

THE DOCTRINE OF GRACE

The word *grace* from the Greek word **charis**, properly speaking means that which affords joy, pleasure, delight, charm, sweetness, loveliness. It involves favour, goodwill, benevolence, loving-kindness, forgiveness, and mercy. In its Biblical setting grace signifies God's kindness and love for man (CP Tit 3:3-7). For New Testament Christians grace is synonymous with God's redemptive plan for fallen man manifest in the gift of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the blessings of salvation purchased through Christ's sacrificial death on the cross for the sins of all mankind, past, present and future. Hell-deserving sinners are saved by grace through faith in Christ's atoning death (CP Ro 5:1-2; Eph 1:3-7; 2:1-9).

It should be noted here that Eph 2:8-9 means exactly what it says: salvation is by grace, solely on the basis of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no convoluted meaning to it that only those whom God has predestined to salvation can exercise this faith, as some teach in the contemporary church – the Doctrine of Unconditional Election. God's invitation to salvation is a universal call and all anyone has to do to be saved is respond affirmatively to the call (CP Mt 11:28-30; Jn 3:16; Rev 21:6; 22:17). While Eph 2:8-9 highlights the fact that salvation is the gift of God, it does not support the teaching that God predetermines who He will, or will not save. No one can get saved however, on the basis of any good they may have done before their conversion to Christ, otherwise they could boast about themselves (CP Ro 3:20; 4:1-5; 11:6; Ga 2:16). The only basis upon which one can be saved, is faith in Christ. It was the death of Christ as full payment for the sins of all mankind that made it possible for God to justify sinners and bestow His grace upon them. (For a more detailed study on this subject refer author's study *Salvation – a Free-will Choice or Predestinated?* in his book, **Advanced Studies in the Christian Faith (volume 1)**).

The gospel of Christ is a gospel of grace (CP Ac 20:24, 32). Grace is God's mercy bestowed on the basis of His justice satisfied at the cross of Christ upon hell-deserving sinners who put their faith in Christ as the saviour who died for them (CP Ac 17:30-31; Ro 3:21-26; He 9:15; 1Jn 2:2). We learn from these passages of scripture that God's grace reaches back in time to His covenanted people under the law in the Old Testament – they too were saved by the atoning death of Christ in the New Testament. God merely suspended judgement for their sins until Jesus came and paid for them (CP Eph 1:3-4; 2Ti 1:8-10). God determined from all eternity to bestow His grace upon men through Christ's atoning death, which was prefigured by the sacrificial system under the Old Covenant. All who participated in the Old Covenant sacrificial system were vindicated by Christ's sacrificial death under the New Covenant (CP Gen 3:15 with He 9:11-16, 22-28; 10:1-4). *They which are called* in He 9:15 looks back to God's covenanted people in the Old Testament. We learn in 1Jn 2:2 that Christ's death was sufficient for all men. But it is only efficient for those under the New Covenant who believe on Him and obey Him (CP Mt 7:21-27; 12:30, 46-50; Jn 8:31, 51; Ac 3:19-26; Ro 2:13; Jas 1:22-25; 1Jn 5:2-3).

The first recorded instance in scripture of God's grace being bestowed is on Enoch in the Old Testament. He pleased God and was translated to heaven while still living (CP Gen 5:23-24; He 11:5). Next was Noah. God saved him and his family from the flood that destroyed everyone else living on earth at that time (CP Gen 6:8, 13-14, 18). God's grace is also revealed in the Old Testament in His covenant with Abraham (CP Gen 12:1-3; 15:16; 17:1-14). God's grace is also revealed in the Old Testament in His love for His chosen people, Israel (CP De 7:7-9; 8:18; 9:1-6). Regardless of how often Israel sinned against Him, God forgave them and He will restore them to their position of grace in the age to come (CP Jer 31:2-9; Zech 4:7; 12:10; Ro 11:1-5, 25-33). Grace is also revealed in the Old Testament in the power of the law to convert and restore sinners (CP Psa 19:7-11).

