

The Grace of God

No man will properly understand the infinite grace of God until he understands, first of all, his own need. The word “grace” was already in use before it was brought over into the New Testament. Secular documents written before the New Testament reveal several features of this word: (1) It was primarily used man to man; (2) It involved favor conferred freely, with no expectation of return, finding its only motive in the bounty and free-heartedness of the giver; (3) And, it was something extended towards friends. When this word was taken up into Christian use, it was given a higher and nobler sense. It was no longer primarily used man to man, but became something from God to man. Moreover, it was no longer primarily something extended toward friends, but became something that God extended to enemies, sinners, the ungodly. The meaning was not changed, but ennobled, that is, lifted up from an earthly benefit to one heavenly and spiritual.

“Grace” is simply unmerited favor. It speaks of the absolute freeness of the loving kindness of God to man. It is the spontaneous response of God to the need of the sinner. Consider the sinner’s need: He is a sinner. He has inherited a sin nature from sinful parents. Thus, he is born with a bias and inclination toward evil. Job asked, “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?” He answered, “Not one” (Job 14:4). In keeping with this fact, David said, “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Psalm 51:5). It was also David who, in describing “the children of men,” said, “They are all gone aside” (14:2,3), and added that “they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies” (58:3).

God, who is holy (Exodus 15:11), has decreed that death be paid for sin, “for the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). This “death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (5:12). Therefore, man, born with a sin nature (Ephesians 2:2,3), “dead in trespasses and sins...having no hope, and without God in the world” (2:1,12), finds that his need is greater than he could meet. God’s response to this need is “grace.” Thus, “grace” is associated with the “salvation” that God offers the sinner. One translation of Titus 2:11 reads:

“For the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men.”

There is no limit to the scope of its provision. Sin is universal, and it is “to all men” in its offer, “for God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). “Grace” thus speaks of the relation and conduct of God towards the sinner as revealed in and through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. It is an act of spontaneous favor wherein no mention can be made of obligation. Man does not deserve it, nor can he earn it. It is favor out of the pure generosity of God’s love. God stepped down from His judgement throne and, in His infinite wisdom and love, took upon Himself the guilt and penalty of sin due the sinner. He, therefore, satisfied the just requirement of His law, and made it possible to righteously bestow mercy on the basis of justice satisfied. This unmerited favor is contrasted to works:

“And if by grace, then it is no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace: otherwise work is no more work” (Romans 11:6).

“Grace” and “works” cannot be mixed. They are contrasting terms, and mutually exclude one another. To mix them is to destroy the meaning of each. Any religious system that combines “grace” and “works” in order to save the sinner is at variance with the plain, positive statements of scripture. Paul wrote:

“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” (Romans 4:4,5).

The word "reward" is translated "wages" in II Peter 2:15. One works and receives "a reward." The pay which he receives is "not reckoned of grace, but of debt." It is the legal obligation of his employer to pay. The sinner does not earn salvation by works. "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). The key words are: "grace...saved...faith...the gift of God...not of works." Here, "the gift of God" is not "faith," as some teach. "That" is neuter gender and cannot have as its antecedent "faith" which is feminine gender. "The gift of God" refers to salvation. "Grace" is God's part. "Faith" is man's part. This "faith" is clearly contrasted to works in Romans 4:5. Again, "grace" and "faith" are linked together in Romans 5:1,2:

"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God."

Paul wrote in II Timothy 1:8-10 as follows:

"...God...hath saved us...not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel."

This salvation, as in Ephesians 2:8, is an accomplished fact. It is also "not according to our works." Rather, "according to" God's "own purpose," not man's, springing from His "grace." This was God's plan "in Christ Jesus before the world began." But, in time it was manifested in "the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ." This appearing is that of the first coming of Christ, and its purpose was to "put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Hebrews 9:26). The message that brings it to us is "the gospel," that is, "the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24). It is the message "of Christ" (Romans 1:16) because it speaks of what He did for sinners, namely "died for our sins...and that he rose again" (I Corinthians 15:3,4). In that message there is made known human failure, and the Divine provision related to that need. And, that message "is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth" (Romans 1:16).

Yes, the salvation of the sinner, from the guilt and penalty of sin, is secured solely by believing on Jesus Christ. To this one requirement no other obligation may be added (as many religious systems have) without violence to the scriptures and total disruption of the essential doctrine of salvation by grace. One asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" The answer was simply, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house" (Acts 16:30,31). This faith is apart from works (Romans 4:5). It is a committal of one's self to Christ (II Timothy 1:12). It is a definite turning, that is, a deliberate act of the will, to God from every other confidence (I Thessalonians 1:9).

You are a sinner. The penalty of sin is death. But God in grace has offered you a Perfect Sacrifice, the Lord Jesus Christ, who paid the penalty of your sin in His death. That work is finished. God is satisfied. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." That is the will of God for all unbelievers (John 6:40).

Every soul who, in this life, receives Jesus Christ as his Saviour by believing on Him will live in eternity as a monument to "the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:7) to the end "that no flesh should glory in his presence" (I Corinthians 1:29). "Now is the accepted time; behold now is the day of salvation" (II Corinthians 6:2). Trust Him now and be saved. The God who promised cannot lie. Read John 3:16,18,36; 6:35,40,47; 8:24; 11:25,26; 12:36,46.