

**GREAT  
AND  
GLORIOUS  
GRACE**

**GEOFFREY BINGHAM**

# Great and Glorious Grace

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## FOREWORD

John Newton's hymn entitled 'Amazing Grace' has done much to popularize the theme, but in fact knowing grace is about the most difficult task which confronts our humanity. Proud because of our nature, and insecure because of our guilt, grace niggles us because it seems so humiliating. The general idea is, 'But for grace we can neither be nor do anything'. That seems to take our independence and dignity from us.

Those who have received not only an explanation of the nature of grace but have had a rich revelation of it, will think little about lost place and dignity. To the contrary: they will know that grace lifts us up to where we have never been. Nothing is so exhilarating to the human spirit as is grace.

It was with some eagerness years ago that I wrote a monograph on the subject. At the back of my mind since then has been the desire to write something really comprehensive. The trouble with researching and writing on

this grand theme is that there is not one element of ‘the whole counsel of God’ that it does not touch. The old saying, ‘Grace is everything and everything is grace’, may sound like a trite truism but since the Fall it has been that way because it has had to be that way: otherwise humanity is forever in the pit.

*Geoffrey Bingham*  
*Coromandel East, 1988*

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# SECTION ONE

## Grace Comes to the World of Men

God's grace is a fact in human history. Something has happened in Jesus Christ and we are forced to take account of it.

What is this mysterious happening? Is it, in fact, mysterious, or does it make good sense when we listen to the man Jesus, hear his words, ponder his claims, and try to work out the significance of his life and death?

In this first section we look at the early Christian community, and note that something has happened to form it and to sustain it, something unique in all human history.

Some scholars have said, fancifully, 'God irrupted into history'. This is not, strictly speaking, correct. God has always moved in history, and if He had not done so He could not be sovereign in His world. Jesus does not really come in some unannounced and innovative manner. Not at all: he comes in accordance with a steady build-up of prophetic prediction and explanation.

The prophetic indication is that God always acts on time—His fulness of time—never before, never afterwards, but always at the appropriate moment.

Finally we see that 'grace grows on a tree'. Grace is not a commodity, not even a power: it is God acting, but acting to do man good, even though he does not merit that action. There is one place in all history where grace presents itself brilliantly and it is in the Atonement, i.e. the work of the Cross and Resurrection.

So then, this is our introduction to grace!



## **THE GREAT GRACE HAPPENING**

### **UNUSUAL POWER IN THE HEART OF ISRAEL**

Something quite strange and wonderful was happening to the new community. Two of its leaders, the apostles Peter and John, had been used by their risen Lord—the Christ—to heal a man who had been lame all his life. The man—a beggar—had been seated at one of the gates of entrance to the very beautiful temple which had been built by King Herod. He had asked alms of the apostles, and they had wrought a great miracle of healing.

The wonder of that miracle moved many people deeply. The man who was healed was not quiet about it. In his new-found joy he was ‘walking and leaping and praising God’ (Acts 3:8). The event, naturally enough, quickly drew a great crowd. They were there to see a spectacle, and their eyes were on the two apostles. Then Peter said an unusual thing. He said, ‘Men of Israel, why do you wonder

at this, or why do you stare at us, as though *by our own power or piety* we had made him walk?’ (verse 12).

We might easily miss the importance of this statement. Peter knew that down through history human beings had claimed great powers of healing, whether occultic or divine, and those having power drew followers from the credulous crowd. Peter was speaking against this. He was really saying, ‘A power is present with us: there can be no doubt about that. But it is not *our* power, but the power of God’. He then spoke of Jesus, the One they—the Jews—had recently crucified. He called him ‘the Author of life’. This was a high claim for the man Jesus. He then went on to say, ‘And his name, by faith in his name, has made this man strong whom you see and know; and the faith which is through Jesus has given this man perfect health in the presence of you all’ (verse 16).

The principle, then, was this: ‘God is now present in Israel in a way we have not seen in centuries. God glorified His servant Jesus but you killed him. God raised him from the dead. His power amongst us today has healed the man you see. This power causes faith to flow and operate. *We have a new and different power in our midst*’.

Peter took hold of the occasion to point them beyond the healing to the true Messiah of Israel, and spoke of him in terms of Deuteronomy chapter 18, where Moses had prophesied the coming of ‘the great prophet’. This prophet, Peter claimed, was Jesus, and he concluded, ‘God,—having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you in turning every one of you from your wickedness’ (verse 26).

The attention of the crowd was gripped powerfully, both by the miracle and the message of the Gospel. This angered those leaders of the Jews who had caused Christ

to be crucified, and they took the apostles into custody to try them. The Jewish parliament, the Sanhedrin, faced the fact that some five thousand people had placed their faith in this Jesus, and were part of the new community of Christ.

What the Sanhedrin could not understand was the new power which surged through the believers in Christ. To them it must have been mysterious and even frightening. The movement was swelling so rapidly, and at the enquiry next day they asked the apostles, 'By what power or by what name did you do this [miracle]?' (Acts 4:7).

Peter's reply was, 'Be it known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by him this man is standing before you well' (verse 10). Peter, however, was not primarily interested in a healing, nor even in Christ as the Healer, so much as in Christ the One who had brought salvation into the heart of Israel. He said, 'And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved' (verse 12).

What Peter was saying paralleled something Paul was to write later to Titus his spiritual son, i.e. 'For the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men' (Titus 2:11) John also was to write, 'And the Word became flesh...full of grace and truth', and to add, 'And from his fulness have we all received, grace upon grace' (John 1:14, 16). These are sayings which call for close and thoughtful examination.

No matter how much we attempt to describe this wonderful happening in history—the grace of God appearing in the person and action of Jesus Christ—our

wonderment falls on deaf ears. Grace is not something we hear naturally, as human beings. There is a reason for this, and I want to break in on our story with another story. At the risk of losing our thread, I want us to share the tragic event in history which brought man to the dangerous self-sufficiency in which he seeks to live.

## MAN'S CREATION AND DOWNFALL

### THE MIRACLE OF MAN

'The Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and *man became a living being*' (Gen. 2:7). This ancient account of the origin of man must be seen in the light of God saying, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth' (Gen. 1:26–27). We also need to add other sayings: 'he has put eternity [the universe] into man's mind'; 'God made man upright'; 'thou dost crown him with glory and honour'; 'he is the image and glory of God' (Eccl. 3:11; 7:29; Ps. 8:5; I Cor. 11:7).

'Man became a living being'! Yes, and with gifts, powers, talents and capacities that set him out as unique in the universe. No other creature is like the Creator. No

other reflects God in this wonderful and living way. ‘Do you not know’, said Saint Paul, ‘that we are to judge angels?’ (I Cor. 6:3). Man, made for a little while lower than the angels, will one day reign even over them.

What, then, were the powers of man? We do not rightly know. What we can visualize is that the primal couple would have known a joy, a serenity, and a sense of vocation which would be difficult to find today, certainly in the measure that they knew then. Because they did not have experiences of guilt, shame and inferiority, they were without fear and the continuing sense of dread so common to us. Because they had no fear of death they must have greatly enjoyed life. Innocence does not mean ignorance, for it may well mean having a knowledge denied to clever ways of thinking. Anyway, to be ‘a living being’ was a situation crammed with riches of mind and personal being. It was good to be alive!

The temptation, when it came, was simple enough. ‘In the day you eat [of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil] your eyes will be opened and you will be as God, knowing good and evil’ (Gen. 3:5).

What could possibly be wrong with knowing good and evil? Surely, nothing! Yet, in fact, for every human creature to say he has a sure-fire evaluation of everything he considers must make for dreadful division in the human race. The male knows best: the female knows best. Adults know best: children know best. This race or nation knows best: that nation or tribe knows best. I know best: you know best. What confusion! What division!

The serpent knew best—better than God. The woman knew best—as well as the serpent. The man knew what he wanted to know, and did what he wanted to do. He

chose self-sufficiency. This means moving without God, or using God when required. It means pursuing one's own path. It means conflict with all others who differ or who do not defer.

Humanism is not new. It is as ancient as the human race. The man was sure he had the resources to handle life. Later God saw man building his little—but to him enormous—tower at Babel, and He said, 'This is only the beginning of what they will do; and *nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them*' (Gen. 11:6).

That is how mankind sees it—nothing will be impossible. Man has all the resources he needs, within himself. Whatever those resources may be—and they are many—man has turned them all in upon himself for his own use. He has no need of God except in his more superstitious moments. Then He is known as 'the God of the gap'. Narrow the gap and eliminate it, and you will eliminate God, or at least emasculate Him.

What has not been observed in all this was the shocking state man brought himself into when he rejected God. If we join the accounts of the 'Fall' in Genesis 3 and Romans 1, then we come to the following conclusion, namely that a rift came in relationships between God and man. The effects of this rift are incalculable. Breaking union with God meant that man, as a man, unmanned himself, as a creature, uncreated himself, as a subject of the King, ceased to be truly a subject, and as a son of God, ceased to have a filial loyalty to the Father.

What this meant to him relationally, emotionally, and vocationally cannot be assessed. What we do know is that he was immediately caught in the grip of idols. Idols are surrogate 'Gods', and as such demand loyalty and worship

in return for the relational and emotional hand-outs they give. Man 'exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator' (Rom. 1:25). Underneath his idolatry man is desperate, starved, confused, and *alienated* within the creation. Because he opposed the normal order of things he is awry, dislocated, without true being and life.

When we say 'alienated', we mean he is not at home in the universe. He has denied and defied its true order, and hence is in conflict with the truth—'things as they really are'. He has changed the 'really are' into the 'really aren't', and the 'really aren't' to fit what he thinks should be. Whilst it is easy to generalize on what the Scriptures have taught us, and to say 'Man was this,' and 'Man was that', yet in fact the story of the first couple is the story of Everyman and Everywoman. We are now caught in the bind of self-attainment, self-success, self-extension, and self-expression. What was general for the primal couple is now regular for all humans, males expressing it in a masculine way and women in a feminine, but all in the anguish of *alienation* from God, from others, and from ourselves.

## **ALIENATION AN IMPORTANT FACTOR IN HUMAN AFFAIRS**

We need to pause for a few moments on the thought of *alienation*. Many thoughtful people have recognized the fact of man's alienation and have striven to give reasons and causes for it, but few have come up with the biblical answer, namely that man is an essentially spiritual and social creature. By 'spiritual' we do not mean 'religious',

although man is incurably religious. We mean that when God breathed into man 'the breath of life', that breath made him more than an animal. Hence he needs to relate to his Creator, and to his fellow creatures. Rightly understood he relates to himself through God and others. When this union is broken, man is 'unmanned', i.e. ceases to be truly man. He is a handicapped person as much as any we would give that title to.

His anguish today is attended by an army of psychologists, psychiatrists, psychotherapists, as also by social and welfare workers. The human race is aware that it has a deep problem, and uses all means at hand to try to deal with it. We may think man's distress is a modern disease, but it is ancient, for one only has to read man's history, the psalmists in their grief and anger, the near-cynicism of the author of Ecclesiastes, and the stories of human anger, rivalry, bitterness, unnatural homicides, patricides and fratricides, as also horrifying genocides, to see that man's alienation is a source of pain and hurt. No one can deny the sadness of a human being making his or her way through the life of childhood to adulthood, family and community, especially in regard to becoming a full and mature person in a world of rivalry, fear and apprehension.

So then, man's bid for self-rule—for autonomy—was not a success. 'I heard the sound of You in the garden', said the man, 'and I was afraid' (see Gen. 3 :10). He had lost the glow of glory, the superb uprightness which had so reinforced him, and now he was at a loss. Knowing good and evil in the way it now came to him brought no special joy. The utterness that a man knows in union with God or with another person had utterly deserted him. This was what catapulted him into idolatry. The closest thing we may have

to non-alienation is to be linked with an idol.

Man is by nature a worshipper, i.e. he gives worth to everything according to his discernment and assessment. This is part of 'knowing good and evil', i.e. making evaluations. He gives worship to that which serves him most. Because by nature God must have highest worship, man is forced to make God into those forms which express his concepts. Idols (or 'lords') carry a great thrill, for they represent the expectations of emotionally deprived persons. What in fact they can only derive from God Himself they endeavour to get from their idols.

A psalmist said, 'Those who make [idols] are like them' (Ps. 115:8). In fact man 'extrojects' himself and his desires, that is, he turns them into the form and character of his idols. He then makes the demands upon them that he would make upon something intended to be as God. He wants joy, pleasure, serenity, fulfilment and security from his idols, but by nature of the case they cannot give these, for they have no basic (ontological) reality. Yet man is powerfully gripped by them.

The time comes when idols—always related in some way with sex or power—turn their tyrannous demands upon their devotees. Man, who sets out in imagined selfrule and self-determination, becomes pitiful as he seeks portents of good from his gods. These he never does obtain. What he does discover is that the idols, the gods, and the lords have little if any mercy, and they certainly have no grace. Grace is a matter far removed from self-dependent human beings, and from human-dependent idols.

## GRACE COMES TO MAN IN THE STREAM OF HISTORY

In our first chapter we saw the power that came to Israel through the work of Christ and the Holy Spirit. It was unique in all Israel's history. Somehow, a new era began with Pentecost. We saw that both miraculous healing and man's salvation came as a result of Christ's coming into the world. We saw that this 'grace invasion' was an event in history to be reckoned with. Before we resume our descriptions of the *action* of grace we need to examine something of the *history* of grace.