God's grace in the Old Testament is revealed in the Mercy Seat on the Ark of the Covenant upon which the blood of the animal sacrifices and sin offerings for the priest and the people of Israel on the Day of Atonement, which prefigured the supreme sacrifice of Christ as the sin offering for all mankind in the New Testament, was sprinkled (CP Lev 16:11-16). The blood of the animal sacrifices foreshadowed the blood Christ would shed in His atoning death on the cross. The difference however, is that the blood of the animal sacrifices could not pardon sin. Only Christ's shed blood can do that. His shed blood put away sin forever (CP Lev 16:6, 11-19 with He 9:1-10, 18). The Mercy Seat emphasised that forgiveness of sin is possible only by God's grace on the basis of His justice satisfied through the shed blood of Jesus in the New Testament, who was the true Mercy Seat (CP Lev 17:11 with Ro 3:24-25; 5:11; Col 1:20; 1Jn 2:2). The Mercy Seat was the Old Testament type of the Throne of Grace in the New Testament where Jesus sits at God's right hand and mercy and grace are dispensed to meet the needs of New Testament believers (CP He 4:14-16). We will look at the Throne of Grace from a New Testament perspective a little later. There are many other instances of God's grace revealed in the Old Testament, but those listed here will suffice for the purpose of this study.

The law under the Old Covenant was given by Moses, but grace under the New Covenant came by Christ (CP Jn 1:17; 1Cor 1:3-4; 2Ti 1:8-10). The depth of meaning of grace is richer under the New Covenant. Under the law of Moses sin was revealed and sinners were condemned to death. In the New Testament in Christ, grace not only forgives sin, it provides a righteousness for the sinner (CP Ro 5:12, 15-21; 2Cor 5:21). In Ro 5:20 we learn that not only did the Old Covenant law reveal sin, but it caused it to happen. V21 and 2Cor 5:21 teach that grace provides a righteousness for sinners unattainable under the Old Covenant. Under the New Covenant, where sin abounds grace abounds even more, providing forgiveness of sin and empowering believers to resist it (CP Ro 6:1-2, 14; 1Jn 3:5-10). Grace introduces believers into a new realm in the New Testament. By it believers are taken out of the sphere of death into life by faith in Jesus Christ (CP Col 1:12-14). Repentant sinners are fully and freely justified in Christ (CP Tit 2:11).

This does not mean that everyone who ever lived has known of God's grace that brings salvation. It refers to humanity in general. God's saving grace through the atoning death of the Lord Jesus Christ has made salvation available to the whole of humanity (CP Ro 5:15, 18; 2Cor 5:18-19; Tit 3:4). Grace teaches believers to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts; to live soberly, righteously, Godly, and to look for the coming again of Jesus to take all the saints of God – Old Testament and New Testament alike – back to heaven with Him at the rapture (CP Tit 2:11-13 with Ro 6:13-23; 8:12-13; He 12:14 and Php 3:20). This present age of grace began with the death and resurrection of Jesus and will end with His coming again to rapture the saints to heaven (CP Jn 14:1-3; 1Cor 15:51-58; 1Th 4:13-18; 5:1-11).

The first person to receive of God's grace in the New Testament was Mary, mother of Jesus (CP Lu 1:30). *Favour* here is grace. Grace is one of God's infinite attributes and is the result of the eternal counsel and purpose of His will (CP Eph 1:3-14; 2Ti 1:8-9). We see also in Eph 1:13-14 that another manifestation of God's grace is that He gives the Holy Spirit to repentant sinners upon accepting Christ as their saviour, to assure them of their future resurrection to glory with Christ. That is why Paul calls Him, in V13, the "Holy Spirit of Promise". One of the many graces bestowed upon believers is the gift of giving (CP 2Cor 4:15; 8:1-7, 10-19; 9:7-15). A heart possessed of grace is a liberal heart, but it should be noted, as 2Cor 8:12 teaches, that God only expects believers to give according to what they have, not according to what they do not have. Believers must never feel bad if they do not have anything to give. It is not the amount one gives that matters, but the willingness to give, if one has it.

Grace is also the enabling power of believers to endure extreme hardships in their witness for God. His strength – their enabling grace – is made perfect in their weakness (CP 2Cor 12:7-9). The conduct of those in whom grace is resident is characterised by Godly sincerity in all that they say and do. Their conduct is the transparent genuineness of the grace within them (CP 2Cor 1:12). Grace exercised by believers in their speech acts as a purifying influence on all who hear it (CP Pr 10:20-21; Eph 4:29; Col 4:6). Grace is not only a gift but a trust to keep, believers have been entrusted with the stewardship of grace (CP 1Pe 4:10 with Ro 12:6-8; 1Cor 12:4-11). All these gifts of the Spirit are gifts of grace and what Peter is teaching in 1Pe 4:10 is that believers are meant to be channels of blessing for others with the gifts of grace they have each received from the Holy Spirit. Grace qualifies believers to exercise the gifts of the Spirit (CP Eph 3:8; Php 1:7). Grace is also associated with the development of faith and patience, enabling believers undergoing trials to bear the suffering until they receive the final instalment of their salvation when Christ comes again to take them back to heaven with Him (CP 1Pe 1:3-13 with Jn 14: 1-3; 1Cor 15:51-58; 1Th 4:13-18; 5:1-11). This is the grace that will be brought to them on which believers are to set their hopes fully in 1Pe 1:13.

