



blessed be god the father

Ephesians 1.<sup>3-14</sup>

## Introduction

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Paul's epistle to the Ephesians might be profitably divided into two parts. In the first, chapters 1-3, Paul engages in, what we might call, a long meditation on the greatness of God—what kind of Being God is. He gives us reason after reason after reason to worship, praise, and adore the incredible Being we call God the Father. He ends his exalting reflection on the greatness of God with a flurry and a final "amen."<sup>1</sup>

In the second part, chapters 4-6, Paul turns his attention from the greatness of God to the potential that exists in us—what kind of beings *we* ought to be. This is often done with the voice of admonition.

There is incredible purpose and insight in this approach. What we ought to be, and ultimately what we will be, is based first upon what God is. He is the perfect example of being. We must encounter, witness, and know the perfect example of Being that is found in God before we will know what we ourselves can and should reach for. We must encounter, witness, and know the perfect example of Being that is found in God before we can find the motivation and then the capacity to achieve the godly pattern of Being in ourselves.

Space does not allow us to examine the entire Epistle to the Ephesians. In this discourse, we

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<sup>1</sup> 3.<sup>21</sup>

will limit our discussion, principally, to the first chapter. And of this, we shall examine most closely verses 3-14. These verses constitute the middle, and longest, of three sentences that make up the twenty-three verse first chapter.<sup>2</sup> The first sentence is found in verses 1-2, and contains Paul's greeting to the Ephesians. In the third sentence, verses 15-23, Paul shares the prayer he offers continually that the saints may come to understand and appreciate the incredible blessing it is to have God as an active participant in their lives.

## **b**lessed be god

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In carefully examining the first chapter's second sentence (vs. 3-14), we find that the principle point, the central idea is found in the very first line: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." The entire sentence is one long reflection on why God the Father is worthy of our "blessing;" or, to put it in other words, why we should worship, adore, honor, praise, and stand in awe of Him. This sentence's principle focus is really the principle focus of the first half of the epistle.

Paul surely agrees with the Psalmist, who testified that God "inhabitest the praises of Israel."<sup>3</sup> There is no room for our God in our hearts but what it is occupied, to overflowing, with praise, adoration, and eternal gratitude. Paul would surely have concurred with Ammon's admonition, query, and sure assertion,

Therefore, let us glory, yea, we will glory in the Lord; yea, we will rejoice, for our joy is full; yea, we will praise our God forever. Behold, who can glory too much in the Lord? Yea, who can say too much of his great power, and of his mercy, and of his long-suffering towards the children of men? Behold, I say unto you, I cannot say the smallest

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<sup>2</sup> While in the King Kings Translation there are period marks at the end of verses 6 and 12, these are phantom periods. They are missing in many Greek manuscripts. Additionally, the beginning of the verses that follow—verses 7 and 13—begin in such a way as to telegraph that we have, in fact not arrived at the end of the sentence. Both verses begin with the relative clause "In whom," which refers back to an antecedent. For example, verse seven's "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace," as any English teacher will tell you, is not a complete sentence. In order to be understood, it requires the antecedent of "In *whom*."

<sup>3</sup> Psalm 2.<sup>3</sup>

part which I feel.”<sup>4</sup>

his good pleasure

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Ephesians 1.<sup>3-14</sup> enumerates the many blessings that come to us from Father, and for which we owe Him our heartfelt gratitude, praise, and glory. Before looking at these blessings, however, it is important to acknowledge, as Paul does, why it is that God blesses us with such bounty in the first place.

According to Paul, the bounteous blessings God chooses to bestow are the direct result of “the riches of his grace” (vs. 7). Put differently, they are the result of “his abundant good will.” God is a being of extraordinary good will and liberality. Yes, He “loves” his children—and this love is close and personal, not distant and impersonal. But, God also *likes and enjoys* his children. So the blessings we receive from Him are not, in the first instance, contingent on the kind of beings we are, but on the kind of Being He is—gracious, good-willed, bighearted, and abundantly generous toward His beloved children.