That history began with the fall of man. The promise of Genesis 3:15, given by God, that He would raise up the seed of woman to destroy the seed of the serpent, was God's indication that He had not abandoned man, and would not give creation up to the rule of evil.

## CREATION A GIFT TO MAN BUT NOT 'OF GRACE'

When man was created he had no need of grace. What man was made to be by God did not require him to live in grace. For many years I believed that since everything that man has is a gift of God (cf. I Cor. 4:7, 'What have you that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?'), then everything is of grace. If grace means everything has come to us giftwise, then surely all life is grace. I now see, however, that what God gave to man in creation can only be called 'grace' in a very general way. Man, by nature of the case, is dependent upon God for his being, but he is given his life by *nature* and not by *grace*. Life, then, is not a 'handout', nor something given by condescension or patronage. Man is not an undeserving beggar being given welfare instalments. God has given him life, and that is that! Let there be no talk of 'grace'. Man does not have to fawn upon God in order to live.

## THE IDEA OF GRACE

The idea of grace is specifically used in the Scriptures for God's favour where it is not merited, and God's restoration of sinful humanity where it is not deserved. In the history of Israel, two Hebrew words were used which come close to the Christian word 'grace' (Greek: *charis*), and they were *chen* and *chesed*. We need, now, to do a simple study of the use of the word 'grace', so that we define our terms and set out our meaning.

## The Idea of Grace in the History of Israel

The Greek Old Testament (known as the LXX, or Septuagint) has translated the two Hebrew words *chen* and *chesed* into the Greek word *charis*, which is also the word used in the New Testament for ‘grace’. *Chen* carries with it the idea of something undeserved. For example, Moses says to God, ‘Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found grace in thy sight, shew me now thy way, that I might know thee, that I might find grace in thy sight’ (Exod. 33:13, AV). In human affairs it is used for the weaker appealing to the stronger for favour. In Genesis 32:5 Jacob appeals to Esau as one who is stronger, ‘that I may find favour in your sight’. So, too, Ruth appeals to Boaz (Ruth 2:2, 10, 13), and Hannah to Eli (I Sam. 1: 18). Job admits he cannot argue his own righteousness with God. In Job 9:15 he says, ‘Though I am innocent, I cannot answer him; I must appeal for *mercy* to my accuser’.

The second word—*chesed*—was translated in the LXX by the Greek word for ‘mercy’, i.e. *eleos*. In the English translations of the Old Testament, it is often ‘loving-kindness’ or ‘mercy’. God says, ‘Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love [*aheb*]: therefore with *lovingkindness* have I drawn thee’ (Jer. 31:3, AV). In Isaiah 54:8 God says, ‘In overflowing wrath for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have *compassion* on you’.

Man, too, must exercise *chesed*. Micah the prophet cries, ‘He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love *kindness*, and to walk humbly with your God?’ (6:8).

We conclude that the words *chen* and *chesed* speak of

something which is undeserved by the recipient, without which that person or nation cannot proceed, or subsist in a useful and good way. Grace, then, is exercised towards the weak and the sinful, and involves loving-kindness and compassion. On this foundation the New Testament word 'grace' (*charis*) builds powerfully.

## THE IDEA OF GRACE IN THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

The word *charis* had its own history in Greek usage, and included a range of meanings. These contained the ideas of 'gracefulness', 'beauty', 'a pleasant way of doing things', 'a favour', and this latter meaning included also the idea of 'gratitude' for the favour. The fact that grace could be used for both favour and responsive gratitude shows that the full Christian idea of grace had not yet been reached. The New Testament writers took the word *charis* and gave it meaning that it had not formerly possessed. It was enriched beyond measure, yet such a meaning could not have been invented. It naturally flowed from the fact of God's grace. That grace demanded a word which would encompass its meaning. *Charis* was the word chosen to fulfil this function.

Grace in the Christian community meant that God was always going out to sinful, needy, and undeserving man to do him good, and that that good was something man could not do for himself. We must, then, see grace as God's good action which He does. When we say 'does', we mean that grace is not an abstract element, not some power which can be detached from God. *Grace is God working, and nothing else.* Thus the 'grace of God' and the 'grace of our

Lord Jesus Christ' are the actions of God and Christ, in concert with the Holy Spirit, to effect restoration in man, and sustain him in the battle to live in faith in the face of evil's unremitting attacks upon him. Only this understanding of grace can make sense of its uses in the New Testament. We say then that grace is God acting to do man good, and good because he has fallen and lost the true way of life, and the true use of the gifts God has given him.

Whilst we are satisfied with this general description of grace, it needs also to be described in detail, so that we will know what has 'appeared' (John 1:14; Titus 2:11; 3:4), and thus what is now extant. Grace, then, is God's saving of humanity when it only deserves judgement. It is His forgiving, justifying, sanctifying and glorifying action, when man himself utterly lacks the power or merit to accomplish any of these. Grace is God working at each moment of the believer's life, when he is beset by his own 'flesh', by the works of darkness, and the death which is always about him. Grace, in these moments, is as a power, but it is God Himself working in His own power. It is also the gift and calling of ministry, as well as the power to accomplish such service.

These things which we have defined as 'grace', we must eventually examine, to see whether or not they are valid, but a working understanding of grace is that God restores to us that which was given in creation but lost through the Fall, or—better still—grace is the restoring of us to that state of true humanity, the humanity which was spoiled by the entrance of death and sin because of our rebellion against God.

## **GOD'S GRACE APPEARING IN HISTORY**

When Titus 2:11 states, 'The grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men', it refers to Christ's coming and the work he accomplished. However, that was not the initial appearance of grace. The first statement of grace was the announcement in Genesis 3:15 that God would destroy the seed of the serpent through the seed of woman. This seed—a human being—would crush evil under his heel, whilst that heel would be bruised in the act of destroying evil.

### **Grace Follows the Judgement of the Flood**

We then find grace exercised in various ways. Cain's judgement for killing his brother Abel was ameliorated by God's protection of him (Gen. 4:13–15), i.e. the famous 'mark of Cain' was placed protectively by God. Grace was exercised towards Noah and his family when the earth was filled with violence and corruption (Gen. 6:8), and then towards the world in the first explicit covenant (Gen. 8:20–9:7) when God promised He would never again destroy the world by water.

### **Universal Grace Appears in God's Covenant with Abraham**

Most powerfully of all, God's grace came to mankind in the covenant God made with Abraham. This related not only to Abraham and his chosen descendants Isaac and Jacob, but to their descendants—the people of Israel—and to all the nations of the earth. In the

Old Testament there is a prolific array of materials relating to God's grace as it appears constantly to Israel, and relates to the destiny of the human race.

### **Yet Grace Appears in a New Way, in a Unique Manner**

Why, then, did Paul say, 'The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation', when in fact God's actions of grace had been so prolific before the coming of Christ? Indeed in the same Letter (Titus 3:4) Paul also says, 'But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared. . .', meaning, 'But when the *grace* of God appeared. . .' The answer to our question must be that he was emphasizing the distinctive and definitive nature of the appearing of grace at a point in history—the advent of Christ—and that this appearing eclipsed any motion or movement of grace God had previously made.

It is not merely a quirk of history that Christendom has long used the phrase 'the year of grace of our Lord', meaning that grace in the human scene has been extant, commencing at the birth of Christ. It is clear, then, that the Christian community has looked upon the coming of Christ as the revelation of grace so vast that the human spirit cannot encompass its dimensions. An incredible 'invasion of grace' took place in the birth, life, ministry, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ the Word, the Son of the Living God. It is this we now wish to examine in more detail.

## **GRACE DOES NOT COME WITHOUT PROPHETIC PREPARATION**

### **GRACE IS ONLY TRULY SEEN AGAINST THE BACKGROUND OF MAN'S TERRIBLE PLIGHT**

At the end of Chapter 1, the chapter in which we saw the beginning of grace in the early church, I suggested that we could not truly understand grace unless we looked at the glory of man in creation, and then at the loss of his glory because of the Fall—man's fall into sin, through his rebellion against God. Only when we see the terrible tragedy of man's sin and its consequent effects can we begin to grasp the vast dimensions of grace required to meet his problem, i.e. that of evil, and the doom of judgement which it brings. If, then, we minimize the evil of man we will equally minimize grace.

## **GRACE'S COMING INTIMATED BY THE PROPHETS**

What we must understand on the one hand, then, is the terrible nature of man's evil, and on the other hand, God's revealed intention to deliver man from guilt, from judgement, and from the bondage to the evil powers by which he had been gripped and enslaved. We mean that the appearing of the grace of God was not something which happened unannounced in history. To the contrary, the fact and principle of covenant shows us that only grace could deliver the human race, whilst the coming of that grace was the constant theme of the prophets. Peter wrote to the early church,

The prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired about this salvation; they inquired what person or time was indicated by the Spirit of Christ within them when predicting the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glory. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things which have now been announced to you by those who preached the good news to you through the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look (I Pet. 1:10–13).

Later, too, the writer of the New Testament book, 'The Revelation of St. John the Divine', recorded that, 'The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy' (19:10), i.e. that the subject and theme of prophecy is Christ, for his alone is the dynamic action which brings grace to the human race. What we are saying is that if the coming of Christ, 'full of grace and truth', is not the subject of prophetic teaching and prediction, then it must be suspect: it must be called in question.

For these reasons then we will first look at the intimations in prophecy of ‘the grace that was to be yours’, remembering the principle stated by Amos (3:7), ‘Surely the Lord God does nothing, without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets’.

## **THE PROPHETIC MESSAGE OF THE GRACE WHICH WAS TO COME**

Prophecy in Israel was unique in man’s history. No other nation had the kind of prophecy Israel knew and practised. Indeed it was one of the most powerful factors by which it lived. Other nations had prophecy of a sort, but never like that in Israel where God Himself spoke through His chosen servants. The idols were for the most part dumb. God, however, was powerfully vocal. Hence we find such statements as the following: ‘ . . . my words, says the Lord, which I persistently sent to you by my servants the prophets’; ‘I have sent to you all my servants the prophets, sending them persistently’; ‘Yet I persistently sent to you all my servants the prophets’ (Jer. 29:19; 35:15; 44:4). Amos, as we have noted, made the claim, ‘Surely the Lord does nothing, without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets’.

This prophetic word was powerful. Jeremiah called it ‘a burning fire shut up in my bones’ (20:9). God said, ‘I am making my words in your mouth a fire’, and again, He asked, ‘Is not my word like fire?’ (Jer. 5:14; 23:29). It was to this prophetic word that Jesus referred time and again. After his resurrection he said to two of his disciples,

‘O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?’ And beginning with Moses and *all the prophets*, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself (Luke 24:25–27).

Later they said, ‘Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked with us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?’ (verse 32). The prophetic word was as powerful in their hearing as when first uttered.

It was the same word to which the apostolic preachers alluded constantly. Paul asserted to King Agrippa,

‘I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: that the Christ must suffer, and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to the people and to the Gentiles’ (Acts 26:22–23).

We refer to prophecy because it is one of the most dynamic elements of history. Either God spoke—and speaks—to His people, or He does not communicate in this way. If He does communicate in this way, then what He says must be of great significance. In fact it is mandatory that we read, hear, know and believe the prophetic word.

## **WHERE THE PROPHETIC WORD IS, THERE IS NOTHING INNOVATIVE**

It is of great significance, for it shows that Jesus’ coming in history was nothing innovative or contrived. For centuries the people of grace—Israel—had been waiting for the ‘greater grace’ of Messiah’s coming. We mean that

the prophets had spoken in various ways of the coming of ‘great David’s greater Son’, i.e. Messiah, the ‘anointed one’ (II Sam. 7: 12–14; Ps. 132:11; I Kings 8:25; II Chron. 6: 16), ‘the Son’ of Psalms 2 and 89, and ‘the Son’ of Isaiah 9:6–7, who was to be ‘Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace’. It seemed that this one was also ‘the righteous Branch’ of Jeremiah 23:5 and 33:15 (cf. Zech. 3:8; 6:12; Isa. 4:2). He was also to be the great ‘Lord’ of Psalm 110, a veritable ‘Priest–King’, ruling all the nations.

### **‘THE TESTIMONY OF JESUS IS THE SPIRIT OF PROPHECY’**

Prophetically, this Davidic King was the one who was to ‘come to you; triumphant and victorious . . . humble and riding on an ass’ (Zech. 9:9). Nor was this King the only figure of a Coming One. There was to be a ‘Suffering Servant’ such as is found in Isaiah chapters 40 to 66 (42: 1–4 49:1–6; 50:4–9; 52:13–53:12), who would not only ‘raise up the tribes of Jacob’ and ‘restore the preserved of Israel’, but would be ‘a light to the nations, [so] that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth’ (49:6). Nor was this the limit of the Coming One. There was to be a great prophet, the one predicted by Moses in Deuteronomy 18. Men were to hear his words under pain of death for disobedience.

If—as it seemed were the case—this King would also be a King–Priest, a great Lord, a Prophet and a Suffering One, then by nature of the case his ministry must be unique amongst mankind and in all human history. He would bring, not only to Israel but to all the human race,

that which no man had brought, nor could bring. What mankind needed was deliverance from its plight, and such deliverance would have to be an act of grace. If it were to happen from human political powers then it must be doomed to ultimate failure.

As King he would bring in the Kingdom of God, as Prophet he would proclaim the living powerful Word of God—the one which would bring deliverance. As the Suffering One he would ‘bear the sins of many and make intercession for the transgressors’ (Isa. 53: 12). As Lord he would rule over all history for his people and his God, bringing the nations to obedience so that they would worship the one true God. This would be the ultimate triumph of grace.

