

GRACE DEFINED

By Milburn Cockrell

“For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men” (Tit. 2:11).

My text speaks of the saving grace of God, or grace which actually brings salvation. In this text “grace” especially means “the gospel of grace” which is the declaration of the free love and favor of God as manifested in Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament the gospel was hid in types and shadows (Eph. 3:3-9), but in the New Testament dispensation Jesus Christ is the personification of the grace of God. This grace has appeared to all kinds of men by the preaching of the gospel.

THE WORD GRACE

In the Old Testament the word “grace” comes from a Hebrew word (chen) which means “kindness or favor.” In the New Testament the Greek word (charis) means “the kindly disposition from which the kindly act proceeds, graciousness, longkindness, goodwill generally” (An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words by W. E. Vine, p. 170). It is related to the Greek word for gift (charisma), and in the King James Version the word for grace (charis) is translated “gift” in II Corinthians 8:4. Our English word “grace” means “favor or goodwill. . .the freely given. . .unmerited favor and love of God. . .the condition of being in God’s favor or one of his elect” (Webster’s Family Dictionary, p. 409).

Perhaps one of the most concise definitions of grace was given by an old black brother who had been a slave for 40 years. When asked, “What is grace?” he replied, “Grace is what I should call giving something for nothing.” I doubt you can improve upon this simple definition.

Abraham Booth (1734-1806), the Baptist theologian, said grace “is the eternal and absolutely free favour of God, manifested in the vouchsafement of spiritual and eternal blessings to the guilty and unworthy” (The Reign of Grace, p. 47). A. W. Pink (1886-1952) tells us that grace “is a perfection of the Divine character which is exercised only toward the elect. Neither in the Old Testament nor in the New is the grace

of God ever mentioned in connection with mankind generally, still less with the lower orders of His creatures” (The Attributes of God, p. 60).

Another good definition is given by Burton Scott Easton in The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia. He declares that grace “is an attitude on God’s part that proceeds entirely from within Himself, and that is conditioned in no way by anything in the objects of His favor” (Vol. II, p. 1291).

SCRIPTURAL DEFINITIONS

Any reader of the Bible can see the word “grace” means “goodwill and favor” (Ruth 2:2; I Sam. 1:18; II Sam. 16:4). In Ephesians 1:5 “the good pleasure of his will” is the same as “the riches of his grace” (Eph. 1:7). The grace of God is “the kindness and love of God” (Tit. 3:4), the love and pity of God (Isa. 63:9).

The Lord styles Himself: “The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth. . .” (Ex. 34:6).

GRACE EXCLUDES HUMAN MERIT

Grace means unmerited favor, mercy shown when punishment is deserving. What is done in grace is done graciously. Grace is unattracted by anything in, or from, or by the objects upon which it bestows blessings. It can neither be sought nor bought by the recipients. If grace could be merited, it would cease to be unmerited favor. As A. W. Pink expressed it: “When a thing is said to be of ‘grace’ we mean that the recipient has no claim upon it, that it was in no-wise due him. It comes to him as pure charity, and, at first, unasked and undesired”; (Attributes of God, p. 60).

The word “grace” presupposes unworthiness in its object. It cannot be exercised where there is the slightest degree of human merit recognized. Romans 11:6 declares: “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.” God’s grace and man’s works are diametrically opposite and totally irreconcilable. When you add

works to grace, then grace changes its meaning; it is no longer grace. The idea of being saved by merit contradicts the very idea of grace. Grace is not grace unless it is altogether free from human merit. When you hear someone talking about what we do to earn God's grace, you can mark it down that such a person does not know "the grace of God in truth" (Col. 1:6).

Grace cannot be withheld because of demerit in its object. It would cease to be grace, if God withheld it because of human failure and sin. Grace in salvation can only be exercised by God where worthiness is banished forever. God's grace saves the chiefest of sinners (I Tim. 1:15), the ungodly (Rom. 5:6), the enemies of God (Rom. 5:10); yea, even those who are "by nature the children of wrath, even as others" (Eph. 2:3).

