

## THE GRACE OF GOD

"I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ." I Corinthians 1:4.

As we think of the grace of God, we are contemplating the profoundest subject of divine revelation and that which is beyond the ability of the natural man to comprehend. "Grace" is one of the greatest words that is connected with the Christian religion. It is so woven throughout the New Testament that an effort to remove it from the texture would cause the whole fabric to fall to pieces. Just as the Old Testament is built around the law and the prophets so the New Testament is built around and upon the grace of God.

### I. The Meaning Of Grace.

Christianity has literally captured the best and the greatest words of human speech and has put them upon the lips of men in behalf of the glorious gospel of Christ. Grace is the queenliest of all good Bible words. It is the sweetest that human tongue has ever uttered. It is the foundation word of our spiritual existence and the very basis of Christian experience. In a sense it is the biggest word in Scripture. Grace is so much of God that it has never come fully into the understanding of man who, in his natural state, knows so little of God.

Grace is a difficult word to define. In scriptural usage it acquires a marvelous depth and sweetness. The wealth of the whole revelation of God in Jesus Christ is enshrined in the word. This is the reason why it defies adequate definition. To define anything means to draw a line around it, and the very moment you draw a line around it you limit it. So nothing infinite can be defined adequately.

Dr. G. Campbell Morgan said, "There is no word in the New Testament that more baffles the expositor than this word Grace. Gather up the occasions in which it is found in the New Testament and read them in their context; then sit down in the presence of them, and wonder and worship."

This precious word is one of the least understood of all the great words of our Christian vocabulary. Many people have banished the word from their vocabulary because they do not have any conviction of sin which necessitates grace. Lacking the scriptural conception of sin, it is no wonder that they are blind to the Biblical meaning of grace.

Many have undertaken to define grace. Here are a few definitions which I pass on to you with the prayer that they might give each of us some suggestion as to what is involved in the grace of God.

C. I. Scofield said, "Grace means unmerited, unrecompensed favor."

R. W. Dale endeavored to express its secret in a few words saying, "Grace is love which passes beyond all claims to love. It is the love which, after fulfilling the obligations imposed by law, has an unexhausted wealth of kindness. Yes, it is all that; but when we have said all that, the half hath not yet been told."

John Calvin said, "Grace is the pure liberality of God."

Charles H. Spurgeon, a silver-tongued orator and master of words, said, "No truth is more plainly taught in God's Word than this: that the salvation of the sinner is entirely owing to the grace of God."

R. E. Neighbour said, "Grace is the immeasurable and unmeritable favor of God."

C. L. Fowler said, "Grace is God assuming all of guilty man's responsibility."

J. H. Jowett said, "Grace is an energy: it is the Divine mercy: it is the energy of the Divine affection rolling abundantly to the shores of human need. Oh, it is this, and much more than this!"

J. H. Hunter said, "The rich, red blood of Christ spells the rich, rare grace of God."

Thomas Spurgeon said, "Grace is something in God which is at the heart of all His redeeming activities, the downward stoop and reach of God; God bending from the heights of His majesty to touch and grasp our insignificance and poverty."

Alexander MacLaren wrote, "Grace, what is that? The word means: first, love in exercise to those who are below the lover or who deserve something else; stooping love that condescends, and patient love that forgives. Then it means the gifts which such love bestows, and then it means the effects of these gifts in the beauties of character and conduct developed in the receivers."

Alexander Whyte said, "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 who in any way are beneath us. But grace from its nature has only one direction which it can take. Grace always flows down. Grace is love indeed. A king's love to his equals or to his own royal house is called love; but his love to his subjects is called grace. God's love to sinners is always called grace."

Grace is of God; therefore, the mind of man cannot grasp it, nor the tongue of man describe it. In scriptural usage the word acquires a marvelous depth and sweetness. The wealth of the whole revelation of God in Christ is enshrined in the word. This is one reason why it defies adequate definition.

I like to think of grace as God's limitless love freely expressing itself in measureless liberality to the wholly undeserving. It is infinite love expressing itself in infinite goodness. It is unmerited favor prompted by love. It is a gift apart from any recompense.

Grace comes from the Greek word "charis," which, according to New Testament usage, means "good will, favor" carrying with it the additional idea of "loving-kindness." Thayer's Lexicon states, "The New Testament writers use "charis" pre-eminently of the kindness by which God bestows favors even upon the ill-deserving and grants to sinners the pardon of their offenses and bids them accept of eternal salvation through Christ." "Charis" must be translated and preached as God's lovingkindness to mankind, which, as a free gift, excludes merit, and is not hindered by guilt, but forgives sin; it thus stands out in contrast with works, law and sin. Our conception of the word "grace" might be clarified if we would translate it "lovingkindness," ever keeping in mind that it is the lovingkindness of God." By God's grace is meant His love for mankind as evidenced by His sending His own Son into the world to make atonement for sins and to offer salvation through faith in His shed blood.

W. H. Griffith Thomas expressed it well when he defined grace as "God's mercy pitying, God's wisdom planning, God's power preparing, God's love providing." It is the unmerited favor of God to the sinful.