In describing these elements of prophecy we have condensed great themes, so that their importance is minimized. Many scholars have pondered these prophecies in fine detail. For example, the ‘Suffering Servant’ of Isaiah chapters 40 to 66 was a figure of mystery. He claimed that in his coming he would bring great salvation, justification and healing. Who could he be? Likewise the prophecies linked with the Kingdom of God pointed to an ultimate universal Kingdom, involving all the nations of the world. How, then, could these things be? They were all to come about by some sovereign intervention of God.

### **THAT WHICH IS PROPHESED IS NOT ONLY INEVITABLE BUT INDISPENSABLE**

This point is most important. Every so often we need to remind ourselves that what was prophesied was not only sure to happen, but needed to happen. Whilst we do not

doubt that what God prophesies will happen, its happening is because in the plan of God it is indispensable. That is why Peter said, ‘The prophets prophesied *of the grace which was to be yours*’.

We gather, then, from all this, that the principles found in Isaiah 46:9–11 and 48:3 are basic to God in His plan and His purpose, that which Paul calls ‘the counsel of His will’ and ‘the eternal purpose which he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord’, namely:

‘I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done. . . I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it’ (Isa. 46:9–11);

‘The former things I declared of old, they went forth from my mouth and I made them known; then suddenly I did them and they came to pass’ (Isa. 48:3).

This is why Christ had such regard for the prophecies, claiming he only did what they had predicted. He used the word ‘must’, i.e. ‘it is necessary’ (Greek: *dei*), meaning that these things had, of necessity, to happen:

‘Was it not *necessary* that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?’ (Luke 24:26);

‘These are my words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled’ (Luke 24:44).

We conclude then that the ‘appearing’ of grace, of which the New Testament speaks, was not innovative, not something concocted by such enthusiastic followers of Christ as Paul, Peter, and John, who spoke of it in glowing terms. Indeed prophecy was given by God to prepare

the world for the 'invasion of grace', that great sovereign act which was intended to change the destinies of the human race.

## **IN THE FULNESS OF TIME, GOD'S GRACE APPEARS**

### **GRACE APPEARS IN THE PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST—ON TIME**

If indeed Christ's appearing—'full of grace and truth'—was the fulfilment of the prophecies, then we can have great confidence in the Christian message. As for the idea of 'the fulness of time', we have many references in the New Testament. Paul said, 'In the fulness of time God sent forth his Son' (Gal. 4:4). Jesus cried, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand' (Mark 1:15). He kept referring to 'my time'. He said, 'My hour [time] has not yet come', when Mary pressed him with an important matter, and when his brothers urged him to go to Jerusalem (John 2:4; 7:6, 8). Finally he said, 'Father, the hour has come' (John 17:1). With his coming, grace had come uniquely to the world.

Paul put it simply, 'The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation' (Titus 2:11, NASB). 'The grace of God' and 'bringing salvation' are statements which equate with each other. Paul also said, ' . . . the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared' (Titus 3:4). 'Goodness and loving kindness' are Hebrew synonyms for 'grace'. John, too, stated it simply: 'The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; and we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father' (John 1:14). The matter could not be more clearly stated.

## **THE INVASION OF GRACE**

Theologians often speak of God 'irrupting into the affairs of mankind'. They mean that God had always let mankind be, but now He was breaking into their affairs. This is not strictly correct. The thrilling thing about God is that His grace had commenced its action with the fall of man. He had always been closely linked to the human race, upholding it with the word of His power (Heb. 1:3), causing all things to 'hold together' in Christ (Col. 1 :17), and doing His acts of grace, as we have seen, with persons such as Cain and Noah, with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the tribes of Israel, and through His servants the prophets.

Yet undoubtedly the Incarnation of the Son, the Word 'becoming flesh' was an invasion of sorts into the human scene. The Jews who rejected Christ thought it was a preposterous suggestion that God had become man, and the Greeks described it as 'foolishness'. This was

understandable. Christ said that without rebirth— ‘being born anew from above’—true understanding of him and his mission was impossible. It would take a great mind—and a simple one—to see all the prophecies fulfilled in the one person, Jesus of Nazareth.

## GRACE COMES TO PALESTINE

The birth narratives in Luke chapters I and 2, and in Matthew 1, are all confirmatory that this birth was no ordinary one. It was ordinary in that it was like any other birth—a child ‘born of a woman’. It was extraordinary in that it was attended by the appearing of angels to Mary, Zechariah and Joseph. Unusual was the message to Zechariah and Elizabeth about the conception and destiny of their son to be—John the Baptist. The virgin conception of Christ was also unusual, as was the choir of angels at the birth of Christ. The witnesses of Simeon and Anna to the fulfilment of the prophecies must not be treated lightly, nor, for that matter, the later witness of the Magi.

John said, of the enfleshed Word, ‘He was full of grace and truth’. That could never be said of any man in all history, either prior to Christ’s coming, or after his ascension. No man can be said to be full of truth, and the question of bringing grace cannot possibly arise in relation to a human being. So then, an event had taken place in history in a guileless way.

The witness of John to Jesus must not be taken lightly. He was ‘a man sent from God’ (John 1:6). Jesus acknowledged his witness, but said that what mattered was

the witness of the Father. The Father witnessed to him audibly at his baptism in the Jordan River and at his transfiguration on Mount Tabor. Later Peter claimed it was a witness to the prophecies which went before him (i.e. Jesus). He said,

For when he received honour and glory from God the Father , and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,' we heard this voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. And we have the prophetic word made more sure (11 Pet. 1:17 19).

Just prior to the crucifixion, when Jesus cried, 'Father, glorify thy name', the Father answered him, 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again' (John 12:28). John tells us that the Father glorified His name through His Son, i.e. through what he was, and what he did. This was especially so of the work of the Cross. Grace was present in every movement and action of the Son. That is why John said, 'And of his fulness have we all received, grace upon grace'.

## **GRACE PRESENT AND ITINERANT IN PALESTINE**

John cried, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hands (Matt. 3:2). Jesus took up the same proclamation, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of heaven is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel' ( Mark 1 :15). The Gospel, in Isaiah 52:7, is 'Your God reigns'!

Whatever this may have meant to Israel under the heel and domination of Rome, it had a significance deeper than the political. Anointed by the Holy Spirit, he was

now 'Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God', as Peter and others realized. It was Peter who later described Jesus' entire ministry and its significance: '...God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power . . . he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him' (Acts 10:38–39).

Jesus' programme, it appears, was to proclaim the Kingdom of God to all Israel. His miracles, his healings, and his teachings all had to do with the Kingdom. Indeed, wherever he went he was the Kingdom of God himself, for his anointing had made him Messiah, the true King of Israel. Nathanael acknowledged this (John 1:49), as did also the crowd when he entered Jerusalem on the colt of an ass (John 12:12–15).

He said, 'If it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you' (Matt. 12:28). He told his followers to lay hands on the sick, heal them and say, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you' (Luke 10:9). Everything he did was through the power of God given to him at his baptism (cf. Acts 10:38; 1:8), and cannot be put down to natural or occult powers.

We have said that the human situation prior to the coming of Christ had no promise of relief, so terrible it was. For the faithful in Israel there were the great prophetic promises, but only Israelites would have been aware of these. As it was, they did not—for the most part—link Jesus of Nazareth with these predictive promises. If we read the Gospels closely we will see he brought enormous relief to men and women. He healed them, set them free from demonic spirits and demons, relieving

many, too, of their guilts. What amazed the scribes and other men of the law was that he forgave sins apart from the sacrifices, and it appeared that his forgiveness was authentic.

So he itinerated in Galilee, Judea and Samaria, and— it would seem—Perea also. His ministry was dynamic. He acted in power, with power. Nor was his teaching merely didactic, the mere imparting of information or the kind of argument that comes with intellectual prowess and garnered knowledge. He claimed, 'The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life' (John 6:63). His words were really actions. When he commanded, 'Stretch forth your arm', a man stretched forth his withered arm, as though he could not but obey the given word. Christ undoubtedly taught about the Kingdom, about God, and about the future, but he taught dynamically. So much so that they asked, 'Where does this power come from?', and observed that he spoke with authority and not as the scribes who lacked this immediate word from God.

Only when he had proclaimed the Gospel to the whole nation of Israel did he draw his ministry to a close. He knew it would conclude with the betrayal, a judgement, a cross, and a tomb. He knew he must die, and that he must rise again. This was all 'necessary', the 'must' (*dei*) of the prophetic word.

If we see his ministry in Palestine as a mere prologue to his death, then we will view it as something he had to go through, and not as the living demonstration and actuation of the grace of God. John reminds us, 'Of his fulness have we all received, grace upon grace' (John 1 :16). 'Grace upon grace' is the only way of describing his ministry. God, in Christ, was going out to do sinful man

good, so that many were healed, and many were relieved of torturing spirits, while yet others were the objects of miracles. Some found the incredible peace of sins forgiven. Physically blinded eyes were opened, but a spiritual brilliance shone on others. Those who were crushed by their own sin and guilt and the cruelty of others found healing for their hearts.

This was indeed 'grace upon grace'.

## GRACE GROWS ON A TREE

Jesus knew the end, i.e. the consummation of his ministry, must be a cross and a tomb. Three times in the one Gospel (Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33) he told his disciples that this was to be the case. Each time they retreated from the hard disclosure. On one occasion 'they were afraid to ask him [of that saying]' (9:32).

So he came to Jerusalem, and inevitable death. The joy of his entry, the wide acknowledgement of him as King, by the people, did not prevent him weeping over the city, for he knew the doom which lay over it. In that last week he shared with his disciples the knowledge of the impending judgement of Israel. He foresaw the destruction of the temple, and he himself was to be the new temple. A greater worship than Israel had ever envisaged was going to happen in this world.

## THE PURE GRACE OF GOD IN THE ATONEMENT OF CHRIST

Jesus had given various indications of the importance and meaning of his death. He had said, 'I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh' (John 6:51). He had also said, 'The Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many' (Mark 10:45). In saying this, he connected his life with that of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah.

In the last week he had said, 'And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself', and John added that he was talking about his death (John 12:32, 33). On the last night—the night of the Last Supper—he said plainly, 'This is my blood of the new covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins' (Matt. 26:28). Some of the disciples who heard these words may have thought of Isaiah 53, of the lamb led to the slaughter, and they may have connected this with the Paschal lamb, and the liberating triumph of the Exodus. Some would have thought of the sins taken away by the Suffering Servant, or the forgiveness offered by God in the New Covenant: 'I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more' (Jer. 31:34). Whether these thoughts went through their minds or not, they are inherent in the accounts of the Last Supper, and in the promises of the New Covenant.

Whatever the meaning of many things he said, we cannot evade the fact that he saw the cross and the tomb as part of the great prophetic predictions. The three

sayings in Mark regarding his death and resurrection stand like strong bastions of truth. He knew the *dei* of his death and resurrection.

Nor was he deterred by any thought of the death on the cross, even though some may argue that in the Garden of Gethsemane he came close to losing his nerve. In the light of Matthew 26:38 ('My soul is very sorrowful, *even to death*'), and Hebrews 5:7 ('In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him *who was able to save him from death*, and he was heard for his godly fear'), I claim there are cogent reasons for believing that what he feared (and which puzzled him) was death in Gethsemane, rather than on the cross. No, I do not think that he drew back from the cross. He feared a bloodless death in the garden rather than the bloody death of the cross.

## **WHERE WAS GRACE IN THAT DEATH AND RESURRECTION?**

When we ask a question like this one, and seek to answer it, we are drawn into two thousand years of Christian thinking and theology. We are beset by the great and profound minds which have pondered that Death. Even so, the great minds of the Post-Apostolic Fathers, and of men of later date, such as Tertullian and Augustine, Abelard, Anselm, and the Reformers, are all dependent upon the Apostles themselves. Without the statements of Paul, Peter, John, and the author of Hebrews, they and we would have so little upon which to build.

'My blood . . . for the forgiveness of sins.' That is what

he said on the last night, and that was what it was all about. ‘Father, forgive them for they know not what they do!’, was not a plea limited to his immediate persecutors and tormentors. Forgiveness was to become universal, based on the atoning death. That death was indispensable to authentic forgiveness. Later Paul was to proclaim,

‘Let it be known to you therefore, brethren, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him every one that believes is justified from everything from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses’ (Acts 13:38-39).

The manner of obtaining that forgiveness was the shedding of his blood—as he said it would be. The author of Hebrews said later that the blood of bulls and goats could not take away sin (10:4). He saw that Christ’s bloodshedding was effective to do this. He saw Christ’s sacrifice as the only true sacrifice ever offered: ‘But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. . . For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified’ (10:12, 14).

Peter spoke about this bloodshedding:

You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot (I Pet. 1:18–19).

Blood, in these cases, means sacrificial death, death brought about by violence, seen by God as acceptable.

Even so, it was what happened in that dying, in that blood-letting, in that suffering, which is significant. Peter told us what had happened. He said, ‘He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree’ (I Pet. 2:24). To bear is to

take up the burden of, to take away, from us to himself, and then to suffer the outworking of the guilt and ravages of sin within himself—so much so that he works them to exhaustion and extinction. If he is not greater than our sins then he perishes, but if greater than all our sins, then he triumphs over them, in the very bearing of them.

Paul says, ‘For our sake [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God’ (II Cor. 5:21). So then, Christ became as the guilty one that we might be forgiven our guilts and be justified from the law, thus escaping its ruthless demand for our death. John says, ‘In this is love. . .that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins’ (I John 4:10), and Paul says clearly, ‘God put [him] forward as a propitiation by his blood’ (Rom. 3:25).