In verse 5 Paul speaks of God acting out of “the good pleasure of his will.” In verse 9 Paul says that the blessings that flow from God are the result of the “good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself.” And in verse 11 Paul speaks of “the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.”

Here we are reminded that God’s *determination* to bless, which existed in Him “before the foundation of the world,” flows from His own inner *desire* to bless. God *wants* to bless. He *needs* to bless. He *lives* to bless. It’s in His very disposition, His personality type, if you will. This is simply the king of Being He is. Because He is a Being of such incredible natural generosity, good will, and grace, existence would, for Him, be meaningless if it were devoted to anything other than acting in concert with His inner desire and His natural good will to bless and beautify the existence of others. In this He finds ultimate joy, meaning, and fulfillment.

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<sup>4</sup> Alma 26.<sup>16</sup>

In summarizing the blessing that come to us from Father, Paul uses a grammatical feature we were all taught to identify in grade school: the prepositional phrase. Paul utilizes the prepositional phrase repeatedly to remind us that while all blessings come *from* God the Father, they come *in, through, and by Christ*. The Father's blessings, which Paul outlines here, are found only *in Christ*. If we would receive them, we must be *in Christ*. If we are outside Christ, we may not discover the extent of Father's ability to bless. Here is a sampling of these prepositional phrases. This grammatical feature is important for the doctrine it teaches rather than the grammar it indicates.

- “blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places *in Christ*.”
- “hath chosen us *in him* [read: in Christ].”
- “made us accepted *in the beloved*.”
- “In whom [read: in Christ] we have redemption.”
- “In whom [read: in Christ] also we have obtained an inheritance.”

Jesus came, principally, to reveal Father to a humanity which did not know or understand Him. In Christ we look upon the most powerful revelation ever presented to mankind of the kind of Being God is. When we observe Jesus' good will; when we observe Jesus' generosity; when we observe Jesus' anxious need to bless; we are, in reality, observing those attributes as they exist in Father. The blessedness of God the Father is revealed to us *in the person of Christ*.

### **a**ll spiritual blessings

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Before looking at each particular blessing that flows to us from Father through Christ, Paul makes the general point that God blesses us “with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places” (1.<sup>3</sup>). In his entire epistle to the Ephesians, Paul speaks repeatedly of the “riches” and “abundance” that flow from Father. There are “the *riches* of his grace; wherein he hath *abounded* toward us” (1.<sup>7-8</sup>); “the *riches* of the glory of his inheritance” (1.<sup>18</sup>); and “the

*greatness* of his power to us-ward” (1.<sup>19</sup>). We are reminded that God is “*rich* in mercy” (2.<sup>4</sup>). Apparently feeling that to speak of the “riches of his grace” is to speak too lightly, too cavalierly of the extent of God’s grace, Paul amplifies the phrase to “the *exceeding* riches of his grace” (2.<sup>7</sup>). And as if this were still not expansive enough, Paul speaks later of “the *unsearchable riches* of Christ” (3.<sup>8</sup>). There is the “*manifold* wisdom of God” (3.<sup>10</sup>). In speaking of divinity’s love, “which passeth knowledge” (3.<sup>19</sup>), Paul speaks of its limitless “breadth, and length, and depth, and height” (3.<sup>18</sup>). Finally, Paul claims that God “is able to do *exceeding abundantly* above all that we ask or think” (3.<sup>20</sup>).

No matter how expansive, how rich, how abundant we esteem God’s grace, mercy, love, and power to be, we will have underestimated it. Paul is in full agreement with all the writers of scripture, including, again, the ancient Psalmist who, attempting to help us understand the massiveness of these Divine attributes, surprises us beyond words with his expansive vision of our God.

“For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him.”<sup>5</sup>

Let the reader, then, get out their ruler and start measuring. Open the physics book. See how far out, how high above the earth the heavens extend. If we can measure it, if we can find an end, if we can discover a place where “his curtain is [not] stretched out still” (Moses 7.<sup>30</sup>), then are we justified in putting limits to his mercy and grace.

