



## The Lord's Benediction

### *Ephesians 6:23, 24*

Whenever God's people are gathered for worship on the Lord's Day, they are officially dismissed from the public worship service with the benediction. The ordained minister raises his hands and pronounces a benediction, such as the one found in 2 Corinthians 13:14, *"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all, Amen."*

We have heard such benedictions many times, but many church members may not be fully aware of the meaning and purpose of the benediction in the worship service. The official pronouncement of the benediction by God's ordained minister has a very important meaning and purpose. In this article we will look at Paul's benediction to the church at Ephesus in Ephesians 6:23, 24: *"Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen."*

From this passage of Scripture we are going to see that the benediction is the very invocation of God's favor upon His people. When we depart from the worship service, the minister pronounces these words in order that we may know that we are God's people and that all good comes to us by His grace alone.

#### **1. The source of the benediction**

Paul ended his letter to the Ephesians with a benediction, an invocation by the ordained servant of God, offered up with all the authority of his office, calling for God's blessing upon God's people. The benediction has its origin in the Old Testament. God instructed the Old Testament priests to invoke His Name and favor upon His people: *"And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, 'This is the way you shall bless the children of Israel. Say to them: The LORD bless you and keep you; The LORD make His face shine upon you, And be gracious to you; The LORD lift up His countenance upon you, And give you peace.' So they shall put My name on the children of Israel, and I will bless them."* (Numbers 6:22-27)

Because God instructed the priests, the ordained servants of the ministry, to pronounce this blessing, the benediction is only properly given by men ordained to the ministry. It is pronounced with all the authority of the office of the ordained minister, which is God's own authority. The benediction properly acknowledges that God alone is the fountain of all good for His people.

The Apostle Paul knew that all true blessing comes from God. He writes, *"peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."* God the Father Almighty is the source of all blessing. Nothing comes to us except by His Divine will and providence. Paul knew that if the church at Ephesus was to experience good and blessing, it must be God who grants such blessing. Thus the benediction rests upon the Biblical teaching of God's almighty providence. God controls all things, and all things come not by chance, but by His Fatherly hand.

In pronouncing the benediction at the end of the worship service, all ordained ministers of God are making this solemn acknowledgement. The minister dismisses the congregation by calling upon God Almighty to grant His favor and blessing to the congregation. Such blessing will come to God's people only if God Himself shows them favor by His grace. But let us carefully note that it was God who commanded Aaron and His sons (and all ordained ministers) to officially use the benediction in the exercise of their office. Therefore, the benediction is more than a prayer request. It is the

official pronouncement of God's desire to bless His people. God Himself desires to bless His elect. The benediction is an important, God-ordained means by which the Lord blesses His people.

We must also carefully note that our text teaches that blessings come to us from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ possesses equal authority with the Father to impart favor and blessing to His people. The Lord Jesus Christ is fully and equally God along with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Paul calls upon Christ as being equal with the Father, able to do good for all who call upon Him in true faith.

Not only does Paul invoke the Name of Christ because Jesus is equal with the Father, but also because He is our only Mediator with the Father. The blessings that come to us from God Almighty come to us through Jesus Christ. Christ restored us to God's favor by His sacrifice on the cross. Christ intercedes for us as we pray, being at the right hand of God as our great High Priest. Because Christ is our Mediator before the judgment seat of God, we can expect God's favor and blessing through His Name alone. Those who are outside of Christ are under the curse of God. Being covered by the blood of Christ, Christians are restored to God's favor and can expect all blessing from Him.

The benediction teaches us an important spiritual truth that we must never forget: all good can come to us from only one source, "*from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*" That is why Paul ends his letter with the benediction, and that is why the Christian minister ends the worship service with the benediction. Only God can bless us, and He blesses us through Jesus Christ.

## **2. The spiritual nature of the benediction**

Notice the nature of the blessing that Paul seeks for the church of Ephesus by the grace of God: "*Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith.*" The greatest blessings that we receive from God are not measured in material terms. As our Heidelberg Catechism instructs, we are to be thankful when God grants us prosperity (Q. & A. 28). However, the richest blessings that God gives to us are not temporal in nature. The richest blessings are spiritual in nature.