Now we may not understand all this talking about blood and propitiation, of him being made sin, and bearing our sins in his body, but we need to know the heart of the matter, namely that without that death, that personal sacrifice, no one—repeat, no one—in all the human race could know or obtain salvation. The Cross is entirely indispensable to the salvation of mankind.

We may not know, we cannot tell  
What pains he had to bear,  
But we believe it was for us  
He hung and suffered there.

Our notions of what happened there—on the Cross— will not save us, but they may help us to see something of the immense grace that set him forth in that act of the death. Grace begins always with the Father: He is the one who takes the initiative. He sent him to be the propitiation for

our sins. He then set him forth as a propitiation. He made him to be sin, and He laid on him the iniquity of us all. He it was who numbered him with the transgressors, and He who was pleased to bruise him, and to make his soul an offering for sin. Paul says, 'He [the Father] abandoned him up for us all'. All these things the Scriptures say of the Father, the Initiator of salvation.

But they also say the Son was as much in it because of his love as was the Father. Paul said, ' . . . the Son of God, who loved me and abandoned himself up for me' (Gal. 2:20). He did it graciously, not savagely: ' . . . Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God' (Eph. 5:2). Nor was the Spirit absent from that event, for the writer of Hebrews tells us that he offered himself through the eternal Spirit (9:14). Perhaps this is why the same writer calls him 'the Spirit of grace' (10:29).

## **HUMAN BEINGS FIND THE CROSS DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND**

It is difficult for us to conceive what happened on that Cross. This is because we are so fallen that we cannot understand, essentially, what is the nature of sin. Equally we cannot understand the holiness of God. The inbuilt nature of sin is that of deception. Were we to have a full revelation of the nature of God, we would know that without the Cross we would all be undone.

The heinous nature of our guilt, the moral pollution of ourselves, and the terrible doom that rightly lies over every human being, cannot be rightly known. Were it

known, we would be shocked and shattered. We would see there is no way God can forgive just by forgiving. A Cross is demanded, but we only know that in hindsight. We could not even dream the way of salvation. We could never be wise enough to know that apart from the Cross no one in all the human race could find salvation.

## **THE GRACE OF GOD HAS APPEARED**

The grace has appeared in the person and action of Jesus Christ, and consummated its saving power by virtue of the Cross, and by virtue of the Resurrection. All the work of the Cross was attested when Jesus rose from the grave. Had sin been more powerful than he, then he would have remained dead, after the manner of every sinful human being.

He did not remain dead: he rose to justify those who believe. 'He was delivered for our offences and raised for our justification' (Rom. 4:25). 'If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins' (I Cor. 15:17). If death proved stronger than Christ, then so had sin. If he failed to rise, then it would mean he had failed to defeat sin, to bear it to extinction, to suffer guilt until nothing was left for the human race to suffer. If he failed then we were in no better state than before.

But he did not fail! The empty tomb and the revealed risen Christ are the true cause for rejoicing. '[He] abolished death and brought life and immortality to light'; 'death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God' (II Tim. 1:10; Rom. 6:9–10). These are the

statements which cause grace brilliantly to shine on us. Sin and death were two grotesque monsters who made their entrance into the human scene by the sin of the first man, but 'where sin did abound, grace did *much more* abound'.

Isaiah said, 'He poured out his soul unto death' (53:12). Jesus said. 'This is my blood. . . which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins' (Matt. 26:28). In Psalm 22:15 Messiah says to God, 'Thou dost lay me in the dust of death'. But then the death gives way to life:

Death cannot keep his prey,  
 Jesus my Saviour;  
 He tore the bars away,  
 Jesus my Lord!

That is right—'the grace of God has appeared', 'the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour has appeared'. This grace is set and sealed forever: nothing can reverse it. Like 'the God of all grace', this grace is irreversible. It has appeared to stay for ever, and to be for ever. That is why redeemed humanity can be 'to the praise of his glorious grace', so that 'in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus'.

# SECTION TWO

## **The Practical Work of God's Grace**

What does grace mean to us as persons, and also as the new community? How does grace work in our lives? These are questions we examine in this section, and for which we seek answers.

Grace as an idea is foreign to general human thinking. It may well be found in countries and societies where the Judaic Christian message has been implanted, but even there it has to come as a revelation. Grace is a concept that has to be learned, especially because we are suspicious of gifts. We have a proverb, 'Beware of Greeks bearing gifts'. We are always wary where something is given for nothing.

Yet when grace opens to us, brilliantly, in Jesus Christ, it unveils a new world. 'God's gifts are without change of mind', i.e. God gives freely and never recalls what He has given.

What then are 'the gifts of grace'? How do they work? What is the purpose of them? How can we receive them, and receive from them, and so give through them? This is a fascinating world to explore.

Finally we see that there is such a thing as 'the community of grace'. It did not exist, as such, prior to Christ's coming. Now it is in existence, and its reality is quite astounding. That is why we need to read on.



## **THE PERSONAL AND CORPORATE WORKING OF GRACE**

### **GRACE COMES TO THE HUMAN RACE**

In Chapter I of our first section we saw the event of the lame man being healed by the apostles Peter and John. We noted that they had a power to do this which was not their own 'power or piety'. A new element had appeared, and we saw that the whole church was both captured and captivated by it. We saw that at Pentecost, with the coming of the Spirit, the grace of God had come, bringing salvation, and making the community to be born in love, and to live in love and unity.

We also saw the community shared all it had with those who had need. We saw grace heal the lame man, and later the whole church praying for the persecuted apostles so much so that they were all filled with the Spirit and the same love and unity expressed itself in

further acts of giving and sharing, whilst the apostles witnessed to the resurrection of Christ with great power. Luke sums up this dynamic situation in the statement, ‘and great grace was upon them all’ (Acts 4:33).

What we need to see now is how grace worked in the persons of the new believers, and then how it worked in the community as a whole. Of course the personal and the corporate are interrelated and interdependent.

## **GRACE COMES TO PERSONS PERSONALLY**

We have seen that the Greek word *charis* was taken by the early Christians, infused with the new understanding of grace, and made to carry this radical new comprehension, in much the same way as *agape* was taken and charged with the new Christian meaning of love. At the back of these words were not abstract ideas, but living understanding and practice of both grace and love.

What, then, did the word ‘grace’ mean, and what was such grace in action? In our answer we mean to detail each element of grace, keeping in mind that it is always God’s personal dynamic working, and not a power or thing separate from God, and working its own ends.

## **GRACE IS PRIMARILY CONCERNED WITH SALVATION**

‘The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation’. This could be paraphrased, ‘Christ has come, and he has effected salvation for mankind’. Titus 3:4–7 gives a sort of

## THE PERSONAL AND CORPORATE WORKING OF GRACE

summary of this:

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life.

If we add to this statement two others, then we bring together the rich elements of grace. Ephesians 2:8–10 says,

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not because of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Again II Timothy 1:9 speaks of God, ‘who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not in virtue of our works but in virtue of his own purpose and the grace which he gave us in Christ Jesus ages ago’.

These three quotes add up to something quite powerful. They are saying in essence that man cannot do anything for his own salvation, and God has moved out in Christ to save man. He had planned to do this before time, before creation, and has effected it in time, through Christ. The implications of this are quite staggering. They are that man can do nothing whatever to come to salvation~~ and that entire salvation is of grace, i.e. not only being saved from the penalty of his sin, but all that follows being saved, the details of which we set out below. Only this can explain why the new community was what it was. Only this explains that grace is sheer, that is,

it is total and whole, and that not any action of man, tiny or large, can move God to do anything for us. He does it without our plea, our attempted motivation of Him. We merit nothing, we can attain nothing. God does it all.

Doubtless such statements and the emphasis of them is unacceptable to man in the natural. Everything that happened in his fall is against such thinking. He clings to the idea that his evaluations are correct, his ideas are right, and he knows what to do, and can do it, even in the matter of his salvation. His myriad gods, idols, and ways of salvation attest to man's many attempts to arrive where he desires to be, where he thinks that it is good that he should be.

What then happened in this action of grace in the early church to bring believing people to personal faith and salvation, and the community as a whole to the unprecedented love and unity that they genuinely manifested?

## **PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF GRACE CREATES THE NEW COMMUNITY**

It has to be said that when the Spirit came, he worked in accordance with Christ's prediction that he would convince (i.e. convict and rebuke) the world of sin, and righteousness and judgement (John 16:7–11). This preliminary work of the Spirit must be seen as grace. Without it, repentance and faith could not be born. The theologians often speak of 'prevenient grace', i.e. that work of grace which brings us fully into grace.

The Greek word *charis* (grace) is related to *charism*, i.e. gift. It is noteworthy that we never find the plural of

## THE PERSONAL AND CORPORATE WORKING OF GRACE

*charis*, although we find the plural of *charism* (*charismata*), so that we conclude there is ‘grace’ but no ‘graces’. Even so, the idea of grace is linked with the idea of gift and thus we can speak of the gifts of grace, although grace covers them, and more. What happened at Pentecost was that the gifts of grace came to those present, even though they, for their part, may not have had much theological knowledge of these matters. Because these gifts are important, we will nominate each one, and spend a little time talking about them.

### THE PERSONAL, INTIMATE AND DYNAMIC NATURE OF THE GIFTS OF GRACE

We are now going to discuss the gifts God has given to His church, and to each of us, personally. When we discuss such gifts theologically, then they seem objects at which we look, and about which we hear, but in a sense also appear to be impersonal. There is therefore a weakness in the listing of the following gifts, and I trust this small note may orientate us to the gifts as most intimate, most personal, and as acting powerfully upon our lives.

For example, repentance and faith are gifts of the Spirit, without which man is helpless to change his mind towards God and himself, and to trust God and believe in Him. Now, by the gifts, he is richly aware of God, deeply moved in his understanding, and strongly inclined to the things which are life-transforming. Again, when he is forgiven, his life is radically changed in every part of his being. Justification suddenly looses him from guilt and the perpetual sense of condemnation. The gift of

purification of (from) sins gives man a sense of utter cleanness, and the desire for continuing purity of living.

When believing man receives the gift of love through the saving acts of God's grace, and realizes he is at last a true son of the Father, and more even than that—a holy son of the holy Father—then his joy knows no bounds. He is lifted into purposeful relationship with the living God, and into a vocation which will take him into eternity. In fact it is the gift of eternal life which is unspeakable for a human being. Theologians may speak of it calmly and objectively, but the recipient of such a gift is endowed beyond his wildest dreams.

Such a gift cannot be known apart from the gift of the very Holy Spirit himself, since he is the Spirit of life. He also leads the children of God to the ultimate gifts which are part of that eternal life, namely glorification of the body, and what is called 'the eternal inheritance'.

These gifts will take up the text of our next few chapters, but it is essential that we do not treat them casually, or fail to realize their impact upon us personally. They all issue from grace.

## THE PERSONAL GIFTS OF GRACE (1)

### REPENTANCE AND FAITH

Repentance is a gift of God. When man was in union with God at creation there would have been no need for this gift. Acts 5:31–32 and 11:18 insist that repentance is a gift. Likewise faith is a gift (cf. Eph. 2:8–9; Phil. 1:29; cf. II Tim. 2:25). Faith, we are told, comes through hearing the word of Christ (Rom. 10:17). Man may try to repent but will only end in remorse. Repentance means ‘a change of mind, attitude, understanding’. Romans 2:4 tells us that Gods goodness, kindness, forbearance and patience leads us to repentance.

Faith is trust in God, having an assurance that what He says is true; therefore that trust acts on God’s offers

and promises, and receives the salvation He has proffered. Thus when Peter said, ‘Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins’ (Acts 2:38), those who heard and were moved by the word believed and repented, or repented and believed. Thus their attitudes had been changed. They had *new* minds. They now thought differently. This was of grace.

## THE GIFT OF FORGIVENESS

Only he who has come to know the forgiveness of God can testify as to what it means. The load of human guilt is intolerable. From time to time man is visited by a sense of the enormity of his guilt, and it can be crushing. Peter’s command was, ‘Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins’ (Acts 2:38). He was, of course, saying that only through Christ could forgiveness come to those who were listening, and they would have to be baptized, i.e. become the disciples of Christ.

We cannot estimate the sheer freedom that comes with the total forgiveness of sins. Such forgiveness encompasses the entire sins of anyone’s life, since all have been borne by Christ. The statement, ‘sins past, present, and future’, is perhaps not the correct way of teaching forgiveness, but it certainly compasses all such sins. The guilt, then, fell away from the new believers, and with it that dreadful burden that attaches to guilt. The new community, being a forgiven people, was also instantly a forgiving people (cf. Matt. 18:21ff.; Col. 3:13; Eph. 4:32).

## THE GIFT OF PURIFICATION

Many New Testament Scriptures tell us that Christ effected purification of sins (cf. Heb. 1:3; 9:14; 10:22), and Old Testament Scriptures give us the promises of such purification (e.g. Isa. 4:4; Ezek. 36:24–26; Zech. 13:1). Hebrews 9:14 insists that the death of Christ purifies the conscience from ‘a consciousness of sin’ (cf. 10:2, 22). I Peter 1:22 speaks of ‘having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth’, meaning, ‘having been purified by faith in the Gospel’. Likewise I Corinthians 6:11 speaks of believers having been washed in their initial act of faith. Paul, too, is told to be baptized, ‘washing away your sins’ (Acts 22: 16). Likewise Peter himself speaks of the Gentiles having had their hearts cleansed by faith which he equates with ‘the grace of the Lord Jesus’ (Acts 15:9–11).

