

GRACE TO SAVE

"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: It is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

"Charis", the Greek word which is translated "grace", is found one hundred and fifty-five times in the New Testament. Grace is one of the greatest words in the Christian vocabulary. Perhaps it holds in its content as much or more than any other word of human speech. This charming word is so woven through the New Testament that any effort to remove it from the texture would cause the whole fabric to fall to pieces. Grace pervades the New Testament as the salt permeates the sea, and yet it is one of the least understood of all the wonderful words recorded therein.

I. What This Grace Is.

What a far-reaching ministry this word "grace" has exercised through the centuries! Who can tell all that is enwrapped in the word? We talk about grace, and we sing about it, but what does it mean?

Some words preclude concise definitions, and grace is one of them. It staggers the mind of man. The wealth of the entire revelation of God in Jesus Christ is enshrined in the word. That is why it defies adequate definition. To define anything means to draw a line around it, and when you draw a line around it you limit it. Grace is as indefinable as a sunrise, a snowflake, or a storm. Freightened with deity, grace is as gentle as the morning breeze, and as mighty as the ocean's tide.

Men of learning have made numerous attempts to define grace. Some of these attempts have been helpful, and some have not. Grace has been defined as the unmerited favor of God toward mankind, but we readily see that it is much more than that. It has also been defined as the favor of God to the ill-deserving. This definition is better, but it is not strong enough. It has been said that grace is that which we did not at all deserve, but which we needed desperately. Dr. Alexander McLaren spoke of grace as being love in action towards those below the lover, and who deserved something different. One characteristic of grace is that it always flows downward to creatures who do not deserve it.

Grace is an attribute of God. In Exodus 22:27 God said, "I am gracious." In Exodus 33:29 He said, "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy." Peter called our heavenly Father "the God of grace" (I Peter 5:10). In grace all of the qualities of deity are combined, and all of the resources of deity are exerted in our behalf. Standing for all that God is, grace represents His abiding love and abounding power flowing full and free to undeserving sinners who are in need of His great salvation. Grace is the outflowing and overflowing love of God in Christ meeting the needs of lost sinners. God's matchless love caused Him to give His Son to die on the cross as an atonement for the sins of men, thereby rescuing them from their fallen condition, lifting them out of their sins, and giving them eternal life. As Dr. J. H. Jowett said, "Grace is the energy of the divine affection rolling in plenteousness toward the shores of human need." The grace of God is the forth-putting of His power for the benefit of sinful men, the motive for which is mercy born of love.

In this life we shall never fully understand the complete meaning of grace, because all of the goodness, love, and mercy of God are crowded into that one little word. Not until we get to heaven shall we thoroughly understand or fully appreciate all that grace has done for us. But until then we can and should praise God for His marvelous grace.

II. What This Grace Does.

The mystery of grace is that it began in the heart of God before He made this world. "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" (Ephesians 1:4-6). God is the fountain of all grace. That is why the supply of grace is inexhaustible. Grace cannot be increased or diminished because it is the infinite expression of God's love for lost sinners. It stands for and represents God's attitude toward those who deserve naught but His judgment. Every action of God through the centuries has been for the purpose of setting forth to sinful and suffering humanity the riches of His marvelous, matchless, and infinite grace, which is far greater than our sins. All of God's dealings with men are on the basis of grace.

Philosophize, analyze, and psychologize about it all you please, but God's Word declares that all are born in sin, all practice sin, and all need salvation. By salvation is meant deliverance from the guilt of sin, the penalty of sin, the love of sin, the power of sin, and eventually the presence of sin. Man lacks the power to break the shackles of Satan and to save himself. Man neither merits nor solicits salvation. Salvation is the result of divine grace. The doctrine of salvation by grace glorifies God and that is why egotistical people do not like to hear it preached or taught.

The principle of grace distinguishes Christianity from all other religious systems. Other religions make demands, but Christianity offers a gift. Other religions insist on doing, but Christianity speaks of receiving. Other religions outline the works which people say that man must do in order to be saved, but Christianity reveals a work which God has already done in order to make salvation available to man.

God's marvelous grace devised the astounding plan of salvation, provided salvation for sinners, and made it available to all classes — rich and poor, educated and uneducated, moral and immoral, noble and ignoble — and to people in every generation.

Many attempt to achieve salvation through personal efforts and meritorious works in spite of the fact that God's Word repeatedly states that it is an impossibility. No one is ever saved by his own efforts because salvation is "not of yourselves." Neither can one purchase salvation by acts of obedience or service. What could be plainer than this emphatic statement, "not of works, lest any man should boast?" According to the scriptures, there is no salvation apart from God's grace. "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men" (Titus 2:11). "Who hath saved us, and called us with an

holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace: (II Timothy 1:9). "By the works of the law shall no flesh be justified" (Galatians 2:16). "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us" (Titus 3:5). So men are not saved by their good works.

One man said that it took him half a lifetime to learn three things: first, that he could not save himself; that Christ did not expect him to save himself; and, third, that Christ had already provided for his salvation if he would only believe on Him and receive it. No one will be able to present the record of his efforts and works to God and receive eternal life in exchange. Salvation is entirely God's gift to us. The Bible says, "The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

"Naught have I gotten but what I received;
Grace hath bestowed it since I have believed;
Boasting excluded, pride I abase;
I'm only a sinner saved by grace."

If any man would like to be saved, and be at peace with God, he must be willing to 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 person who is not a Christian is not willing to receive the salvation God, in grace, is offering, he will never possess the eternal life that Christ is waiting to give. There are not any price tags attached to this gift. It is as available to the poor as to the rich, to the young as to the old, to the weak as to the strong, and to the ignorant as to the educated. This fact caused Toplady to say, "The way to heaven lies not over a toll-bridge, but over a free-bridge; even the unmerited grace of God in Christ Jesus. Grace finds us beggars, and always leaves us debtors." If any man who hears the gospel of Christ is not saved, it is because he refuses to accept the gift which the grace of God brings to him. Grace offers salvation to all who will receive Christ as Saviour.

By grace God has provided salvation and offers it to us as a gift upon our acceptance of Christ as Saviour. Salvation becomes ours only through faith. It is a gift obtained only on this one condition. It is not a question of our worthiness or unworthiness, but it is a question of our absolute trust in Christ.

Our text strongly asserts that it is faith and not works which procures a soul's acceptance with God. Faith is simply the hand that takes the gift which God presents to us. It is the connection by which the divine supply is brought to the human need. Souls are lost because they reject Jesus Christ as Saviour. God has certainly done His part in providing salvation. In fact, He can do nothing more than He has already done. Jesus said, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36). The Apostle John said, "And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (I John 5:11-12). Men receive His salvation directly and immediately upon the exercise of faith in Him.

In the experience of salvation, God's part is "by grace" and man's part is

"through faith." Many think that God saves sinners by other means than by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. They believe it is by grace through faith plus baptism, or plus joining the church, or plus something else. But, according to the Bible, it is by grace through faith plus nothing.

"Marvelous grace os 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.

Dark is the stain that we cannot hide,
What can avail to wash it away?
Look! there is flowing a crimson tide;
Whiter than snow you may be today.

Marvelous, infinite, matchless grace,
Freely bestowed on all who believe;
You that are longing to see His face,
Will you this moment His grace receive?

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."

--Julia H. Johnston