With this reminder that God blesses us “with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places,” Paul is prepared to catalogue a few of the rich blessings that flow from God through Christ and bring such a powerful sense of euphoria into the believer’s life.

*1. Father has “chosen us in [Christ]... that we should be holy and without blame before [Father]” (1.<sup>4</sup>).*

Long before the world was, God envisioned a life of holiness and blamelessness for his children. But, how was this to be achieved? Was a sense of blamelessness to be achieved

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<sup>5</sup> Ps. 103.<sup>11</sup>

through perfect, sinless obedience? In and through our own “spiritual performance”? No, no, a thousand times no! God knew, approved of, and planned for this unavoidable reality: “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.”<sup>6</sup>

However, neither was it ever intended that we live out our days with a sense of continuous blame due to the sin we would, on a daily basis, inevitably commit. We *were* intended to acquire a sense of being blameless before God in and through the complete sufficiency of God’s righteous and merciful inclination to overlook and forgive the sin we inevitably commit. And this would be found “in Christ.”

Through Christ and his atonement—and only in Christ and his atonement—we may lay our head down at the end of each day with an assurance that God does not point the finger of blame at us. When Father looks down upon us, He finds us blameless and holy. In ourselves, there may be cause for suspense, but in Christ there is no space for suspense to exist. And all of this, because this is how Father willed and intended it “from before the foundation of the earth.”

*2. Father has “predestinated us unto adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself [Father]” (1.<sup>5</sup>).*

There is one sense, of course, in which all, whether they know it or not, are children of God whether they want to be or not. There is no choice in the matter: He fathered their spirits without seeking their input. They cannot choose another Father. But Paul is speaking here of something very different. He is speaking about a childhood that we experience by choice; a relationship that comes by faith in Christ.

While all may technically be children of God, not all know it, and certainly not all experience it as a lively daily reality. To use an earthly analogy, a child may be the son or daughter of a father who is absent from their lives. While the father certainly fathered them, he does not act the part of a father in the child’s emotional or psychological experience. The child has no relationship with the father. When Paul speaks here of our being children of God, he is not so

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<sup>6</sup> Rom. 3.<sup>23</sup>

much speaking of a “technical” relationship or even of God’s Fatherly love and care, but of our actually feeling and experiencing a Fatherly relationship with Deity.

If we are to experience a true and lively sense of God as our Father, it is to be found in Christ. It comes only to those who accept Christ as the perfect representation of Father. We know, acknowledge and experience His incredible fatherly commitment to us through the personal ministry of Jesus Christ—not his thirty-three year earthly mission only, but his continuing ministry in our lives here, now, today. Paul, then, is speaking here of a lively, real, and present awareness on our part of God’s commitment and love for us—His Fatherly good-will toward us. He is speaking of something that is with us powerfully as we live each day’s challenges. And, again, he is speaking of something we experience by choice, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Now, much ink has been spilt in discussion about “predestination.” All too often, it seems, much of traditional Christianity and LDS thought and comment on the concept has ignored Paul’s purpose in this long single sentence, and therefore missed Paul’s point. This has led readers and commentators to explore places that Paul, in writing this sentence, almost certainly never intended and, likely, would have found unrecognizable. For this reason, it is necessary to pause and take a moment to examine Paul’s statement concerning God’s predestination.

We might have a look at the Greek to see if it clarifies the concept of predestination. Frankly, it doesn’t. It is much more helpful to remember that this is a small part of a long sentence, and that the intent of the sentence is that we become more inclined to “bless God.” In other words, the sentence is about God. To the extent that it is about mankind, it is about our faithful response to Jesus’ testimony about God and the attitude we should have toward a most generous Father.

Paul has nothing to say here specifically about one of Calvinism’s favorite musings on the subject of predestination—who is and who is not “predestined.” It does not, and never intended to comment on why one accepts Christ’s witness of Father while another rejects it. Neither, I suggest, is Paul interested in one of Mormonism’s favorite musings on the

subject—how or why individuals are “predestined” or “foreordained,” what they were or were not in pre-earth life existences.