GRACE CANNOT INCUR DEBT

Grace is no sense gracious if God is under any condition of a debt incurred. There is no payment required, past, present, or future. God saves undeserving sinners by unrecompensed and unconditional free grace. "Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness" (Rom. 4:4-5). Grace and debt are distinct and different; they are irreconcilable. When a man works for wages, the wages are due him as a debt. But God is not a debtor to any man. The payment of an honest debt can never be an act of grace. When you hear a person talking of God owing man salvation and saying God must give every man a chance to be saved you can be certain he is a stranger to grace and to God.

Man being a sinner by nature, practice, and choice could never make God a debtor. Men are "children of disobedience" (Eph. 2:2) and "condemned already" (John 3:18). They are "under sin" (Rom. 3:9; Gal. 3:22), "guilty before God" (Rom. 3:19), and in "unbelief" (Rom. 11:32). There is no possibility of such people putting God under obligation to them.

SOVEREIGN GRACE

Grace reigns in man's salvation (Rom. 5:21), and the God of all grace Who sits upon the throne is sovereign. God told Moses: "I will make all my

goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy" (Ex. 33:19). The God of all grace dispenses grace according to His goodwill and sovereign pleasure. It is not dispensed to all without exception, but to all God has appointed to obtain salvation by Jesus Christ. This is all to the glory of God's grace (Eph. 1:4-11).

There can be no election without reprobation. "What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded" (Rom. 11:7). "And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed. But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people. . ." (I Pet. 2:8-9). God does not show His grace to the reprobate. Of the Anakims it is written: "For it was of the LORD to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that he might destroy them utterly, and that they might have no favour (Hebrew techinnah translated "grace" in Ezra 9:8 in KJV), but that he might destroy them, as the LORD commanded Moses" (Josh. 11:20).

FREE GRACE

Grace must always be free, for none ever purchased it. Romans 3:24 tells us: "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." The word rendered here "freely" (dorean) is rendered "without a cause" in John 15:25. We are justified "without a cause", or without any meritorious cause in ourselves. We are justified wholly and solely by God's grace or favor, plus nothing, minus nothing. The word "freely" excludes all consideration of any thing in man as the cause of his justification.

Arminians are more concerned with man's "free will" than with God's free grace. They contend that man's will can never be other than free, for the person using it can never be prevented from willing, any more than thinking. They say it is either free will or no will. Arminians fail to consider that man's will is under the control of his totally depraved nature. Paul wrote: "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth

no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not" (Rom. 7:18). According to holy Scriptures, man is a bound immoral agent, and not a free moral agent. To boast of the freedom of the will to do anything spiritually good is unscriptural, for man's evil will is not free till it is by grace made free. We have no power to become the sons of God until God's grace gives us the faith of God's elect (Tit. 1:1; John 1:12; Phil. 1:29). Acts 18:27 speaks of some who "had believed through grace." Arminians cheapen God's grace; yea, they are haters of the doctrine of sovereign, free, distinguishing grace!

Mr. McLaren, and Mr. Gustart, were both ministers of the Tolboth church. When Mr. McLaren was dying, Mr. Gustart paid him a visit, and put the question to him: "What are you doing, brother?" His answer was, "I'll tell you what I am doing, brother; I am gathering together all my prayers, all my sermons, all my good deeds, all my ill deeds; and I am going to throw them all overboard and swim to glory on the plank of Free Grace."

Hervey once said: "Had I all the faith of the patriarchs, all the zeal of the prophets, all the good works of the apostles, the constancy of the martyrs, and all the flaming devotion of seraphs, I would disclaim them all in point of dependence, and rely only on free grace. I would count all but dung and dross when put in competition with the infinitely precious death and meritorious righteousness of my dear Saviour Jesus Christ. . ."