God's grace knows no distinction between nationalities, social status or gender of those who have been saved. They are all one in Christ (CP Ga 3:28).

This does not mean that there is no distinction between the sexes in their function in the church. It simply means that no one is preferred above another as a child of God (CP V 22-29). Grace is the key element in believers for their witness in the world (CP Ac 4:33). Grace is a continuing work in believers enabling them to abound to every good work (CP 1Cor 15:10; 2Cor 9:8). Grace operates in believers both to will and to act according to God's good pleasure (CP Php 2:12-13 with Tit 2:11-12). Obedience to God's word is a gift of God's grace (CP Eph 2:4-7). *Quickened* here means to cause to live, to make alive. It is used in the sense of being raised from death to life with Christ to do the work of God's word. In their unsaved state believers were dead in their trespasses and sins – disobedient to the word of God. But upon their acceptance of Christ they were made alive by the Holy Spirit to a renewed life in Christ (CP Ro 6:1-13; Eph 5:14; Col 2:8-13). *Quickened* in this context means a type of spiritual resurrection; it expresses what being born again means (CP Jn 3:3-5).

As noted earlier in this study, mercy and grace for New Testament believers are dispensed from the Throne of Grace – God's throne in heaven – where Jesus sits at God's right hand (CP He 4:14-16 with He 1:3; 8:1; 10:12, 19-22). By His sacrificial death Jesus has opened up a way for New Testament believers into the very presence of God to obtain mercy and grace in their time of need that was not possible under the Old Covenant. Mercy and Grace are dispensed through Christ's intercession for believers with God (CP Ro 8:33-34; 1Ti 2:5-6; He 7:25; 9:24; 1Jn 1:8-2:1). We learn in 1Jn 1:8-2:1 that believers can, and do sin. But they are not habitual sinners. When they do sin God has made provision for them to confess and receive his forgiveness. This keeps believers in an undefiled condition – they are cleansed from all unrighteousness (CP Ps 32:1-5; 119:1; Pr 28:13). Believers can come boldly – confidently – to the Throne of Grace knowing also that every petition they desire of God that conforms to His word, will be granted them (CP Jn 14:13-14; 16:23-24; 1Jn 5:14-15). As also noted earlier, the Throne of Grace was typified in the Old Testament by the Mercy Seat on the Ark of the Covenant upon which the blood of the animal sacrifices and sin offerings were sprinkled on the Day of Atonement, prefiguring Christ's ultimate sacrifice.

Grace is the sustaining influence enabling believers to persevere in their Christian walk (CP Ac 11:23; 20:32; 2Cor 9:14). The *word of His grace* to which Paul commended the Ephesian elders in Ac 20:32 are the scriptures (CP Lu 4:3-4; 1Th 2:13; 2Ti 3:15-17). The scriptures are the record of God's gracious dealings with mankind, and the source of spiritual growth for all Christians. Although Paul is speaking to the church leaders in Ac 20:32 – they are subject to the authority of scripture just as the congregation is – he means it for every believer in Christ. Scriptures are able to build all believers up to maturity in Christ and bring them to the place where God would have them to be in Him, in order to inherit the eternal kingdom (CP Ro 8:16-17; Eph 1:3, 11-14; 1Pe 1:3-5). *Them which are sanctified* in Ac 20:32 refers to Christians generally (CP Ac 26:18; 1Cor 1:2; Jude 1). Grace gives boldness to those ministering God's word,

enabling them to unreservedly remind others in the church of Christian doctrine that could be neglected or forgotten (CP Ro 15:14-16 with 1Ti 4:6; 2Ti 2:14; Tit 3:1). Grace is the enabling power of God in believers to labour abundantly in the work of His word (CP 1Cor 15:10). Grace is also the enabling power of God in believers to preach the gospel (CP Eph 3:7-8).