Purification from sins—like its twin companion forgiveness—brings immense relief. Shame is a mark of the human race, but shame is dissolved in cleansing from sin’s pollution. The purified person must be quite heady with the new access to assurance of no shame. Cleansing, as also forgiveness, is the root and foundation of love.

## THE GIFT OF LOVE

In two famous passages, Romans 5: 1–11 and I John 4:7–19, Paul and John outline much the same thing, namely that when we see and understand the Cross we come to know God’s love. Paul calls it a gift of God (Rom. 5:5), whereas John sees God’s act of grace as love, and

concludes, ‘We love because he first loved us’ (I John 4: 19). The gift of God’s love does not mean we have received something from God which we now keep and treasure. It means God gives Himself to us, so much so that ‘we abide in love’, which is the same as ‘we abide in God and God in us’, so that our life is possessed by love. True, we love Him because He first loved us, but God’s revelation had to show us how vast was (and is) that love, the very nature of God Himself. Love, then, is living in God, is a gift from God, and evokes our response to God.

This helps us to understand why love and unity were at such a high level on the day of Pentecost. We need to keep seeing that God’s love was not poured out once in the Atonement, the Cross and the Resurrection, but that that love—His love—is full and is continuing in us all the time.

## THE GIFT OF JUSTIFICATION

Apart from Acts 13:38–39 there is little talk of justification in the Book of the Acts. Paul, however, gives much teaching regarding justification, especially in the Letters to the church at Rome, and those in Galatia. Even so his statement in Acts 13:38–39 is powerful. He links forgiveness and justification, and says that there was no way man could be justified by the law of Moses. Indeed, to the contrary, for ‘by works of the law shall no one be justified’ (Gal. 2: 16; Ps. 143:2; cf. Job 4: 17).

Today justification would seem to have little relevance for us. This, however, is not true. At first sight it may seem irrelevant, but when we think how every human

## THE PERSONAL GIFTS OF GRACE

being seeks to justify himself in his actions, then the problem is unmasked. Since man is so sure of his evaluations and acts, it is interesting to realize that he is indeed most insecure about them, always on the defensive on his own behalf! No, self-justification is a live issue, and perhaps the most burning of them all. Human beings will accuse God—and others—in order to justify themselves. They do not understand ‘justification by grace’.

Well, then, what is ‘justification by grace’? In essence it means that we have no righteousness of our own. To quote Isaiah, ‘all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment’ (64:6). If it is impossible for a human being to justify himself (cf. Luke 16: 15), then he must live for ever in his guilt, and be the plaything of his own conscience and the accusations of others. As we have suggested, this is a live and dynamic issue.

Paul states justification by grace. In Romans 3:19–31 he says, in essence:

The law states our guilt which is inescapable. If this were the end of the matter it would be frightening. However, God has a righteousness which we may call ‘justifying righteousness’. No one is—of himself—righteous. Both Jews and non-Jews are guilty, but God brings both to authentic justification He justifies them by grace: ‘They are justified by his grace *as a gift*, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus’. He has never passed over one sin, but He has set forth Christ as the propitiation for sins, thus bringing judgement upon all sins, in His Son. He now justifies those who believe, accounting them as righteous, and this in no way is against His own righteousness. It is an incredible act of grace, and on the one hand liberates man from judgement, and on the other upholds His eternal law.

What Paul is saying is that the grace of God moves in history—in the atonement of Christ—to deal with the

judgement of the law and set us free from its penalty. This is a gift, although deeply painful to Christ. It is a free gift. Note that we are not justified by faith, although the term ‘justification by faith’ is sometimes used. It means God takes the entire initiative, and grants justification where it is wholly undeserved. Man must of course believe this in order to receive it, but his faith is—as we saw—a gift of God. Hence grace remains wholly grace.

The effects of justification can be seen in a number of places (e.g. Romans chs. 4, 5 and 6), but the primary effect is to take the burden and terror of law and guilt from the human heart and mind. The message of justification is, ‘You could never create a righteousness of your own, and you must never try. God has given you righteousness as a gift’. If we read Romans 5:12–21 carefully, we will see that Christ’s own righteousness has been accredited to us. This is called the ‘righteousness... which is through faith in Christ’ (Phil. 3:9).

Justification means we ‘have obtained access to this grace in which we stand’ (Rom. 5:2). In Romans 5:17 we are told—by way of contrast—of Adam’s sin and Christ’s obedience:

If, because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man, *much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.*

Justification places man in the most incredible freedom.

We ought to note, in passing, that to be free of guilt by justification is to have a heavy impediment to true living taken from us. We are now free to live: this is the message and gift of justification. The terrifying guilt, the pain, the

## THE PERSONAL GIFTS OF GRACE

shame, the alienation and its consequent loneliness, are all destroyed. That is why Paul says, 'Therefore, since we [have been] justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ' (Rom. 5: 1). The positive results of justification are no less than thrilling, when we truly understand them.

Although we have by no means covered all the gifts of grace, we can close this chapter by observing that any community, the new members of which simultaneously receive the gifts of repentance and faith, of forgiveness and cleansing, of love and justification, must be a rich and beautiful community. To be so radically brought under grace by the Gospel, through the Holy Spirit, must ensure it is that community which is without precedent in the history of mankind.



## THE PERSONAL GIFTS OF GRACE (2)

### THE GIFT OF REGENERATION

Today this word ‘regeneration’—which for a time was in the discard—is often used. After bushfires, or the rape of jungles, we talk of forests being regenerated. It is a word used for things being renewed. Yet nothing can be regenerated which has not first been generated. Thus when Paul says, ‘If any man be in Christ he is a new creation’, he adds, ‘Old things have passed away. Behold! They have become new’, i.e. the old things are now new things (II Cor. 5:17). A new creation is not ‘another creation’, but the old creation renewed.

In his great passage on grace appearing (Titus 3:47; cf. 2:11–14), Paul says,

God . . . saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, *by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit*, which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour.

‘The washing of regeneration’ we have already seen, i.e. purification from sins. ‘Renewal in the Holy Spirit’ is the entire renewing of the heart and mind, and both these things were long ago promised by God, and foretold in Ezekiel chapters 36 and 37.

In Ezekiel 37 the dry bones comes together, gather flesh, and are as newly–slain corpses, but through the Spirit are regenerated. In Ezekiel 36 God promises,

‘I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit [Spirit] I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit [Spirit] within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances’ (verses 25–27)

This activity of God is clear enough, but note it is God’s activity, not ours. We can change nothing! The miracle of regeneration takes place by God’s power. In regard to this John says (John 1:12–13), ‘To all who received him [Christ], who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God’. No human power is evident here, in this regeneration.

This action of God is indicated in James 1:18, ‘Of his own will he brought us forth *by the word of truth* that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures’. Here we are born ‘of the word of truth’. This is similar to the thought in I Peter 1:23, ‘You have been born anew, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, *through the living and abiding word of God*’. In the Book of Acts the terms for ‘the word of truth’ and ‘the word of God’ are ‘the word

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of his grace' or 'the gospel of the grace of God'.

When then we speak of 'the renewing of the Holy Spirit', we mean the Spirit of God takes the Gospel, the word of grace, and brings it effectively to the human heart. The application of that word, and the working in us of the Gospel by the Spirit, is God's great work of grace, for it effects regeneration.

Again we note that on the day of Pentecost there was a community of thousands, all of whom had received this gracious work of grace. No wonder they were 'the community of grace' and no wonder that 'great grace'—i.e. 'glorious grace'—was said to be upon them!

### THE GIFT OF SONSHIP

The gift of regeneration makes believing persons the children of God. This is clear from John 1:12–13. I John 3:1–3 and Romans 8:16 also speak of us being the children of God. 'Sonship' (or 'adoption') is another word, however, and carries a somewhat different idea. In Galatians 4:4–7 Paul links the grace of salvation and the grace of sonship in the one statement. He says,

*But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' So through God you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then an heir.*

Notice that in this passage redemption (from the law) is placed first, but it is with a view to sonship (adoption) which is a gift of God. The Spirit of sonship is sent into

the new heart, crying ‘Father!’ (cf. Rom. 8:15–17). The living relationship of a son to the Father is now established.

This gift of sonship is an incredible one, for it makes believers not simply persons who have been forgiven and justified but those who have been given a rich relationship with God, and who have the privilege of calling Him ‘Father!’. No higher cry than this will ever pass the lips of a human being.

At the same time it reveals to us that the nature of the new community is that of the family of God, elsewhere called ‘the household of God’ (cf. Eph. 2:18f.; I Tim. 3:15; Heb. 3:1–6). Sons of God are being shaped into the likeness of the Son (Rom. 8:29; I John 3:1–3). If then we refer to the corporate community of grace, we see they are the true family, and their relationships are first filial, and then familial. This inevitably leads to what is called ‘brotherly love’ or ‘love of the brethren’, bringing us vitally to see the extent of the gift of love of which we have spoken in our last chapter. What we should note here is that the gifts of grace include the gift of the Holy Spirit—that is, the Holy Spirit is given to us, a matter which we shall later pursue. Here we simply ought to see that all gifts come to us through the Spirit, and in particular love and sonship are linked with him (Rom. 5:5; Gal. 4:5–6).

## **THE PERSONAL GIFTS OF GRACE (3)**

### **THE GIFT OF HOLINESS, OF SANCTIFICATION**

One of the problems we will later discuss is the believer's attempts to effect what God has already given as a gift. Paul once said, 'He has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing' (Eph. 1:3). Human pride would like to achieve, warrant or merit these blessings. One of them is the fruit of the Spirit, and another is holiness of life. We can achieve neither.

We first need to see that the Scriptures urge us to live in holiness. Christ said, 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God' (Matt. 5:8). Paul said, 'Let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, and make holiness perfect in the fear of God' (II Cor. 7:1). The author of Hebrews wrote, 'Strive for peace with all men, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord' (Heb. 12: 14). Peter added, 'But as he who called

you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct' (I Pet. 1:15). Again, Paul spoke on the practics of holiness: 'If anyone purifies himself from what is ignoble, then he will be a vessel for noble use' (II Tim. 2:21). These exhortations urge us to live in a holy manner.

Secondly we need to see that holiness, from beginning to end, is a gift of God and a work of His grace. Roughly speaking we can divide the teaching of grace into two sections, (i) grace as sanctification, coming to us as a gift, and (ii) the exercise of holiness in the life of purity.

That sanctification is wholly of grace is clear from the word of the Son to the Father: '[Father] sanctify them in the truth; thy word is truth' (John 17:17). He had said to his disciples, 'You are already made clean by the word which I have spoken to you' (John 15:3). These two sayings show that the purification ('the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit') is effected by God. When we look back at the grace of cleansing as we discussed it, we can see that no holiness of life can be possible unless first we are washed through the Atonement, by the agency of the Holy Spirit.

We discover that before time began God purposed our holiness: ' . . . he chose us in him [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him'; 'I am sure that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ'; 'He who calls you is faithful' (Eph. 1:4; Phil. 1:6; I Thess. 5:24).

Part of the grace of sanctification is God placing us as members of His holy people. When Paul says 'you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified' (I Cor. 6:11), he must mean—amongst other things—that even

before justification God had sanctified His people. This is borne out by I Peter 1:2, ‘chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood’. Here election precedes our repentance and faith, as does also our sanctification. I Peter 2:9 tells us that we are ‘a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation’, i.e. that just as Israel (Exod. 19:5–6) was chosen and sanctified by God, so have we been chosen. Our inclusion in the holy people of God is of God’s grace, not of our working.

The other part of the grace of sanctification is God enabling us to live holy lives. What we must remember is that just as we have no righteousness of our own, so we have no sanctification of our own. If we are urged to ‘work out your own salvation with fear and trembling’, we are also reminded, ‘for God is at work [energizing] in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure’ (Phil. 2:12–13). Only He who has begun the good work will complete it.

Later, when we look at the dynamic and constraint of both love and grace, we will see that we never have a moment of life in which we are not dependent upon grace. As Paul put it, ‘. . .the grace of God has appeared . . .training [instructing, educating] us to renounce irreligion and worldly passions, and to live sober, upright and godly lives in this world’ (Titus 2:11–12). When then we look back on injunctions to live holily, we see they are given in the light of the ever-present grace of God.

We may conclude then that the new community at Pentecost was a whole people, the new holy people of God. They had every incentive and constraint to live holily, and so they did. They were not simply the aggregate of holy

persons—'the saints'—but they were the holy congregate, the true congregation of 'the Holy One of Israel' (Christ), the children of 'the Holy Father', and the people led by 'the Holy Spirit'.

## THE GIFT OF ETERNAL LIFE

Paul wrote (Rom. 6:23), 'The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord'. The 'free gift' is *charisma*. This shows it is not earned, but is of grace. It is a breathtaking gift, for to realize—as Jesus said—that we will never see death, is that which takes away the fear of death.

Jesus often promised that those who believed in him would not perish but have eternal life. It is difficult for autonomous sinful man to realize that this eternal life is a gift. It is in fact the very fact and experience of knowing 'the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent' (John 17:3). John in his First Letter said, 'He who has the Son has life' (5:12), and added these words, 'And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, to know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life' (5:20).

