

A Lord's Day Snippet!

Biblical And Southern Studies

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1 'Twas finsh'd, saith the faithful God,
Before the world itself began:
The ransom of a Saviour's blood,
From everlasting, flow'd for man.

2 Ere Satan dar'd th' Eternal King;
Ere Eden saw the morning sun;
Ere Eve had felt the Serpent's sting;
Thy perfect will, O God, was done.

3 Before that Adam disobey'd,
Himself, and all his sons were thine:
Those works, thy life thy death display'd,
Confirm eternity's design.

4 Jesus from earth's foundation slain!
Worthy art thou, thrice worthy, Lord!
To ever live, and rule, and reign,
By angels, and by men, ador'd.

George Richards (1755-1814)

The Dispensation of Grace

"If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward."

Ephesians 3:2

Paul the prisoner as it were rattled his chains a bit in this chapter when he penned, "For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles" (3:1). This indicates the indebtedness of Gentiles to the Apostle Paul for his ministry of grace and suffering. The *Geneva Bible* notes Paul's purpose herein, "He maintains his apostleship against the offence of the cross, upon which he also makes an argument to confirm himself, affirming that he was not only appointed an apostle by the mercy of God, but was also appointed particularly to the Gentiles. And this was to call them everywhere to salvation, because God had so determined this from the beginning, although he deferred a great while the manifestation of his counsel."

Who is the author of this dispensation of grace? “God” is! “If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God (and you have)” which is the sense here. The word “if” could be translated “since” and means “since you have heard.” Thus, there is no doubt involved in the text here, but an assumption of knowledge. God is the author of this dispensation. He is the one to be eulogized, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ ... having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved” (Eph. 1:3, 5, 6). Christ administers grace for He made us accepted, He redeemed us, He forgave our sins, etc. Our place in God’s family was by God the Father’s action.

What is the meaning of the dispensation mentioned here? It is important to have a clear understanding of this word “dispensation,” which literally refers to the rule or administration of a house by the father. It is the “dispensation of God” (Col. 1:25) who rules in the household of faith. “That in the dispensation of the fulness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in Him” (Eph. 1:10). There is a broad rule of God the Father over heaven and earth; but the rule of grace is over His household. The Father administers His saving purpose in His world, and He adopts whom He wishes to have under His rule in His own house. God’s dispensation or administration is in governing his family, which is also called, by Paul, “the household of God” (2:19). “The dispensation of the grace of God” (3:2) is the dispensing of grace as the Father chooses. God rules his own by mercy as He dispenses grace. His own are called “the children of God” or “the sons of God” (Rom. 8:14, 16, 19, 21). Those regenerated have been “adopted” into the family of God and are under His rule (Rom. 8:15, 23; Gal. 3:26; 4:5). “Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will” (Eph. 1:5) and compare this with, “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name” (John 1:12). The “dispensation of the grace of God” does not refer to the reign of a tyrant who rules over what is not rightfully his; but the grand idea here is the rule of a loving Father in providing for His own. Christ alone is God’s Son by nature; the only way we can become sons in this family is by adoption. Thus “adoption” never loses its proper meaning of “sons of God by adoption.” This word literally means to “place as a son” and the Greek word is a word only used by Paul. Paul primarily uses the word to emphasize the privileges which belong to believers brought into God’s family. All that adoption entails, and its full realization is yet future (Rom. 8:23).

Who is the recipient of the dispensation of grace? It “is given me to you-ward.” The rule of God the Father in grace was given to Paul who administered it to the regenerate

Gentiles. Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles, “For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office” (Rom. 11:13). Paul was a “dispenser of grace in the dispensation of grace.” “Nevertheless, brethren, I have written the more boldly unto you in some sort, as putting you in mind, because of the grace that is given to me of God, that I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost” (Rom. 15:15-16). When Christ appeared to Paul on his journey to Damascus, he said to him, “I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me” (Acts 26:16-18). Paul as a dispenser of grace was given that duty “by revelation” (Eph. 3:3). God the Father rules in His family and He chose Paul to spread the good news of salvation to his lost sheep and to point them to the way home.

God the Father is ruling in His family of grace and in the dispensing of justice to His creation (2 Pet. 3:7 ff.; Rev. 20:11-15). Years ago, in Edinburgh a preacher was introduced to a man in the following way, “This is Mr. _____, an acquaintance of mine, who, I am sorry to add, never attends public worship.” The preacher replied, “I am almost tempted to hope that you are bearing false witness against your neighbor.” The infidel replied, “By no means, for I always spend my Sunday in settling accounts.” The minister immediately replied, “You will find, sir, that the day of judgment will be spent in exactly the same manner.”

Judgment is sometimes greatly misunderstood. Charles the Second of England said to John Milton the Puritan, “Do you not perceive Mr. Milton, that your blindness is a judgment of God for taking part against the late king, my father?” Milton calmly replied, “Nay, if I have lost my sight through God’s judgment, what can you say of your father, who lost his head?”