If he was interested at all in such questions, they are not addressed here. Here he is single minded. He wants us to know that the Father, in the eternal generosity that is such a part of his character, decided long, long ago—long before we even came into being and it was known what we would do and become—that He would embrace those who accepted His Son’s witness of the Father’s character with all the intimacy of a Father for his children.

That is all, I suggest, that Paul cares about here. In this single sentence, He is interested in talking about our character, either in earth life or pre-earth lives, only insofar as we either trust Jesus’ testimony of Father or we don’t. He simply desires us to more fully appreciate God’s willingness and readiness to enter into intimate relations with those of us who trust Jesus’ testimony concerning the Father’s generosity. That willingness and readiness to enter into intimate relations with us is based upon the character of God, reveals his incredible good nature and generosity, and predates even our existence. It is as eternal as He is.

If there is any mystery here, it is in the unexpected and bounteous goodness of God. The Calvinists at least got that much right.

### *3. Father has “made us accepted in the beloved” (1.<sup>6</sup>).*

We might often wonder, “Am I acceptable to God?” “Is he pleased with me?” In answering this question, we might, if we are shortsighted and something other than gospel centered, consider only our personal performance. This would, undoubtedly, lead us to answer, “No, I am not acceptable. He is not pleased. There are too many things amiss in my life.” But, as we say, this is shortsighted. We who strive to follow Him, but still, due to the weakness of the flesh, find weakness and failure, can confidently call upon God in the name of Jesus Christ, acknowledge our sins, and plead sincerely for forgiveness and assistance. As we do so with faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, we may feel and experience Father’s loving acceptance and anxious presence in our lives, notwithstanding the inadequacy of our personal performance.



Only in Christ do we find the longed for assurance of Father's acceptance. Jesus reveals the existence and reality of Father's good-will toward us. Because of him and his revelation we not only know it, but experience it.

4. *"In [Christ] we have redemption through his [Christ's] blood, the forgiveness of sins according to [consistent with] his [Father's] grace." (1.<sup>7</sup>).*

Forgiveness of sin, likened to emancipation from slavery or debt, is found only in Christ. Without Christ, though we might *want* to repent, though we might *yearn* for forgiveness, yet repentance and forgiveness would not only be out of reach, they would be, in our minds, nonexistent. Jesus didn't "invent" forgiveness, of course. Rather, in Christ we discover that God is and has been from the foundation of the world of "a forgiving disposition" (Lecturers on Faith, Lecture Third). He is inclined, naturally, internally toward forgiveness. Jesus came to reveal this truth. Through him our trust in God's disinclination to go hunting for sin in us (remember Paul's testimony that Charity—the pure love of Christ—"thinketh no evil;" it doesn't go around looking for and thinking on the sin of others), and His inclination to forgive sin when we acknowledge it, becomes exceedingly strong. With this strong faith, the temptation to deny and hide our sins and weaknesses is shattered. We approach God and acknowledge our sin much more willingly, much more hopefully. This in turn leads to our much more effectively using the Atonement—Father's attachment to us—to overcome sin and error.

5. *Father has "made known unto us the mystery of his will...that...he might gather together in one all things in Christ" (1.<sup>9-10</sup>).*

While Paul principally has God's unexpected inclusion of gentiles into the gospel in mind, it would be too restrictive a reading to stop there. "All things" that are gathered unto the Father, are gathered in or through Christ. No man cometh unto the Father, but by me,"<sup>7</sup> Jesus taught his disciples on their last night together. Through Christ, Father has revealed his inner desire—an inner desire not guessed at or even imagined by a humankind too small, puny and restrictive in their estimation of God—to be at-one with them. We imagine a God often

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<sup>7</sup> John 14:6

divided or withdrawn from us. Not so, says Jesus. He is at-one with us whether we feel at-one with him or not. To be aware of and actually experience his complete attachment, involvement, engagement, participation, unity—At-one-ment—we must come unto Christ. In Christ we will discover what is always present in the bosom of Father.<sup>a</sup>

As we are gathered individually in Christ and discover the incredible fidelity toward us that already exists in Father, our fidelity toward Him increases. We become more faithful. At the same time, our attachment, or At-one-ment, with His other children—all His children no matter their religion, nationality, sexual orientation, color, faithfulness—develops into that which is truly God like.