Peter speaks of husband and wife being 'joint heirs of the grace of life' (I Pet. 3:7). He indicates that they will not only inherit that life in eternity, but they live together in it now. The gift of this life determines their present behaviour to one another. If we understand eternal life as being a present participation in the life of the Father and His Son, then we will see we are not only receivers of life

in prospect, but in present fact. Each element of this life is dynamic to us now.

Eternal life is of course a future prospect, and with it goes the gift of inheritance. However we will speak of this and other future gifts in Section Seven, 'Great Grace's Greater Grace'. It is enough to quote Paul on this great event of being 'quickened', i.e. 'enlivened' and 'brought to life':

But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:4-7).

## THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

So far the gifts of grace we have nominated have been personal gifts transforming the believing person and having their general effects on the community. Now we speak of the gift of the Holy Spirit as both a gift to the believer and so the gift of God to the community. To compass the dimensions of this gift would require a large amount of space and time.

The first thing we need to note is that the term *charism* or *charisma* is never used for the Holy Spirit. The Greek word *dorea*, i.e. 'gift' is specifically used for the Holy Spirit. See Acts 2:38, 8:20, 10:45 and 11:17. It is undoubtedly a higher word. When we think about it, every gift we have—such as repentance, faith, forgiveness, cleansing, justification, regeneration, love, sonship, and eternal life

–is given to us by the Spirit. So he transcends the gifts he has. It is an awesome thing to receive the *dorea* of the Holy Spirit.

He, of course, is not a gift we handle and use ourselves, as indeed we do the others, but rather we are subject to him as our teacher, our guide, our sanctifier, and as the one by whom we are sealed unto the ultimate day of redemption.

He is the *dorea* of God also for the new community, ‘the Israel of God’ (Gal. 6:16). Just as all gifts come with him, so he is the Spirit of sonship, of fellowship, of love, of prayer, worship, ministry, service and unity. He brings to the community the daily practice of God’s grace. All that happened at Pentecost, in and for the community, goes on happening in the churches where he is not grieved or quenched, bringing as he does both the gifts and fruit of the Spirit, along with the weapons by which spiritual warfare is waged.

He is indeed God’s indispensable *dorea* to the otherwise helpless new community, God’s true people who can know true strength only in their own weakness.

## THE GIFTS TO COME

A list or resume of the gifts of God would be incomplete without reference to what we might call ‘the gifts to come’. In I Peter 1:13 the author says, ‘. . .set your hope fully upon the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ’. He means, ‘When Christ will be revealed at the end–time, then you will be ushered into grace which is the outcome of God’s promises. You have

the gifts now by faith, and you exercise them by faith. Then it will all be by sight. What is more, these gifts will be ultimate, and their use perfect, and not as now, when, because of our sinfulness, we often use them in pride or for self-advancement’.

The gifts to come for each believer will be those of resurrection, eternal life, full sonship, total holiness of being, a body that is glorified, citizenship of the Holy City, membership of the Bride of Christ, and participation in the eternal Kingdom with all believers as ‘kings and priests unto our God’, for we shall reign together upon the earth.

It is difficult for us to grasp even the idea of these wonderful gifts, let alone sense and know their reality. In that day we shall know the gifts of that which we might call ‘the ultimate grace of God’.

## THE GIFTS OF GRACE TO THE NEW COMMUNITY (1)

### THE OLD GIFTS AND THE NEW GIFTS

We have discussed in our last two chapters the gifts which we received from our redemption and consequent Christian living. These are personal. In addition God gives gifts to the new community for its life and ministry, and we have called these ‘old gifts’ and ‘new gifts’.

What then do we mean by ‘old gifts’ and ‘new gifts’? By ‘new gifts’, we mean the *charismata* mentioned by Paul in I Corinthians 12 and by Peter in I Peter 4:10–11. Peter calls these ‘the varied grace of God’. By ‘old gifts’, we mean those which Paul mentions in Romans 9:4–5:

They are Israelites, and to them belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ. God who is over all be blessed for ever. Amen.

It is a fascinating thing to realize that every one of these gifts belongs to the new community, the people of God.

In Ephesians 3:1–11 Paul opens up the amazing revelation that he has been given, namely that ‘the Gentiles [nations] are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel’ (verse 6). This is quite astonishing—that all that has been given to Israel is now the lot of the nations. It is to be doubted whether this revelation has fully burst upon either Israel or the church, so significant is it.

For our purposes we see that the gifts God had given to Israel were, in Christ, also given to the new people, the ‘Israel of God’. Undoubtedly the New Covenant gives a new slant and significance to these gifts, but they must be seen as indispensable to the true life of those we may now call ‘grace-people’. Let us now look at the presence and use of these gifts in the new community.

## THE OLD GIFTS NEWLY USED

### The Gift of Sonship

This is the first gift Paul nominates in his list in Romans 9:4. We have already seen that this ‘adoption’ is also for the church. Each member of the church is a son of God by salvation, adoption, and the presence of ‘the Spirit of his Son’. What we might miss is that ‘the sonship’ in the Old Testament was primarily a corporate thing, i.e. Israel as a nation was a son of God, or even *the* son of God. In Exodus 4:22 God told Pharaoh, ‘Israel is my first-born son, and I say to you, "Let my son go that he may serve [worship] me." ‘

Likewise in Hosea 11:1 God says, ‘Out of Egypt I called my son’. Other Scriptures (e.g. Deut. 14:1) speak of Israelites as sons of God, but they derive personal sonship from the corporate sonship. When Jesus was taken down to Egypt, Hosea 11:1 was applied to his return to Galilee: ‘Out of Egypt have I called my son’ (Matt. 2:15).

Jesus, we remember, always spoke of ‘my Father’s house’ when referring to the temple. His Sonship revealed God’s Fatherhood. Yet not only may we see God’s Fatherhood through him, but we may participate in that Fatherhood; for to us, also, is given the gift of sonship. Even so, it has a corporate nature. In Galatians 3:26 Paul says, ‘For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith’. He then adds, ‘For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ’ (verse 27). He means that we are participators in the Son through the Gospel, via baptism. We have put on Christ, that is, we are all sharers (sons) in that corporate sonship.

This, then, gives us ‘the sonship’ in a way which transcends the adoption that Israel knew. This is especially so because we have the Spirit of Sonship whereby we cry ‘Abba!’, that is, ‘Father!’ (see Gal. 4:6; Rom. 8:15). Thus the new people of God are even more familial than the old.

### **The Gift of the Glory**

This, in the Old Testament, is a vast subject. Israel came to know the glory because ‘The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham’ (Acts 7:2). Isaac and Jacob were worshippers of that glory, and Moses came to know God through a manifestation of His glory in the

burning bush. On a later occasion he sought to see that glory, but was given only a limited glimpse. Even so— as we read in Exodus 34—the glory was God’s mercy, His forgiveness, and His insistence that unrepentant evil be judged and punished. He was a loving and holy God.

This glory was seen in God’s acts, in His presence in Israel in the tabernacle, in the pillar of fire, and in the Shekinah glory. At the time of the dedication of the temple built by Solomon, the glory was such that the priests and Levites were unable to minister.

In Ezekiel we have a special treatment of this glory: God’s glory departing from the defiled temple, but later returning to redeem and transform Israel, especially as it became the sanctuary of God in a new way. God told Israel through Haggai that the glory of the second temple would exceed that of the first. The gift of glory—the gift of His personal presence—God never withdrew from Israel, but the promise of the coming One and the coming Kingdom spoke of a glory Israel had never seen.

With the coming of Christ the Word, comes also the glory of God: ‘And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father’ (John 1:14). The Son reflected the glory of the Father. In fact his whole aim was to glorify Him, i.e. to do His will and so reflect Him. He had always been the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person (Heb. 1:3), so that Paul can say, ‘For it is the God who said, Let light shine out of the darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ’ (II Cor. 4:6).

Paul is really telling us that we see God’s glory through

Christ, the same glory revealed in part to Moses in Exodus 34, that God is the One who forgives the sins of many, who is full of tender mercies, or, as Jeremiah spoke for God, ‘ . . . let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practise steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth’ (Jer. 9:24).

God’s great grace is that the new people of God have His glory in the midst. As we will see, the worship given to Israel is given to the new people of God in a richer way even than before. They are the new temple, with the new worship (Phil. 3:3), the people who are His sanctuary (Eph. 2:22; I Pet. 2:4ff.), who are to the praise of the glory of His grace (Eph. 1:6), and—with Israel—yet to be to the praise of His glory (Eph. 1:11–14).

The gift of God’s glory—the Gospel—is at present contained in earthen vessels, so that the transcendent power may be seen to be of God (II Cor. 4:7). Even so, the people of God are being changed from one stage of glory to another (II Cor. 3:18). Moses’ face was veiled, but theirs are not. They reflect the glory of God, not in a transient way, but ever increasingly, for God is conforming them to the image of His Son that they may be his true brethren (Rom. 8:29), his true likeness, who is himself the brightness of God’s glory and the express image of his person (Heb. 1:3).

### **The Gift of the Covenants**

The new people know only one covenant—the covenant of grace called ‘the New Covenant’, which they also recognize to be the fulfilling of the covenant originally

made with Abraham, the true father of the people of God.

To understand this covenant we need to trace it through the prophecies, knowing that Zechariah the father of John the Baptist saw it was about to be fulfilled, with the coming of Messiah. At the Last Supper Messiah claimed his death was to seal the New Covenant, and bring forgiveness to many, thus echoing Jeremiah's classic prophecy of 31:31–34.

The writer of Hebrews gives the most brilliant exposition Christendom has known, tracing the nature and value of the Mosaic Covenant, and showing how Christ's New Covenant transcended the old. This is why Hebrews makes such fascinating reading. The New Covenant has outmoded the Old, and with it has brought an entirely new worship.

### **The Gift of the Law**

Here again, we could fill volumes, writing about the wonder of law, law as Israel knew and loved it, admiring, from the depths of its true heart, the gift of law. As Moses asks in Deuteronomy 4:7–8,

*'What great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? And what great nation is there, that has statutes and ordinances so righteous as all this law which I set before you this day?'*

Whilst it is true that men in Israel were idolatrous and did not love and keep the law, the inner heart of Israel was good. Psalms such as 1, 19 and 119 so magnify the law as to bring readers and listeners to deep emotion, and it is a poor reading of the apostle Paul which sees in him a

rejection of God's law. For him, as for Jesus, there is no abrogation of God's law. When Paul talks about being free from law he really means free from its condemnation, and free from it as a way of self-justification. He himself delights in the law of God after the inner man (Rom. 7:22). He wishes to fulfil the just requirements of the law (Rom. 8:4) and says, 'But now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we serve not under the old written code but *in the new life of the Spirit*' (Rom. 7:6).

In the new people, the community of Christ, the law of God is called 'the law of Christ' (Gal. 6:2; I Cor. 9:21; John 13:34; 15:12). It encapsulates the heart of law as expounded in the Ten Commandments, but spells it all out as love of God and love of one's neighbours (Rom. 13:8–10). James calls it 'the royal law', 'the law of liberty' (1:22–25; 2:8–12), and Paul says, '. . .through love be servants of one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself" ' (Gal. 5:13b–14)

It is grace, then, which does not leave us lawless, but which itself teaches us 'to renounce irreligion and worldly passions, and to live sober, upright, and godly lives in this world' (Titus 2: 11–12). All the beautiful things said in the Psalms mentioned above apply in fulness to 'the law of Christ'. The law, of course, is the will of God, a living and dynamic thing, and not a static set of rules which are the grounds of dangerous and finicky legalism. That is why Jesus said, 'If you love me you will keep my commandments', and why John added, 'And his commandments are not burdensome'. In fact John adds, 'This is the love of God that we keep his commandments'.

Law, then, is a great gift of grace. Thus we can rightly speak of graceless law, lawless grace, and—correctly—the grace of law.\*

### **The Gift of the Worship**

Worship was a gift given in creation, as undoubtedly also was law, but it was a gift that man transposed to idolatry when he rebelled against God. He was—indeed always is compelled to worship, i.e. to give certain worth to the creation and its creatures according to what he evaluates as ‘good’ and ‘bad’.

Israel was given a special form of worship, based on God’s revelation of Himself to this nation, by His acts on their behalf. It was rooted in the fact of the Abrahamic Covenant, and was an unchanging form or cultus. What must be emphasized is that it came out of the grace of God. Hence, when in Exodus 20 Israel is commanded to serve (worship) God, it is on the basis that He has delivered them from the bondage of Egypt.

So rich, so deep, and so significant is this subject that I wish to deal with it later in a more particular manner. It is sufficient to say here that in the New Testament a new era of worship begins, in the same manner as the other gifts, once given to Israel, are heightened and enhanced in the new community. Worship issues out of grace, without a doubt. This can be quickly seen from a study of Romans 12:1, Hebrews 9:14 and Revelation 7:15.

The new era of worship indicated in John 4:20f. and Philippians 3:3 is linked with the new temple, and the

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\* For a comprehensive treatment of this subject, see the author-s *Oh, No, Lord! Not law, Lord?*, NCPI, Blackwood, 1979.

new priesthood, facts upon which we have lightly touched above.

### **The Gift of the Promises**

These promises to Israel related to the coming of Messiah the Davidic King, the Righteous Branch, the Son of Man, the Suffering Servant. They related to the establishment of God's universal Kingdom with Israel at its centre. There were also promises of a new temple, a new worship, and a new covenant, and we have touched upon all of these.

For Israel these were promises, but for the new community they were promises that had been fulfilled in the advent of Christ. So much then had grace worked, and so much too had the Atonement wrought as the Spirit brought its fruits to persons and to the community as a whole, that the promises were seen as truly fulfilled.