Three such spiritual blessings are mentioned in Paul's benediction, the first of which is *peace*. Such peace is a definite kind of peace from God, a peace that the world cannot comprehend. It is not merely the absence of conflict, but is the entire state of favor which we experience from God when we are reconciled to Him through Jesus Christ. While the Scriptures teach that the "*wrath of God abides*" on the unbeliever (John 3:36), Christians are assured that "*we have peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ.*" (Romans 5:1)

When Paul invokes such peace upon the congregation, He calls upon God to fill us with a sense of this communion that we have with God through Christ in order that this peace may be promoted and nurtured in the churches. Since we have peace with God through Christ, peace must be promoted in the church among the members of Christ's church. We only mock Christ if we claim that we have peace with God while we harbor hostility to other members in the church of Christ. Peace with God must bring forth peace amongst Christ's people.

In order to have peace, we must also have the second of these blessings in the benediction, which is *love*. It was God's love for us that brought to us peace and favor with Himself. While we were yet sinners, rebellious toward God and undeserving of His favor, His love sent forth Christ. His love did not withhold His own Son even from the death of the cross. The love of God delivered us out of sin, death, and hell unto eternal life with Christ. Having known such love we must show the same love for our brethren. Nothing can destroy the joy and peace of a local congregation faster than coldness and divisions which arise from a lack of love.

Christ-like love is the fruit of the third blessing found in the benediction, which is *faith*. Our texts tells us that it is "*love with faith*" because such love can only arise from true faith in God through Jesus Christ. True faith is a certain knowledge of God along with a hearty trust in Jesus Christ. It is not static. Once we have true faith, we must grow in that faith. That is why faith is part of Paul's benediction. He knew that if the church was to grow in faith, then God must bless the members of

the church with His Spirit in order that they may abound in faith and bear its fruit: true thankfulness to God for redemption.

### **3. Divine grace is the foundation of the benediction**

Peace, love, and faith are all blessing that come to us from God the Father and Jesus Christ our Lord. And by looking at the final verse of Paul's letter to the Ephesians, we can see the one word which describes how and why God gives us such blessings: GRACE! *"Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen."*

We can expect God's favor only because of His grace. God has shown unmerited favor to undeserving sinners. Grace is the foundation of the benediction because all of our blessings come to us by God's grace alone. No matter what we have, from the temporal blessings which sustain our life day by day to the blessings of eternal life with God in heaven, all good things come to us by God's grace alone.

God's grace is indeed particular. It is shown to those who have been chosen by God and brought to faith in Christ. When Paul pronounces the benediction, he adds the words, *"grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity."* God's grace belongs to Christians, to those who are believers in Christ by grace. A Christian is one who trusts Christ and loves Him with sincerity. Hypocrites have no part in the benediction. Those who do not love the Lord Jesus Christ are especially the objects of Divine wrath. Hear the awesome curse which the same apostle pronounces upon those who do not sincerely love Jesus Christ in 1 Corinthians 16:22: *If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema.*

Anathema is the divine curse that rests upon those who do not love Christ. It is the opposite of benediction. God's favor is upon those who love Christ. God's wrath and curse are upon the rest. The benediction is for God's people who have been brought to faith and love in Christ by God's grace.

The apostle seals the benediction with the word, *"Amen"*. Amen means, "so shall it truly and surely be". We end our prayers with this word because God hears our prayer even more than we feel in our hearts that we desire such things from Him. The "Amen" comes at the end of the benediction as the seal to all that has been said. God desires to bless His people even more than we can feel in our hearts. The "Amen" serves this important purpose at the end of the benediction. The benediction itself serves the same purpose at the end of the worship service. We depart the service with the words of Divine favor because God blesses us even more than we feel in our hearts.

### **Conclusion**

The next time the minister pronounces the benediction at the end of the worship service, think of its meaning and purpose. As the ordained servant of God, he calls upon the Lord to impart His blessing upon you who love Christ in sincerity. The world is a stranger to such a blessing, but Christ's servants have this assurance from God each time we depart the worship service:

*"Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith,  
from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.  
Grace be with all them that love  
our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.  
Amen."*

William W Haddock

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