Grace inspires singing (CP Col 3:16). The singing of Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs helps to internalise the word of God in believers and establishes their heart's affection for Jesus, and their brothers and sisters in Christ. Psalms are scriptural songs, hymns can be divinely or humanly inspired songs and spiritual songs are impromptu songs sung under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (CP Eph 5:18-19). Grace brings hope (CP 2Th 2:16). The hope referred to here looks back on God's gift of His Son, Jesus, in whom believers have eternal comfort now in their salvation, and the promise of being raised to future glory with Jesus throughout eternity (CP V13-14). Grace abounds exceedingly with faith and love (CP 1Ti 1:12-14). Faith and love are gifts of God's grace in Christ (CP Eph 1:15; 3:17-19; Col 1:4). 1Ti 1:12-14 also teaches that no matter how shameful one's past may be, God will forgive and use those who accept Christ as saviour (CP 2Ti 2:1). Here we see that grace gives strength. This is admonishing believers to be courageous with the strength which God's grace provides; to render service to the Lord faithfully with the ability that comes through union with Him (CP V 1-7).

Grace aids in suffering (CP He 2:9). God's grace here is manifested in Christ's suffering in His atoning death on the cross as the sacrificial sin-offering for all mankind, in order to redeem as many as will receive Him as their saviour, from eternal damnation (CP V 10-18). Christ was made a little lower than the angels for a time, but is now crowned with glory and honour, seated at God's right hand in heaven. By His perfect life and His sacrificial death, Christ has made it possible for mankind to be redeemed to God and eventually regain sovereignty over creation (CP V 5-8 with Psa 8:4-9). Grace helps render true service (CP He 12:28). In light of the fact that believers will inherit God's eternal kingdom, which will be the only thing that will survive in its present form from the shaking of heaven and earth, believers are admonished to exercise grace in their service to God, not as mere ritual activity, but in reverential awe and Godly fear (CP V 24-29). Grace gives stability (CP He 13:9). Only God's grace can inspire and empower believers to live holy lives, not endless rules concerning food and drink (CP Tit 2:11-14). Grace gives life (CP 1Pe 3:7). The *grace of life* here in effect means the grace of God which gives life. Believing husbands and

wives are equal heirs of God's grace and salvation, and husbands who fail to honour their wives and treat them with the respect they deserve as being physically and emotionally weaker than them, will not have their prayers answered (CP Eph 5:25, 28-29).

Now in bringing this study to a close, let us look at some aspects of grace from a human perspective. Grace can be resisted. Grace will never fail believers, but believers will fail grace (CP 2Cor 6:1; Ga 1:6; He 12:14-15). Grace can be frustrated (CP Ga 2:21). If believers try to add works to grace to save themselves they are sinning (CP V 18-20). Once they accept Christ as saviour believers are dead to the law and only follow after the things of God revealed in Christ. Their life is no longer centred on self, but on Christ. Being *crucified with Christ* means dying to self and allowing the resurrection power of Christ to indwell them (CP Ro 6:1-14; 7:6). Believers must not nullify God's grace by self-efforts to attain righteousness. Works cannot be added to grace for salvation (CP Ro 4:4-5 and 11:6 with Ga 2:20-21). Grace can be abandoned (CP Ga 5:1-5). Paul is warning believers here against turning away from God's grace in Christ. Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything with Christ. He is only concerned with one's faith that works itself out by love (CP 1Cor 7:18-19; Ga 6:15-16; Col 2:8-12; 3:11-14).

Faith which worketh by love means that faith in Christ expresses itself in self-sacrificing love for others (CP Jn 13:2-17, 34-35; 15:12-17; Ro 5:5; 12:9-10, 15-16; 15:1-3; 1Cor 13:1-7; Ga 5:13-15, 22-26; 6:2; Eph 5:1-2; Php 2:1-5; Col 3:12-14; 1Th 3:12-13; 4:9; He 13:1; Jas 2:14-26; 1Pe 1:22; 2:17; 3:8; 4:8; 2Pe 1:5-9; 1Jn 2:3-5, 9-11; 3:14-19; 4:7-21; 5:1-3; 2Jn 5:6). Grace can be turned into lasciviousness (CP Jude 4). *Lasciviousness* means unrestrained vice of sexual freedom. These men were obviously teaching that salvation by grace allows believers to sin without restraint and not be judged for it. They taught pardon for sin, but not the imperative of holiness. That of course is a lie of the devil, but sadly it is the cause of many contemporary believers failing God's grace.

A fitting conclusion to this study is a rhyme written by another author in another time, but is inserted here to contrast the absolute inability of those living in Old Testament times to conform to the Old Covenant law, with New Testament believers under the gospel of grace.

*'Do this and live, the law commands,
But gives me neither feet nor hands.
A better word the gospel brings,
It bids me fly, and gives me wings'*