However, there were promises which, as yet, had not been fulfilled. The Kingdom of God was yet to become visible and established throughout the earth. Christ's triumph over all the nations and his subduing of all evil awaited an eschatological *denouement*. Even so, these were Old Testament promises extended in time to the Day of the Lord. The new community lived in the last days, and knew it did, and lived accordingly, knowing the promises of God were for it.

### **The Gift of Christ**

When Paul cried, 'Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift!', he undoubtedly meant 'Christ' and all that

went with him, such as salvation, sanctification and glorification. To old Israel, Messiah was the great gift to come. To the new community he was the great gift given. Hence the Epistles speak of everything being 'in Christ' or 'through Christ'. It is he who ascended on high, leading captivity captive, and giving gifts to men (Eph. 4:8).

Thus, when the New Testament Letters have opening salutations and closing greetings which say, 'Grace be to you from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ', they are saying that the new community lives under grace which is the active goodness towards them which is being done by both the Father and the Son. This is fully living in Christ, whether it be the Pauline 'in Christ', 'Christ in you' or the Johannine 'abiding in Christ', 'abiding in love', and similar statements.

## **CONCLUSION ON THE 'OLD GIFTS'**

Israel, then, had nothing given to it, either in act or promise, that the new community, founded at Pentecost, has not also received, and in richer, more enhanced form. The new community finds its identity only in this grace. It is a grace–community. This fact is underlined by the 'new gifts' given to it through the Holy Spirit.

As we will see, these 'grace gifts' do not transcend the gifts set out in Romans 9:4, but rather are functional gifts given to minister grace to the church, and through the church.

## **THE GIFTS OF GRACE TO THE NEW COMMUNITY (2)**

### **'THE VARIED GRACE OF GOD' (I PETER 4:10)**

We now come to what we have called the 'new gifts'. Certain scholars have traced some of these gifts in the Old Testament, so that in that sense they are not new. In the new era, commencing with Pentecost, these gifts were made known, and the use of some of them is recorded in the Book of Acts. Paul, Peter, and the author of Hebrews also mention them.

We need to understand the nature, purpose and use of the gifts. There is no better place to start than I Corinthians 4:7. Here the apostle states a general principle by way of a question: 'What have you that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?'. Undoubtedly there was some pride in the church to which he was writing. Not only were folk

excited by the presence of gifts but some must have thought that the possession of gifts made them different from others. In some way they were better because they could exercise a gift.

Peter said,

As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who utters oracles of God; whoever renders service, as one who renders it by the strength which God supplies; in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen (I Pet. 4:10-11)

The thrust of this passage is as follows: 'God's grace is varied, i.e. it meets many needs, and in different ways, and it does so through the gifts God gives. These gifts come to us by grace, but they are not grace. They minister the grace of God, and those who have them must see them as reflecting back on God and glorifying Him, not giving glory to those who possess them, for they are simply stewards, and not the primary givers of grace'. If we were to understand gifts this way then they would not bring us into pride, but rather into humility and awe. We would use them thinking only of God's glory, for that is what our life is all about.

### **The Gifts of Christ, and the Gifts of the Spirit**

The term 'gifts of the Spirit' is well known. In fact it is Christ who gives gifts. In Ephesians 4:8 it is said of him, 'When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men'. The word for gifts here is *domata* and not *charismata*. This has led some to think that these

gifts mentioned—apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers—are different from the *charismata* and hence are *domata*. However, in I Corinthians 12:28–30 they are mixed with those gifts we call *charismata*. We should not be too specialized about words in this case. The main point is that if Christ gives these (so-called) ministry gifts, he also gives the others.

The *charismata* are called ‘gifts of the Spirit’ because in I Corinthians 12:8 it is said these gifts are given *through* the Spirit. In Hebrews 2:4 there is the term ‘gifts of the Holy Spirit’, but the word here is *merismois*, i.e. ‘distributions’. The point is that the Holy Spirit distributes gifts. Because it is God acting as primary mover, and not man, we see that the use of gifts is really the grace of God working. Man never administers grace, but God administers grace through man. This idea is further fortified where in I Corinthians 14:1 Paul calls the gifts ‘spirituals’, (i.e. *pneumatika*), meaning that they are of the Spirit. *Pneumatika* could never be of man. In I Corinthians 12:11 he says that all of these gifts are the work of the one and same Spirit, i.e. *he* operates them. That is why in verse 7 they are called ‘manifestations of the Spirit’.

What needs to be studied is I Corinthians 12:4–7:

Now there are varieties of gifts [*charismaton*], but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service [*services: diakonion*], but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working [*workings: energematOn*], but it is the same God who inspires [*is operating*] them all in every one. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

It is curious how much emphasis has been given to the ‘variety of gifts’ but not to the ‘services’ and ‘the workings’.

Note that the Spirit relates to the gifts, the Lord (Christ) to the services, i.e. the ministries, and the Father (God) to the workings or operations. We see here a Trinitarian work of grace through gifts, ministries and operations. Little is spoken about the latter two, but it seems these also are 'manifestations of the Spirit' and come through by his agency. They are all 'for the common good', i.e. *they are an the workings of God's grace.*

If we can grasp this principle, namely that in gifts, ministries and operations the grace of the Godhead is operative, then it will reduce the nonsense and pride which often accompanies these three things. In any case, I Corinthians 13:1–3 is given to show that no gifts, ministries, or operations have any value apart from love. Apparently man can make them 'the manifestations of man' and so render them valueless. This is obvious, since in this case they become something which is not grace. Man can never administer grace, although God can minister it through him. Peter (I Pet. 5:10) calls God 'the God of all grace', meaning that grace never initiates with man.

Having said that, we must emphasize the value of gifts, ministries and workings, for they are the way in which God's grace comes through to the church, and via the church to mankind. This can be seen when we see the gifts, ministries and operations as 'the fulness of Christ'. If he gives gifts, effects ministries, and energizes workings, then he does so out of his fulness. That fulness must have a working agency and this agency is the church. Hence in Ephesians 1:22–23 we read, '...the church, which is his body, the fulness of him who fills all in all'. We can see then that as Christ fulfils the Father's plan

(Eph. 1:9–10; 3:9–11; cf. I Cor. 15:24–28), he does it through his church, of which he is the head.

### **God's Many-Faceted Grace**

In I Peter 4:10–11 the apostle has set out the principle of 'varied grace', i.e. 'many-faceted grace'. He must surely mean that the use of each gift ministers a special element or facet of grace to meet a particular need. We must be careful to emphasize the principle that needs do not evoke grace, nor is God bound to meet a need. The free nature of grace must always be recognized. God is not a welfare God, a God of 'handouts', for man is responsible for his own decisions, and the consequences of those decisions. That God would meet the needs of man must always be seen as sheer grace.

### **The Use of the Gifts**

We need not spend time on this interesting point. The continual injunctions in the New Testament to 'go on being filled with the Spirit', to 'be aglow with the Spirit' and to 'walk in the Spirit' and 'be led by the Spirit', tell us that when we are subject to the Spirit then he will bring through his manifestations as he wills.

Of course there is also a responsibility on our part to use the gifts we have, especially if we know we have them. In II Timothy 1:6–7 Paul said to Timothy, 'Hence I remind you to rekindle [stir up] the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; for God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control' (cf. I Tim. 4:14). Likewise Peter

was exhorting his readers to a conscious use of gifts when he said, ‘ . . . whoever speaks, as one who utters oracles of God; whoever renders service, as one who renders it by the strength which God supplies’ (I Pet. 4: 11).

## THE GRACE OF MINISTRY

After our discussion of gifts, services and workings in the last chapter, we might wonder what there is left to talk about on this subject. Even so, there is much to ponder under our heading 'The Grace of Ministry', for so often we think in terms of doing God a favour, or of doing a work which is extra to what we would term 'normal living'. This is a great error, and we need to rectify it. Any ministry we have is a gift of God, a high privilege, and so a deep responsibility.

A deficient view of the grace of ministry probably arises out of our ancient view of 'clergy' and 'laity'. This makes for a two-layered Christendom. We think there are two stratas—the higher being the clergy and the lower the laity. In the New Testament church there were only laity, i.e the *laos* or 'the people'. It is true that there were leaders called 'elders' or 'presbyters', and that there were aides called 'deacons' and 'deaconesses', but all constituted 'a spiritual house', 'a holy priesthood', 'a royal

priesthood', 'a holy nation'. This 'household of God' (cf. I Tim. 3:15; Heb. 3:1–6) was called 'the temple of God', and in it all participated in the new worship (Phil. 3:3).

It has been a quirk of history which set this view of 'clergy' and 'laity' and has given a holiness to clerical ministry over and against the 'ordinary' laity. In England during the Reformation, when it was insisted that the word 'priest' was only to be understood as a shortening of 'presbyter', one dry comment was, 'New Presbyter is but Old Priest writ large'.

## **EVERY PERSON IS IN MINISTRY**

The word for ministry or service in the New Testament is *diakonia*. In Ephesians 4 Paul sees the gifts as being there 'to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ'. This is undoubtedly a corporate ministry, even if it is composed of a variety of ministries, and differences in service.

## **THE CALL TO MINISTRY**

We may hesitate to use Paul as a paradigm in our enquiry regarding ministry, but his greatness as a man of God should not deter us. Paul would have been puzzled by our present distinction and separation of (a) conversion, and (b) the call to ministry. He could not make a

distinction between the grace that called him into life and the grace which called (or commanded) him into ministry.

The accounts in Acts of Paul's conversion all include Christ's commission to him to preach the Gospel to Jews and Gentiles. Doubtless, for this reason, Paul could never separate his conversion and calling. Whilst, in fact, they were two things, yet they were both the one. In Galatians 1 15–16 he says, 'But. . . he who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me, *in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles*'. He means that his conversion was with a view to proclaiming the Gospel.

This all makes good common sense: no one having been called and converted by the grace of God could remain silent on that marvellous score. Peter had said to the Jewish Sanhedrin, 'We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard', and Jesus said to Paul, 'I have appeared to *you for this purpose*, to appoint you to serve and bear witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you' (Acts 4:20; 26:16). For Paul, the very Gospel itself was the strong constraint that drove him on. 'The love of Christ constrains us!' he cried. The grace of calling is at once the grace of proclaiming.

In Romans 1:4–5 Paul speaks of 'Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations'. In Romans 15:15–16 he adds,

*But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles [nations] in the priestly service of*

the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

Paul, then, sees all his ministry as both *a grace of calling* and *a grace of enablement*. He claims, ‘But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God which is with me’ (I Cor. 15:10). He often uses the term, ‘the grace given to me’. In I Corinthians 3:10 he says, ‘According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation’. In Galatians 2:7–9 he says that when the apostles at Jerusalem saw that he, Paul, had been ‘entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised . . . and when they perceived the grace that was given to me’ (meaning ‘the grace of ministry to preach to the Gentiles’), they then gave him the right hand of fellowship.

In one sense Paul’s authority lay in the grace of apostleship, and in another sense in the immediate action of God’s grace. He told the Romans, ‘For by the grace given to me I bid every one among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think’ (Rom. 12:3). In II Corinthians 1:12 he claimed his ministry was all by grace: ‘For our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience that we have behaved in the world, and still more toward you, with holiness and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God’.

Paul had the sense of God’s grace in showing him ‘the whole counsel of God’. This counsel we see particularly in Romans (‘the righteousness of God’) and in Ephesians (‘God’s plan for the fulness of time’). In Ephesians 3:1–11 he develops the special revelation that was given to him,

namely that God's people being one, Jews and Gentiles share equally in the Gospel and so are 'fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus' (Eph. 3:6). For this extraordinary revelation he used statements such as 'the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me', 'Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace', and 'To me ∴this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ' (Eph. 3:2, 7, 8).

He did not, of course, limit the grace of ministry to himself, or even to the other apostles. He spoke of Christ's gifts (Greek: *domata*) to the church of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. He also spoke of other gifts, i.e. the *charismata*. As we have observed, he did not limit the word 'ministry' to any particular office. All the people of God have ministry, service, and such service is a grace from God and requires grace for its use. Paul can even talk of speaking as an opportunity for ministry conversation that fits any occasion, 'that it may impart grace to those who hear' (Eph. 4:29).

## THE GRACE OF MINISTRY FOR ALL

We have seen Paul's ministry as an example of grace. Paul called himself 'less than the least of all saints' and 'the foremost of sinners', so that we ought not to think anyone is less (or more) qualified for ministry. We conclude that grace is that action of God which redeems us and restores us in regeneration, and which simultaneously calls us to service. We must also recognize that every ii element of ministry (service) is by the enablement of

grace. To repeat Paul's statement in I Corinthians 15:9–10:

For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God which is with me.

We are constantly driven to see that 'Everything is of grace, and grace is everything'.

## THE GRACE OF MINISTRY IN GIVING

In looking at the working of God's grace, we have seen how it works to us personally, how to the community corporately, and how within the community—by the fulness of Christ's gifts—it is outworked functionally in the church. This brings us then to the principle of giving, which is at the heart of grace.

This is seen in II Corinthians 8:9 where Paul says, 'You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich'. Gifts are of course something given to which one is not entitled. Paul's argument in Romans 4: 1–4 is that what one earns is not a gift.

In creation God was generous, bringing creation into being. The principle of creation was, and is, 'God [has given] us all things richly to enjoy'; 'Everything created by God is good'; 'every tree . . . is pleasant to the sight and good for food'; 'He has made everything beautiful in its time' (I Tim. 6:17; 4:4; Gen. 2:9; Eccl. 3:11). Even so, there is no hint of grace in all this.