ETERNAL GRACE

Grace is as old as the covenant of grace and the eternal council of the Godhead. God purposed to give us grace before He imparted it: "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" (II Tim. 1:9). Our calling and salvation must be traced back to God's eternal purpose of grace. He was self-moved, impelled by motives, not from without, but from within Himself. The purpose of God to save us was not called forth by any worthiness in us, but it was "according to his good pleasure which he had purposed in himself" (Eph. 1:9).

This grace was given to us in our covenant Head “before the world began.” We did not exist in eternity past, but our Redeemer and Representative did. This grace was given to Christ for us when we were chosen in Christ (Eph.1:4). This donation of eternal grace occurred before we existed and before we had done any good or evil (Rom. 9:11). Grace that began in eternity past will last till eternity future.

INCOMPREHENSIBLE GRACE

In Ephesians 3:8 it is written: “Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Eph. 3:8). “The unsearchable riches of Christ” means the riches of God’s grace which center in Christ. There is a mighty treasure of grace and love laid up in Christ Jesus. The length, depth, breadth, and height of God’s grace is incomprehensible. Grace is like a boundless, shoreless, bottomless ocean.

IRRESISTIBLE GRACE

What does the term “irresistible grace” mean? It means the love and favor of God in Christ is irresistible in the elect when it pleases God to reveal His Son to them (Gal. 1:15-16). I do not mean by this term that God drags rebellious sinners to Heaven against their will. This is the lie told by our opponents to prejudice people against what we believe. I mean the power of God’s grace makes the sinner willing to come to Christ. I mean, as the Bible teaches, that all the Father gave to Christ in the covenant of redemption will come to Him (John 6:37). Nothing can prevent the eternal purpose of God to save His people by grace. We sometimes speak of this as effectual calling.

The grace of God attacks hostile thoughts of men and brings every thought into obedience to Christ. In II Corinthians 10:4-5 it is written: “(For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.” Ignorance and love of sin are Satan’s strongholds in the mind of man. Vain imaginations, carnal reasonings, and high thoughts exalt themselves

against the knowledge of God. All of these strong holds are pulled down by victorious grace and the power of God.

The term “irresistible grace” does not mean that the sinner may not for a time resist God, for he certainly does. I mean invincible grace will triumph over all human resistance. No sinner is saved without his own hearty will and concurrence. But he is not willing to be saved till victorious grace makes him so. “Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power. . .” (Ps. 110:3). The gift of saving grace involves “the effectual working of his power” (Eph. 3:7).

Why does the sinner at first refuse the call of the gospel? Because he is unconscious of his ruined condition. He knows not the evil of sin nor the strictness of God’s moral law. He has never become mindful of the majesty of God whom he has offended. He does not realize he possesses an incurably wicked heart. He sees no beauty in Christ that he should desire Him. The sinner is perfectly content to rely on his wisdom, his power, and his supposed self-righteousness. Nothing but irresistible grace can awaken him from this condition.

Arminian Baptists are very inconsistent. They say that a man may resist God’s saving grace, but then once saved by grace it becomes irresistible (man can’t fall from grace). Fallen man can will himself into Christ, but he can’t will himself out of Christ. This gives more liberty to the unsaved man than the man who is saved!

Victorious grace comes to show the sinner how terrible his plight is and that he deserves the wrath of God. The Spirit of grace causes the sinner to see he is a lost, condemned, helpless creature, standing on the brink of Hell-fire. At this point the poor sinner throws his supposed good works to the wind and flees to Christ as his only refuge. He casts himself upon free grace, for free grace alone can meet his need. Then he sings:

Amazing grace! how sweet the sound,

That saved a wretch like me!

I once was lost, but now am found,

Was blind, but now I see.

**T'was grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed.**

GRACE AND CHRIST

Jesus Christ is “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14, 16). All the fullness of the God of all grace (I Pet. 5:10) dwells in the Son of God (Col. 1:19; 2:9). There was found in Christ both the graciousness which bestows favor and the actual gift bestowed. Christ was full of the grace of God. There is enough grace in Christ for all His people.

