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THE GRACE OF GOD

By: C. D. Cole

Titus 2:11, 12: *“For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.”*

Grace is the divine perfection or attribute from which proceeds gracious dealings on the part of God towards sinful men. The grace of God is the one foundation of the sinner’s hope. Without the grace of God every sinner would be forever doomed to endless despair. Grace is the lone source from which flows goodwill, love, and salvation. God’s love and salvation do not find their reason in the sinner but in the grace of God. If God were not gracious justice would step in and execute His wrath upon every sinner. It becomes every saint to say, *“But by the grace of God I am what I am...,”* I Corinthians 15:10.

Grace is hard to define. It has been defined as the unmerited favor of God. But it is more than that. Others have defined it as the favor of God to the ill-deserving. This is better but even this does not go deep enough. Grace is salvation to the hell-deserving. Dr. Dale defined grace as love which passes beyond all claims to love. That makes God’s love to sinners a gracious love. Dr. Alexander Whyte says: “Grace and love are essentially the same, only grace is love manifesting itself and operating under certain conditions, and adapting itself to certain circumstances. As, for instance, love has no limit or law such as grace has. Love may exist between equals, or it may rise to those above

us, or flow down to those in any way beneath us. But grace, from its nature, has only one direction it can take. **GRACE ALWAYS FLOWS DOWN.** A king’s love to his equals, or to his own royal house, is love; but his love to his subjects is called grace. And thus it is that God’s love to sinners is always called GRACE in the Scriptures. It is love indeed, but it is love to creatures, and to creatures that do not deserve His love. And therefore all He does for us in Christ, and all that is disclosed to us of His goodwill in the Gospel, is called Grace.

Thomas Spurgeon says of grace: “It defies definition and beggars description. There are some things of earth which no human pen or brush has done justice – storms, rainbows, cataracts, sunsets, iceberg, snowflakes, and dewdrops. Because God made them, man fails to describe them. Who, then, shall tell forth fully that which God has and is?”

In the Bible grace is set forth by way of contrast with other things. One of the best ways to get at the meaning of grace is to study it in its Scriptural contrasts.

Grace is contrasted with debt as a principle upon which salvation comes to the sinner. Romans 4:4, *“Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.”* If salvation were earned, then it would be a matter of debt and not of grace. The very moment you feel that God was under obligation to save any sinner, that moment you make salvation a debt of God to man. There can be no grace where there is obligation.

Grace is contrasted with law as a principle by which God saves sinners. Sin cannot have damning power over the believer, Romans 6:14, *“For sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace.”* To go to the law for justification is to fall away from grace (not out of grace). Galatians 5:4, *“Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.”* Law condemns: Romans 3:19, *“Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.”* Grace justifies: Romans 3:24, *“Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”* Law curses: Galatians 3:10, *“For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.”* Grace redeems from the curse: Galatians 3:13, *“Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.”* Law says, “Do and live.” Luke 10:26-28, *“He said unto him, What is written in the law? How readest thou? And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself. And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.”* Grace says, “Believe and live.” John 5:24, *“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and*

believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." Law condemns the best man: Philipians 3:4, 8, 9, "Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more:...Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ. And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." Grace saves the worst man: I Corinthians 6:9-11, "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." The law looks for good men whom it may approve: Romans 2:7-11, "To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile: But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile: For there is no respect of persons with God." Grace seeks bad men whom it may save: I Corinthians 15:9, 10, "For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me."

Grace is contrasted with works in the scheme of human redemption. To introduce works as the cause of salvation is to destroy grace. Romans 11:6, "And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work." Grace and works will no more mix in effecting salvation than will an acid and an alkali, or oil and water.

The channel of grace is the death of Christ. There is no conflict between grace and justice. Grace reigns through righteousness by providing satisfaction for justice. The law got its pay from Christ for the sinner's debt. Christ, as surety for His people, received just wages for their sins. Justice demands the punishment of sin and Christ bear the punishment for our sins in His own body on the tree. I Peter 2:24, "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed." The death of Christ settles the question whether salvation is or is not by grace. That great sacrifice was worse than wasted, if man can save himself. If righteousness is through the law, then Christ is dead in vain. Galatians 2:21, "I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain." In view of the sufferings of Christ, penances, and pieties, and performances are less than vanity in effecting salvation. Self-righteousness cannot thrive on the slopes of the hill called Calvary.

The grace of God is manifold: I Peter 4:10, "As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." It operates at every point in human salvation. Every act of God is an act of grace and every exercise of the sinner's will, in being saved, is the result of efficient and inwrought grace. And let me emphasize that the will of the sinner is exercised in salvation, otherwise he could be saved in his sleep.

