

Episode #1018 Ephesians 3 Part 3-God is Gracious

I. The purpose of Paul's epistle to the Ephesians is to tell us what God's present purpose is in all His work today. This includes His work in the world and in the individual believer. Ephesians is the book of God's present purpose, the book of being "in Christ," and the book of God's grace.

II. I have called the book of Ephesians "the book of God's present purpose." Even more specifically, chapter 3 is the chapter of God's present purpose. We learn here what it is that God is doing today. Verse 2 tells us that we live in the dispensation of the grace of God.

III. Grace is God's love and favor to the undeserving. Grace is never withheld or lessened because of faults. Grace cannot incur a debt, and is never the payment nor overpayment of a debt. Ephesians 4:32. The great truth of the dispensation of grace is that God is dealing graciously with us! Justice gives people exactly what they deserve, whereas grace gives love and favor without taking whether or not one deserves it into account. A covenant is an agreement, so fulfilling and agreement can never be an act of grace, no matter how gracious the covenant might have been up front. God's grace today does not come to us as the result of a covenant.

IV. Grace Versus Promises. Genesis 12:3. The blessings mentioned here are the reward of works, not grace. Since God's administration is purely gracious today, this promise can no longer be in effect. Many do not realize this, and claim that any good or ill done to the nation of Israel will result in blessing or cursing. This is a denial of the truth that God is dealing graciously with us! II Chronicles 7:14. This promise is twisted to apply to us, ignoring entirely that only Israel were ever His people called by His name, Deuteronomy 4:7-8. The nature of the dispensation of grace makes every other promise of God suspended or inoperative.

V. Grace and Faith.

A. Romans 4:16. Grace operates through faith.

B. Acts was a time of seeing. Mark 16:20: signs followed believers. Acts 4:31: God answered their request for boldness by a sign.

C. Today our faith is not in signs and wonders, but in the Word alone. John 20:29. We are those who have not seen, yet have believed.

VI. Grace and Prayer.

A. Prayer was a powerful thing in Acts. Christ gave His apostles many promises. John 14:14. They would get what they asked for.

B. Prayer was answered miraculously many times in Acts.

1. Acts 8:15-16. The Holy Spirit was given to the Samaritans by prayer.

2. Acts 9:11-12. Paul's prayer was answered by Ananias restoring his sight.

3. Acts 9:40. Tabitha was raised by Peter's prayer.

4. Acts 12:5-10. Peter was delivered from prison and death by prayer.

5. Acts 16:25-26. Paul and Silas were delivered from prison and chains by prayer.

C. Philippians 4:6-7. Prayer in the dispensation of grace is on a different basis. We can demand nothing of God. We know only that when we make our requests to God, He hears them. We are free to bring our concerns before Him and leave them in His hands.

VII. Conclusion: God's present purpose is to demonstrate the greatness of His grace for all time to come. When God acts only and exclusively in grace, all His other promises are put on hold and suspended. Grace operates through faith, and the two go together. Prayer in the dispensation of grace is a request for the things we need, not a guarantee to receive them. In grace, the world

will never be converted from its wickedness. In God's kingdom to come, however, the world will learn righteousness. Now, we live in the time God acts totally and exclusively in grace, and this explains much of His actions in this world. Let us ingest and incorporate fully into our thinking the reality that we live under God's great administration of grace.