua. – God’s grace is shown to us in that while we deserved His wrath as those who were “by nature children of disobedience” (v. 2), He treated us with kindness. But God could not have simply dismissed our sin and rebellion, for to do so would be contrary to His infinite righteousness and justice. Thus Paul adds the all important “in Messiah Yeshua.” As noted in the previous verses, it is the believer’s union with Messiah in His death, resurrection, and ascension that the payment for sin has been made and new life given. Yeshua’s death, resurrection and ascension is reckoned to all who are “in Messiah.” As Calvin notes:

The love of God to us in Christ is here proved, or again declared, to have had its origin in mercy. *That he might shew, says he, the exceeding riches of his grace.* How? *In his kindness towards us, as the tree is known by its fruit.* Not only, therefore, does he declare, that the love of God was free, but likewise that God displayed in it the riches, the extraordinary preeminent riches of his grace. It deserves notice, also, that the name of Christ is repeated; for no grace, no love, must be expected by us from God, except through his mediation.²

1 Thielman, *Ephesians*, p. 138.

2 Calvin, *Ephesians*, p. 226.

8–9 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

For by grace – In the Greek, the opening words of v. 8 includes the article for the word “grace” – Τῇ γὰρ χάριτί (*tē gar xariti*), “for by *the* grace.... This use of the article (called “anaphoric”) points back to the parenthetical statement in v. 5, “... made us alive together with Messiah (by grace you have been saved”). Thus, in our verse, Paul continues what he began in v. 5, to speak of God’s grace as the fountain from which His saving love flows. The opening words of this verse describe the cause of our salvation, that is, that which brought it about. And that “cause” is God’s grace.¹

What is grace (χάρις, *xaris*)? While the Greek word, like our English word “grace,” can have the sense of “graciousness” or “kindness,” when in the biblical contexts which speak to God’s grace in the saving of sinners, the word is best defined succinctly as “unmerited favor.” That which is “earned” or “achieved” cannot be considered as having received it “by grace.” For something that is “earned” is owed and something that is “achieved” is likewise received as obligatory. But grace cannot be earned or awarded, for by definition grace is that which is freely given, i.e., a gift, as Paul makes clear in our text.

...you have been saved – In the Greek, the verb “you have been” is plural (ἔσστε, *este*), and thus envision the community of believers. All who are saved by God’s grace come into the family of God the same way. There is only one way of salvation and people-group identification, station in life, or gender make no difference. As Paul makes clear in his epistle to the Galatians:

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Messiah Yeshua. (Gal 3:28)

The verb “saved” is in the Greek perfect tense (σῳσμένοι, *sesōsmenoi* < σῳζω, *sōzō*) meaning that once again Paul is emphasizing that our eternal salvation is based upon a finished work, Yeshua’s death and resurrection, the merit of which is continuously applied to the believer. That which Yeshua accomplished in His death and resurrection remains ef-

1 The dative Τῇ γὰρ χάριτί should be taken as a dative of cause and not a dative means. Cf. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Zondervan, 1996), pp. 167–68. [hereafter, Wallace, *Greek Grammar*]

fective for all who are in Messiah. Those whom God has saved will never be lost. Tompkins, in the final stanzas of his hymn “Christ’s Grave is Vacant Now,” describes the believer in this way:

And cries with wondering joy, “As He is so am I,
Pure, holy, loved as Christ Himself – who shall my peace destroy?”

Reach my blest Saviour first, take Him from God’s esteem,
Prove Jesus bears one spot of sin. Then tell me I’m unclean!

Nay! For He purged my guilt by His own precious blood,
And such its virtue not a stain e’er meets the eye of God.

...*through faith* – Paul makes clear that the *cause* of our salvation is God’s sovereignty motivated by His abundant grace. The *means* by which the sinner lays hold of God’s grace is the exercise of faith. Thus Paul teaches us here that God’s grace in salvation is acquired by the one who will be saved, through exercising saving faith, that is, faith which agrees with God and accepts the gift of salvation in Yeshua.

