

For by Grace, Through Faith

For it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith (and this is not of yourselves). It is the gift of God (not by works) so that no man can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians. 2:8 - 10).

To understand this familiar and oft quoted passage we need to begin at the beginning. And for the Apostle Paul, the beginning is *before the beginning*— before the creation of the world.

Praise be to the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight in love [...] in accordance with the riches of God's grace, that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding ... (1:3 - 10).

There is an abundance of ideas in this passage that are echoed in Celtic spirituality. However, for our purposes, we will confine ourselves to a few thoughts that aid directly in our understanding of the text at hand, Ephesians 2: 8 - 10. Like the Apostle we must begin “before the beginning.” Now, what did God do “before the beginning?” He blessed us with “every spiritual blessing (1:3) in accordance with the riches of God's grace (1:7).” The result? We have “lavished on us all wisdom and understanding (1:8).” Why? Because “he chose us *in him* to be holy and blameless (1:4).”

The primordial mythology of the ancient Celts speaks of a primordial God who sang Creation into existence and in so doing imparted the fullness of numinous energy in all of Creation. Creation then was holy, blessed with “every spiritual blessing.” The root of the words “holy” and “whole” are the same. Thus, to be “holy” one must be “whole”, or as the Apostle writes,

“blameless”. In Celtic spirituality, life – pilgrimage – is about *wholiness*, the quest to become wholly, holy. In Celtic mythology this holy wholeness is realized when This-World and the Other-World are once again reunited, having been separated originally by humankind following the wrong wisdom, a wisdom that is other than from the divine Song of creation. This reuniting, this *at-one-ment*, according to Celtic spirituality, is at once, both potential future and potential present reality.

Here, in the context of passage we are discussing, the Apostle makes a very Celtic-like statement, “to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head (1: 10).” Is this not holy wholeness?

In the passage quoted you will notice the [...], signifying that something has been omitted. What has been omitted is the portion dealing with predestination. It was not merely glossed over, but rather held in abeyance so as not to unduly confuse us. At its very core, predestined means simply “chosen beforehand”. Chosen “before the beginning”, the Apostle writes, to have redemption. We will save the Celtic understanding of redemption for another time, but here the Apostle makes it abundantly clear that it involves the “lavishing” upon us of wisdom and understanding. Here, we move directly to the faith passage of the second chapter.

Wisdom and understanding are more than mere human wisdom and its resultant understanding. As they are lavished beforehand, that is, in our creation? Wisdom and understanding are the “spiritual blessing”. Note the singular; not *blessings* in the plural, but *blessing* in the singular. The Apostle is not equating the blessing with *things*, such as health, wealth or family. All blessings, indeed, but not *the* “spiritual blessing.” What, then, is that blessing? It is God’s Grace. The Apostle Paul is clear here. It is Grace that has been given to us beforehand. The Celts called it the Oran Mór, that Great Melody of Creation that sang all into existence. The Oran Mór – Grace – is not something apart from God, as we are often apt to think of it, but intrinsic to God. Grace, properly, may be said to be the uncreated energies of the

Trinity. What we are given then at our creation is not merely a divine image, but the very energy of God!

“For by *Grace* are you saved.” What saves us? Grace. Not some other external wisdom or some notion of some way we must behave. What saves us is nothing less than the numinous energy – Grace – within. “Through faith not of ourselves (of another wisdom),” we find holy wholeness, or as the Apostle says, “blamelessness.” And what is faith? Another writer in another place writes, “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see (Hebrews 11:1).” How can we not be sure when we have been chosen before the beginning? Given human nature, we still find a way. Here again, Celtic spirituality comes to the fore. The Oran Mór, we are told, did not stop being sung with the initial creation, but continues even today if we listen for it. Faith, then is nothing more than listening for the divine song, *even when we can't hear it!* Both Celtic myth and Holy Scripture assure us that if we listen that is all that we need to do to eventually hear. The Apostle in Ephesians 2:4 & 5 writes, “Because of his (God's) great love for us, God who is rich in mercy, made us alive *even when we were dead...*” “Love”, friendship, divine friendship, that is, Friendship from before the beginning. In the friendship context another way of putting this is that before the beginning, God held us as his esteemed and dear friends. What breaks friendship? Only our refusal to be a friend. God has never refused, “*even when we were dead.*” Even when we were not living in divine Friendship God has constantly remained our friend, a friendship demonstrated by the song of the divine uncreated energies – Grace – within. Simply acknowledging the Grace that is within, even when we cannot “hear it”, is all that it takes. This is *faith!*

How do we acknowledge the Song within, demonstrate our faith? By beginning to do those good works “which God has prepared in advance for us to do (2:10).” And these works? “To praise his glorious Grace (1:6).” How? By lavishing upon Creation Grace, divine wisdom and understanding— spiritual blessing. “And in him (Christ) you too are being built together to become a dwelling which God lives by his Spirit (2:22).”