In II Timothy 2:1 it is written: “Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.” In Christ is a fountain, redundant, overflowing, ever-flowing for believers, for “of his fullness have we all received, and grace for grace” (John 1:16). Christ is not only the fountain and foundation of grace, but He also gives us grace to receive grace, one grace after another, grace upon grace.

As God, Christ is the Author and Giver of grace. As the Mediator, He is the Purchaser and Procurer of grace.

All the grace in us comes to us by Christ as a conduit. This is why Paul speaks of “the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ” (I Cor. 1:4). This grace was given us in Christ before the foundation of the world (II Tim. 1:9). Adam was the conveyor of sin and death to his seed. Even so, Christ, the Second Adam, is the conveyor of life and grace to His seed. From Adam we received corruption upon corruption, and from the Second Adam we receive grace for grace. We have no grace but what we received from Jesus Christ.

There is no grace for those who live and die outside of Christ. I believe I heard someone ask, “How do you get into Christ?” I answer by an act of God the Father: “But of him (God the Father) are ye in Christ Jesus. . .” (I Cor. 1:30). God put us in Christ by sovereign election: “According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world. . .” (Eph. 1:4). In time God creates us in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:10). As a consequence of this

election and regeneration, these people believe the gospel: “. . .and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed” (Acts 13:48; cf. John 10:26; 17:20; Phil. 1:29). In this sense they believe into Jesus Christ (John 3:15-16, 36). Then to declare this experience of grace before the world they are baptized into Jesus Christ: “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal. 3:26-27; cf. Rom. 6:3).

GRACE AND GLORY

In Psalm 84:11 it is written: “For the LORD God is a sun and a shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.” Thomas Brooks well said, “Grace is glory in the bud, and glory is grace at the full.” Another has said, “Grace is the bud of glory; glory is the flower of grace.” God will give grace and glory, both in due time, both as needed, both to the full, both with absolute certainty. All grace and all glory is a free gift of God’s unfathomable love displayed in Jesus Christ.

What more could we ask of God? What more do we need in time and eternity? Heaven be praised! God gives grace and glory. You cannot separate the two. In II Timothy 2:1 we see Christ as the fountain and foundation of grace: “. . .the grace that is in Christ Jesus.” Then in verse 10 of this same chapter we see the same Christ who give us grace also give salvation “with eternal glory.” Thus there is an inseparable union between grace and glory. They are related as cause and effect. God gives grace to save our souls from sin and glory to sanctify us for the eternal kingdom. Indeed Christ will bring many sons to glory.

CONCLUSION

1. Grace does not offer salvation upon certain terms and conditions to enfeebled and sin-ruined creatures. Grace begins, carries on, and completes the work of man’s salvation: “. . .by grace ye are saved” (Eph. 2:5). By God’s goodwill, His free mercy, His lovingkindness, we are really and truly saved. God’s grace brings salvation (Tit. 2:11); it does not merely offer it.

2. Sinner, do not despair. Men are not saved by their good works, for no man can do enough to be saved. Neither do bad works prevent a man from being saved by grace. "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men. . ." (Matt. 12:31). The grace of God saves the very chiefest of sinners. Oh, friend, Christ is full of grace. Then why not say: "God be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke 18:13).

3. John Bunyan (1628-1688) wrote: "But, methinks, we should not have done yet with this grace of the Son. Thou Son of the Blessed, what grace was manifested in Thy condescension! Grace brought Thee down from heaven; grace stripped Thee of thy glory; grace made Thee bear such burdens of sin, such burdens of sorrow, such burdens of curse as are unspeakable! On Son of God, grace was in all Thy tears. Here is grace indeed---unsearchable riches of grace---grace to make angels wonder, to make sinners happy, to make devils astonished!"

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