...*and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God* – The real issue in understanding Paul’s meaning in this phrase is the demonstrative “that” (τοῦτο, *touto* < οὗτος, *houtos*). In Greek, a demonstrative must agree in gender with the word it modifies. So when we begin to ask what is not of yourselves, we obviously look in the preceding context to find the answer. The word “grace” in the Greek is feminine gender, and the word “faith” in the Greek is also feminine. However, the demonstrative “that” is in the neuter gender. The best explanation of Paul’s words here is that the neuter demonstrative can be used to refer back to an entire clause or to the previous context in general.¹

Further, in the English translation of “it is the gift of God,” the English words “it is” are not actually written in the Greek but, as often, are expected to be supplied as an ellipsis. If we were to translate the entire verse woodenly it would be: “For by the grace you have been saved through faith, and this not of you, the gift of God.”

Thus, the best understanding of the grammar is this: Paul is stating that the means of our salvation flows from the grace of God, and the we receive His salvation by faith, and neither His grace nor our faith is something which begins with ourselves. Both His grace as well as the faith to received His gracious offer of salvation are gifts which He gives.

1 See Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, pp. 334–35.

This is in full concert with what Paul has taught us from the beginning of the epistle, for our salvation is the result of God has chosen us from before the foundation of the world (1:4), predestined us to be adopted into His family (1:5), made us alive together with Messiah (2:5), raised us up with Him (2:6) and seated us with Him in the heavenlies. All of this could only have happened by His doing since we were dead in our trespasses and sin (2:1).

But I hasten to say that, in the mystery of God's working, the one to whom He grants the gift of salvation is still the one who actively exercises the faith that lays hold of God's gift of salvation. God in His mercy grants us the gift, which includes faith, and enables us to exercise that faith resulting in salvation. We are active and not passive in this operation, for He has brought us to life from the dead and we have become partners with Him so that we may glorify Him and render to Him the praise He deserves.

In considering those who take the view that "grace is God's part, faith is ours," Hendrickson disagrees, taking the demonstrative "this" to refer to the entire previous context, including "faith" as a gift from God.

This is true first because in a context in which the apostle places such tremendous stress on the fact that from start to finish man owes his salvation to God, to Him alone, it would have been very strange, indeed, for Paul to say, "Grace is God's part, faith ours." True though it be that both the responsibility of believing and also its activity are ours, for God does not believe for us, nevertheless, in the present context (verses 5–10) one rather expects emphasis on the fact that both in its initiation and in its continuation faith is entirely dependent on God, and so is our complete salvation.¹

...not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. – This is obvious in the context, but Paul emphasizes it once again. Such emphasis is necessary since deep in the heart and mind of fallen mankind is that notion that one could actually win the favor of God by what one does. And this was even more the mindset among the Judaisms of Paul's day, that by one's own "righteousness" one could attract God's grace or that one's ethnic status gave an advantage in winning God's favor.

But Paul has already concluded that all, both Jew and non-Jew, are dead in trespasses and sin. There is therefore only one way to come to

1 Hendricksen, *Ephesians*, p. 121.

God, and that is with a heart of repentance, with empty hands seeking His mercy and forgiveness.

Paul's emphasis here is parallel to what he has written in his epistle to the Romans.

In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice. But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace. (Rom 11:5–6)

What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS." (Rom 4:1–3, cf. Gal 3:6)

It was Abraham's faith that was credited as righteousness, not his works. "And where divine grace operates, human merit is excluded, and human boasting too."¹

Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. (Rom 3:27)

...so that no one may boast. – If the salvation of a lost soul depends upon the sinner themselves, then those who "make the right decision" could well look upon those who refuse to believe as lacking something that the believer has. But in here in Ephesians as well as in the unified message of the Scriptures, those whom God saves have nothing in and of themselves to warrant boasting. Salvation is the work of God's grace, bringing sinners to life, endowing them with His Spirit, and thus enabling them to love Him, to put to death the deeds of the flesh, and to glorify Him for His great love, mercy and grace.

just as it is written, "LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD."
(1Cor 1:31, cf. Ps 34:2)

1 F. F. Bruce, *Ephesians*, p. 289.