John Currie remarked, "Grace is God's gift to paupers." It is even greater than a gift to a pauper; it is gracious pardon to an enemy. Grace is a word which characterizes the attitude of God toward men. Grace is the free, sovereign, unmerited favor of God. It is a word which is as deep as the deepest sin, as broad as the measure from east to west, and as high as the throne of God. In substance, grace represents what God can do for a poor sinner who has sunk to the depths of hell itself. He lifts him

out of the depths and removes his sin from him as far as the east is from the west, and presents him faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy. Grace is God's everything bestowed upon those who merit nothing. It is love for the loveless and help for the helpless. When it comes to the grace of God bestowed upon man through the merits of Christ, it means far more than any human being can ever fathom. The grace of God is truly wonderful, far beyond man's possibility of comprehension.

## II. The Need Of Grace.

Man, created originally in the image and likeness of God, had, through wilful disobedience, sinned against his Creator. He became the enemy of the Almighty, and remains so to this day in his natural state. But God was not content to let things rest there, and leave man in a depraved state—with his mind defiled, his understanding darkened, his heart deceived, his conscience defiled, his will enslaved and his affections perverted. God still thought of man, and He still loved him, abundant proof of which abounds throughout the inspired Word. So, with a heart of infinite love, the "God of all grace," made full and free provision of salvation whereby man, lost and undone, without hope and separated from God by sin, might obtain salvation and enjoy fellowship with Him. Hence we read: "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." I John 3:10. "But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Romans 5:8.

"And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others." Ephesians 2:1-3. The grace of God absolutely ends where man's worth begins. Grace does not grant any place to human merit in any of man's affairs. Grace cannot be fathomed until we can fathom sin. All of the passages in the Scriptures revealing man's sinful estate set forth the need of grace.

## III. The Channel Of Grace.

Since the time of Adam God has been dealing graciously with His people. But His grace was revealed supremely in the incarnation, ministry and saving work of the Lord Jesus. Christ instituted, as it were, a new economy, a new era of grace. "For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). The Old Testament looked forward to this manifestation of grace in Christ. The character, teachings and passion of Christ were a revelation of the grace of God. When "the Word was made flesh," He was "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). Of course, His atoning death was the most amazing exhibition of divine grace. "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man" (Hebrews 2:9).

Salvation was purposed in the mind of God, prompted by the love of God, and perfected by the Son of God. The good news which needs to be proclaimed is "the gospel of the grace of God." God wants all men to be saved. "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live." Exekiel 33:11. "For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth." I Timothy 2:3. "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." II Peter 3:9.

The contrast between the operations of the law and of grace is sharply drawn. The law commands; grace bestows. The law curses; grace blesses. The law demands love, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God"; grace proclaims love, "God so loved the world,

that he gave his only begotten Son." The law requires man to come up to its standard; grace comes down where men are. The law says, "Do"! for Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, that the man that doeth those things shall live by them; grace says, "Done"! for "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." The law challenges the sinner, reveals his iniquity, condemns him to death; grace steps in and provides a righteousness to which the sinner could not otherwise attain. The fact is repeatedly emphasized that the works of the law cannot save; that the grace of God in Christ alone avails for man's redemption. Jesus Christ is the only channel of divine grace.

How can God justify the ungodly? The most inclusive answer in the Scriptures is perhaps in II Corinthians 5:21: "For he hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." Here we have a two-fold imputation. The believer's sins are imputed to the propitiating Christ, the sacrificial Saviour; the sinless Saviour's righteousness is imputed to the penitent believer. The grace of God was manifested by Him sending His own Son into the world to make atonement for sins and to offer salvation through faith in His shed blood. God provides salvation. Once an old man got up in one of Dwight L. Moody's meetings and said, "I have been forty-two years learning three things." Mr. Moody, in telling of the incident, said, "I pricked up my ears at that, thinking that I would find out in three minutes what a man had taken forty-two years to learn." The first thing that the old man said he had learned was that he could not save himself. The second thing was that God did not expect him to save himself. The third thing was that Christ had already provided for his salvation, and all he had to do was to take it. That is what Paul meant in Ephesians 2:8-10.

Grace is God loving man with a love that knows no bounds, a love that has no limitations. Grace is God giving. It was the love of God that caused Him to give Christ to be the Saviour of men. God in grace was willing to give His best. He was willing to give that which cost Him the most. God's infinite grace revealed in His great love and His great gift becomes the power that lifts man out of his sinfulness and hopelessness. If any man would receive salvation and be at peace with God, he must allow the grace of God, in Christ Jesus, to lift him out of his sinfulness and self into the glorious liberty that belongs to those who thus become the children of God. If the soul out of Christ is unwilling to receive the salvation the Saviour offers, he will never receive eternal life.

"Marvelous grace of our loving Lord,  
Grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt,  
Yonder on Calvary's mount outpoured,  
There where the blood of the Lamb was spilt.

"Grace, grace, God's grace,  
Grace that will pardon and cleanse within;  
Grace, grace, God's grace,  
Grace that is greater than all our sin."