I have heard people talk as if they

thought the grace of God was exhausted in the death of Christ. Romans 8:32, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" The same grace that gave Christ to die for us must also work in us if we are to appreciate and appropriate His sacrificial death. We believe through grace: Acts 18:27, "And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace." It is the work of grace in us that makes Christ precious to us. Christ is not precious to the graceless man. He sees no value in His atoning death.

THE PRICELESS CHAIN OF HUMAN REDEMPTION

It is now our delightful task to examine the glorious and priceless chain of human redemption. Every link in this chain is stamped with the hall mark of grace.

ELECTING GRACE

The Scriptures speak of God's elect. Luke 18:7, "And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?" Romans 8:33, "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth." Colossians 3:12, "Put on therefore, as the elect of God..." Titus 1:1, "Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness." Just a few of the many references.

Of the Jews Paul said there was a remnant saved: Romans 11:5, 7, "Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace...What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded." II Timothy 2:10, "Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory." II Thessalonians 2:13, 14, "But we are bound to give thanks

alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth. Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." From a fair analysis of these verses, the following truths are deduced: (1) Election is of God; (2) The elect obtain salvation; (3) The choice or election was made "from the beginning;" (4) The election was of grace, that is, there was nothing to merit it in the one chosen; (5) Salvation is through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth, necessitating the preaching of the gospel.

Arminians try to make the doctrine of election seem ridiculous and unjust by using illustrations where obligations are apparent. If there are ten men drowning and I am in a boat and have the means to rescue them and save five, leaving the rest to drown, then I am cruel and unjust, because I am obligated to do good unto all men. If a man has two children in a burning building and he saves one of them, leaving the other to burn to death, then he is cruel and unjust. He is obligated to save both of them. Illustrations like these will not do in illustrating the electing grace of God, because God is under no obligation to save His rebellious subjects.

Here is a better illustration. Suppose God were to determine to save devils. Would He have to save all if He saves any? Would He not have the right to save as few or as many as He pleased? Certainly, for He would not be under obligation to save any. Those saved would be saved by grace, and the rest would get justice.

PREDESTINATING GRACE

Predestination is God's purpose to make His foreknown or chosen people His sons and make them like His only begotten Son. Romans 8:29, "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren." Ephesians 1:4-6, "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we

should be holy and without blame before him in love: 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." And all this is to be to the praise of the glory of His grace. The chosen are by nature the children of wrath, and all that God purposed to do for them was out of mere grace, and not because of anything due them.

CALLING GRACE

Romans 8:30, "Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called:..." This is the effectual call and always results in salvation. Galatians 1:15, "But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace." II Timothy 1:9, "Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began." I Corinthians 1:24, "But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God." Calling grace is an in-wrought work opening the eyes of the soul to see and the heart to receive Christ as Saviour and Lord.

JUSTIFYING GRACE

Romans 8:30, "...and whom he called, them he also justified..." Justification is the act of God declaring or accounting a person just or righteous. It means to be free from all condemnation - just as free as if the law had never been violated. God is under no obligation to account a sinner as just, therefore it is of grace. The sinner does nothing to merit it, and therefore, again it is of grace. The fact that faith is the instrumental cause of justification does not deny that justification is of grace, because faith itself is the gift of grace. We believe through grace: Acts 18:27, "And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: w ho, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through

grace." I Corinthians 3:5, "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?" John 6:65, "And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father."

GLORIFYING GRACE

Romans 8:30, "...and whom he justified, them he also glorified." The believer is assured of more grace to come. I Peter 1:13, "Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." I John 3:2, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."

Now in order to be fitted for eternal bliss and glory, the sinner must be chosen, predestinated, called, justified, and glorified; and God does all these through grace, and through Christ as the channel of grace. We do not deserve any of these blessings, and God is under no obligation to do them. Every step is a work of grace.

"Grace first contrived the way

To save rebellious man;

And all the steps that grace display

Which drew the wondrous plan.

Grace led my roving feet
To tread the heavenly road;
And new supplies each hour I meet,
While pressing on to God."

*Dr. C. D. Cole

Brother Cole, a Kentucky native, pastored in Kentucky and Florida, and taught at the Toronto Baptist Seminary in Canada. A

prolific writer, he authored at least eight theological books. The Bryan Station Baptist Church is honored to be entrusted with his complete works, and we are privileged to keep his writing in print and available to the next generation.



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