6. *“In [Christ] also we have obtained an inheritance” (1.11).*

If we are to enter the kingdom of God and live in his eternal presence, we must first enter into Christ. “There shall be no other name given nor any other way nor means whereby salvation can come unto the children of men, only in and through the name of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent.”<sup>8</sup> Peter eloquently says it like this:

“Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”<sup>9</sup>

We are reminded of Jesus’ comforting words spoken to disciples, who, anxious about his impending departure, wondered what and how they would do without him, and how they would find their way back to him.

“Let not your heart be troubled... In my Father’s house are many mansions... I go to

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<sup>8</sup> Mosiah 3.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>9</sup> 1 Peter 1.<sup>3-5</sup>

prepare a place for you.”<sup>10</sup>

While we sometimes read these verses and then launch into a discussion about “Degrees of Glory,” I think it unlikely on this night that Jesus was “teaching theology.” He was trying to comfort anxious and worried disciples. In comforting them he let them know that there was plenty of room in his Father’s kingdom—lots, and lots, and lots of room—for each of them. And it was Jesus who would prepare each of their places.

*7, “In Christ...ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance” (1. 13-14).*

This blessing alone could be a subject for discussion that might extend over pages and pages. To be brief we shall say this much. First, on his last night with his disciples, Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to be a comforter, revelator, and one who empowers. Thus, in the first place, the Holy Spirit of promise is the Holy Spirit that Jesus promised to send. The promised Holy Spirit is found only in Christ.

Second, when Jesus sends the promised Holy Spirit into our lives it brings “promise.” We speak of the “promise” of a young talent. The Holy Spirit of promise sheds light upon the promise or potential that God has placed within us. It imbues our spirit with a sense of hope and optimism. We begin to believe that there is promise or potential in us beyond what we might have imagined. The Holy Spirit brings the promise of power sufficient to overcome all weakness and acquire every godly attribute. Finally, with this promise of potential and power, we begin to feel right now, today, the assurance (not “guarantee”) of eternal life.

“And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; *and* he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.

These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> See John 14.<sup>1-2</sup>

<sup>11</sup> 1 John 5.<sup>11-13</sup>

One may ask themselves, “Am I saved? Were I to die tonight, would I be prepared to meet my God and enter His presence?” If we are in Christ, where the Holy Spirit that brings promise abides, the quick and confident reply is, “Yes, in Christ, I am worthy. Because of the infusion of promise which the Holy Spirit has brought into my life, I shall enter His presence.” Without this, life is filled with suspense and doubt that leads to discouragement, even depression, which can lead to our quitting the fight and yielding to Satan’s fiery darts.

The Holy Spirit of Promise, then, like a down payment on a house, convinces us of God’s rock-solid determination to usher us into an inheritance “incorruptible, and undefiled”<sup>12</sup> and leads “unto the praise of his glory.”<sup>13</sup>

## Conclusion

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So, there we have it—one single sentence. But what a packed sentence it is! What a bounteous list of benefits God promises those who come unto His Son and accept in faith the Son’s faithful witness of God’s incredible good natured feelings for, and his generosity toward, his children. We started our discussion with Paul’s opening assertion: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Paul ends his three chapter meditation on the greatness of God with this affirmation:

“Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.”<sup>14</sup>

Eighteen hundred years later a young man of similar experiences would pen words of similar feelings when contemplating the greatness of God.

“Let the mountains shout for joy, and all ye valleys cry aloud; and all ye seas and dry lands tell the wonders of your Eternal King! And ye rivers, and brooks, and rills, flow

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<sup>12</sup> 1 Peter 1.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Eph. 1.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> 3.<sup>21</sup>

down with gladness. Let the woods and all the trees of the field praise the Lord; and ye solid rocks weep for joy! And let the sun, moon, and the morning stars sing together, and let all the sons of God shout for joy! And let the eternal creations declare his name forever and ever!”<sup>15</sup>

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

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<sup>a</sup> We often speak of “the Atonement.” I prefer to speak of “Atonement,” no article. It is not a *thing, a happening* that must be distinguished for other things or happenings. It could never be confused with any other thing or happening. It is a *state* with no analogies, no look-alikes, no parallels, no competitors.

We often speak of “the Atonement of Jesus Christ” as if he created it, made it, wrought it, invented it, brought it into being, made it possible. Now, if we mean by this that, without Jesus’ labored witness unto death, we would not have known, appreciated, or experienced an At-one-ment that already existed in the very bosom of God, then fine. I can accept that Jesus was, in his labored witness unto death speaking to a blind and recalcitrant mankind. But if we mean in any way that At-one-ment would not have existed in God our Eternal Father if not for Jesus’ labored witness unto death, then we are just dead wrong. I can have nothing to do with such, frankly, hateful and harmful doctrine. It does violence to God’s children and does violence to God. In his labored witness unto death Jesus was not speaking to a blind and recalcitrant God. He did not wrest At-one-ment from a reluctant God through his labored witness unto death.

The word At-one-ment speaks principally of that which exists in God Himself. It describes what kind of a Being He *IS*. God lives *at* or *in* a state of oneness. It might just be, in fact, that this is the principal attribute of deity, what makes God, God: oneness, indivisibleness and un-dividedness. He cannot, in Himself, be divided from anything.

Look closely at the word: *AT*-one-ment. **AT!** One can be *by*-home, or *near*-home, or moving *toward*-home. In each case one would not be *AT*-home. But one *can be* *AT*-home. Big difference. It isn’t “*by*-one-ment,” or “*near*-one-ment,” or “*toward*-one-ment.” It might be any of those if it were mankind’s feelings about and response to God that the word sought to describe. “Jesus came to move men from “no-

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<sup>15</sup> DC 128.<sup>23</sup>

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one-ment” and “toward-one-ment.” If this is truly the point of the word, then it should have been “toward-one-ment.”

But it’s AT-one-ment. There is already arrival. There is a state of oneness and it has been arrived AT. This suggests, again, that the word is first and foremost revelatory of the kind of Being God is, what resides in His bosom. The importance of the word, then, is to testify to a mankind with no-one-ment that there is a Being out there who has arrived, who has always lived At-one-ment. He is At-one with all. He is At-one with you. This At-one-ment he feels toward and lives with you is unforced. It is not “practiced.” It flows out of the place He IS. It’s where He’s AT.

How empowering is this!! I don’t need to jump through hoops in the hopes of adjusting His feelings and experience of me. And this is certainly not what Jesus was doing. No, Jesus was trying to adjust our feelings toward God. He was trying to reveal the truth about God. God does not feel divided from us. He does not feel to withdraw. He does not resist unity, and participation and involvement, and engagement with us. He remains attached. We are the resisters. And like all resisters, we resist because we sense resistance. We resist because we have believed in a God who resists us. This is Satan’s lie, not Jesus’ truth.

God does not resist us. He does not disengage with us. He might, if He were something other than the perfect parent. But he is the perfect parent. As such he remains engaged, involved, united, AT-ONE with his beloved children. Always and forever. Only in believing Jesus’ labored witness unto death that this eternal and unbreakable At-one-ment exists in the bosom of God, can we find At-one-ment for ourselves.

The next time you pray, then, don’t pray with a view of convincing God to have something to do with you—become involved, engaged, and united with you. Rather, pray that you might experience the involvement, engagement, unity, attachment, participation—the At-one-ment—that is perpetually in him.