James said, ‘Every good endowment [giving] and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change’ (1:17). When it comes to the matter of giving there is only one true giving—God’s. What giving we do always has some self-seeking in it. God’s giving always has us in mind.

Paul pointed to the fall of man, linking it with his failure to honour God and to give Him thanks. Man takes his creation for granted. Whilst he has natural powers he sees no need for God, and thinks nothing is a gift. The principle of giving has been hopelessly lost. When thanksgiving goes, giving also disappears.

### **GOD’S RICHES: MAN’S POVERTY**

‘Though he was rich’, is a statement which sets our minds working on the matter of God’s glorious riches. It would be impossible for us to understand, for Paul says that there is nothing that man has seen or heard or that has entered his imagination which can direct him to what God has prepared for him. However, we can at least grasp the idea that God’s wealth is fabulous. Even so, we must think of God’s ineffable nature in terms of His attributes of holiness, righteousness, goodness, truth and love, and this is where we fail, so pitiful are our conceptions of them.

The Scriptures show us that whenever a celestial messenger comes into our ken, we are terrified, or fall into a swoon. We can grasp little of the ineffable. Even John the Divine in seeing angels was tempted to worship them—so

different they were—and he had to be rebuked. We know so little of the ineffable, of the true glory of God.

It is our own poverty which affects us. We are envious, covetous, jealous, and we are in conflict with one another. ‘Getting and spending’, Wordsworth said, ‘we lay waste our powers’. Jeremiah described our mean hearts as wicked and deceitful above all things. Christ described them as cesspits of iniquity, holding every evil thing. Paul spoke of us as being ‘without strength’, i.e. totally without moral power. Jesus saw men and women grovel before death, the playthings of unclean spirits, deformed and debased. Paul’s descriptions of man’s moral powerlessness and his depravity (Rom. 1:21–32; 3:9–18; Eph. 2:1–3; Titus 3:1–3) do not make pretty reading.

It was at the time of our evil that he came. ‘This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners’; ‘while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us’ (I Tim. 1: 15; Rom. 5:8).

The old theologians used to speak of ‘the divine condescension’, and in the times when they spoke ‘condescension’ was not a dirty word. Today it is: we must have no patronage. But the word meant ‘to descend and be one with’, and there was no patronizing of us in it. If we study Philipians 2:1–9 closely we will see that Christ considered others better than himself, that he did not look to his own interests but to the interests of others. He did not merely resign himself to become man, but desired mightily in love that this be so.

And it was so. Some speak of the ‘divine humiliation’, but then he was never humiliated because he was already humble. He who is truly humble can never be humiliated. Paul says ‘he humbled himself, and became obedient

unto death, even the death of the cross', meaning he lowered himself from great heights of glory to do the most unnatural thing in all history—be made sin on a gallows, and bear the ignominy and shame of the human race. He numbered himself with the transgressors.

Paul said this is grace. The Son, the Eternal Word, was under no obligation whatever, except the love of the Father. What he did could not be demanded by natural morality, or any law. 'Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends' (John 15:13). What then, when he laid it down for his enemies? The psalmist said, 'The ransom of [a man's] life is costly' (49:8). Paul said, 'You were bought with a price' (I Cor. 6:20; 7:23). Grace was ever so costly to God, although to us it is wholly free. The terrible cry of dereliction tells us that: 'My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?' In that moment he was the most poverty-stricken creature that has ever been, or will ever be.

'Now', Paul tells us, 'if that was his grace, what will be your response?' The response is, of course, that we now give. Speaking of the Macedonians he said,

For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own free will, begging us earnestly for the favour of—taking part in the relief of the saints—and this, not as we expected, but first they gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God (II Cor. 8:3–5).

Paul is describing the return miracle of grace, and it is an incredible thing.

'Freely you have received, freely give.' Christ knew this divine impulse. When a man tastes the freedom of God in his true nature, the constant joyous giving, then he enters a sphere and an experience which is wholly sweet and

truly unforgettable. At last he is free! He does not seek to secure himself, to lay up for that security, but he gives with utter abandon.

‘He who withheld not his only Son but abandoned him up for us all, will he not also with him freely give us *all things?*’ When we give the ‘all things’ we partake in the nature of God. We are one with Him. We give within His grace: we come closest of all to knowing the nature of that grace. Many have described grace as God’s love in action. God’s love of course could never be other than in action, but the description is good. His love becomes action in us, and we become the channels of that grace.

## SECTION THREE

### **Man and the Grace of God**

We have already seen that grace is a new element, an entity not known or recognized by man in his self-dependence and self-seeking. Grace starves the ego of man—the self-extending ego. It is worth looking at famous and notorious persons in our history as a race.

We often see ourselves mirrored in others, and we seek to understand why people act in the ways that are characteristic of them. Generally we are most critical of the shortcomings of others. Suddenly to see ourselves mirrored in those we criticize tells us a lot about ourselves.

What then is grace? Why are we so reluctant to receive it? If we were to discover its reality then what would such a discovery do for us? Is it possible to so think and act that we can evade the confrontation of grace? Whatever, anyway, is ‘the confrontation of grace’? Why, too, should it be described by various writers and songsters as ‘amazing’, ‘abundant’, ‘great’, and ‘glorious’?

Finally—in this section—we see the clever evasion of grace, especially by those who insist they are ‘under grace’. Undoubtedly they have problems with grace, and seek to rationalize it away. It is altogether too humiliating, and too demanding, especially on human pride. If we were to understand its ‘fulness’ we would never seek to receive it ‘in an empty way’.

## **MAN THE GRACELESS RACE**

### **MAN, WITHOUT GRACE**

We come back to man again, to seek to discover him as a person without grace, and to see what he can be as a person of grace. It is that proud autonomy of his which strikes him down, that haughty assurance that what he plans is authentic, and what he does is correct. Only when he loses his nerve does he become a terrible thing to behold.

Every man did what was right in his own eyes.' This statement was written about Israel in the days of the Judges (17:6; 21:25), but it could well fit the history of all mankind. Every man seeks to do that which is right in his own eyes.

If it is right in his own eyes, is it not, then, right for him? Must not each man evaluate what he must do, and may he not be permitted to do what he thinks is right?

Whatever the answer to these questions, man has mostly striven to do what he considers to be right. 'Right' may mean 'prudent', 'profitable' or 'desirable'. It may not, however, mean what is right in the eyes of the Creator. It may not even mean 'right' in the eyes of many others, and may not even seem 'right' in the deepest sense to the doer himself. Below the surface desire, the immediate compulsion to do it, there may be an objection in the depth. Some inner ethical sense forbids it; some conscience disagrees with it; but then the person does it.

This is the history of our race. It seemed right to the woman to eat of the fruit that was forbidden, and it seemed right for the man to hear her voice and do likewise. It seemed right for Cain to kill his brother, for Lamech to be a bloody avenger, for Nimrod to be a hunter of men, and for the builders of Babel to defy the creational command to spread across the face of the earth. It seemed right for Ishmael to torment his brother Isaac, for Esau to hate his brother Jacob, for Jacob's sons to kill, or sell Joseph into slavery. Many other things have seemed right which have been cruel, vicious, wicked, and evil; many a thing seemed so right in its time but has brought horrific consequences to the world.

'It seemed right!' has always been the thought of man. Despite his great acts of worship to his gods, he goes on as though he were the one to note, he the one to do the things required to be done. 'All this I have done with my own hand!', cried Nebuchadnezzar as he observed great Babylon: 'Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?' (Dan. 4:30). It surely was.

Nebuchadnezzar had not prostrated himself before his

gods, and implored them to help him in the building of the city of glory. He had not trembled at the immensity of the task. He had known that within a man are enormous powers, capacities to accomplish almost anything. What Nebuchadnezzar had known, God Himself had voiced centuries before. He had watched man trying to build a tower to heaven, and had said, ‘. . .this is only the beginning of what they will do; *and nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them*’ (Gen. 11:6).

That is the fact of our race, and this is our story. *There is nothing that we propose that we will not be able to accomplish!* This is the key to our history. Another way of saying this is, ‘We are a self-sufficient people. We will eventually accomplish what we need to accomplish. Nothing will prevent us’.

It is true that at times man feels weak and feeble, especially in the face of great disasters. Long ago insurance companies got to calling these ‘Acts of God’, and against such there is no insurance. When cyclones toss houses into the air and batter sea-coasts, when volcanoes spill their lava across village and town, and when arable land lies cracked and dry in the drought, suns and no rain comes, then, and only then, man admits his weakness.

Such forced confession is only for a moment. He quickly rebuilds his shattered dwellings, his destroyed towns, and he learns to irrigate his lands or await more favourable seasons. He endures the famines, the floods, the plagues and the bushfires, and rebuilds with indomitable spirit. He is a great lord across the earth! In many ways this appears to be to his credit. Also he has it in mind to control, eventually, the volcanoes, the plagues and famines, the floods and the fires. He believes that day

is not too distant.

For heathen heart that puts its trust,  
 In reeking tube and iron shard,  
 For valiant dust that builds on dust,  
 And, guarding, calls not Thee to guard,  
 For frantic boast and foolish word—  
 Thy mercy on Thy People, Lord!

Rudyard Kipling saw the immense *hubris* (exuberant pride) of man and prayed against it in such words.

Man has prayed to his gods. He has even writhed before them in his terror of the unknown. He views fate with a certain fear, consults the wizards and the omens, has a keen eye to the horoscopes, seeks divination, and such prophecy as will guide him. He wishes to know the portents. Even so, these are but side issues. He wishes to gain the favour of the occult and its powers only that he may accomplish ‘that which is right in his own eyes’.

Nor, often, are his religious institutions in better shape. There is nothing, it seems, which cannot be built by power and politics. The beginner in humility who has genuine faith in God is soon overcome by what appears to be the slow movement of God in history. He wishes to accelerate such good movement. Power and politics can build a Holy Roman Empire, can hasten the evangelization of tardy peoples, can build great cathedrals, give political clout to the church, and can even put punch into the local Parish Council.

Left to itself, given time, and given a good ethical sense, there is nothing in the realm of social justice equality amongst mankind, alleviation of its sufferings stoppage of its wars, and the sharing of the earth’s resources, that man—by power and politics—cannot do.

‘There is nothing that they propose to do which will now be impossible for them’.

How then, where then, and when then, the need of grace? What possible meaning can that impossible word ‘grace’ have in the midst of human powers, human politics, and what need of it when every man can pursue the fulfilment of that which is right in his own eyes?

Had not the serpent promised, ‘You shall be as God, knowing good and evil’? What man or woman, then, in all the earth, cannot correctly evaluate? There is none. We all think we evaluate correctly—we know what is good and evil! Whilst circumstances and the like may temporarily prevent us accomplishing what we wish, we will ultimately succeed. If we do not, it is not because we lack the power, but only the opportunity. You see, there are many others about us who are seeking to do what is right in their own eyes, and since they and we differ as to what is ‘right’, then that is our little problem!

We repeat: what we say about the heathen in his independence of God, is often what must be said concerning us who profess our dependence upon Him! We can have evangelizing, pastoral ministry, and ecclesiastical success and accomplishment, without an ounce of grace being in it. Doubtless we will give many a nod to God and His grace in the process, but we know what we must do is use the brain and the energies He has given us, and no less the political clout and cunning that we can utilize. By the same token, we can have the opposite if we will, i.e. ministries only controlled and energized by grace.

## MEN AND WOMEN— WITH GRACE, AND WITHOUT GRACE (1)

### WE ARE MIRRORS FOR ONE ANOTHER

In our last chapter we discussed the principle of ‘every man did that which seemed right in his own eyes’. I shan’t quickly forget the shock that came to me when I realized that is how it has been with the human race since the Fall, indeed with each one of us, and sadly— shockingly—with me. I see now that you can write a book on grace without having grace! This is frightening. I only found relief when I remembered Paul’s words, ‘not having a righteousness of my own’ (Phil. 3:9).\* What a boon to realize that not only can one *not* achieve such a righteousness but that it would, in any case, be a great burden to carry!

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\* For further reading, see the essay 'My Own Righteousness' in *I Saw, in the Night, Visions*, NCPI, Blackwood, 1986, pp. 164-180.

People who are linked with the business of counselling others find it helpful to have what they call ‘case histories’ or ‘models’. They can work better when they actually see humans live and work, that is, do actions. On the basis of this principle, we will take living examples of men and women who (i) appear to live without grace, i.e. are autonomous, (ii) seem to be people of faith, and (iii) seem to be a mixture, i.e. of living in faith, but yet often ‘going it alone’.

Before we commence this exercise, let us examine the famous ‘by faith’ term used in Hebrews chapter 11. The writer says, ‘By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain’ (verse 4). ‘By faith’ must mean ‘trust in God, refusal to trust in one’s own ideas and human powers, belief in God as the God of grace who acts in one’s life, and thus obedience to Him in His plan ‘ and commands, i.e. a life which goes on working in dependence upon God’.

When we ask, ‘How does this faith come?’ The answer must be, ‘Men and women of faith have seen God as the God of grace, as they have faith in Him, His plan and His actions, even though they may not consciously realize this. Because of the revelation God has given to them of Himself, they do not live their lives doing only that which seems right in their own eyes, but they do what they believe seems right to God in His own eyes’. Another way of saying this is, ‘The grace of God produces faith in human beings’, or, ‘Grace always precedes faith’.

With this in mind we are ready to share the ‘case histories’ which are set out in Scripture, always remembering that somehow the Scriptures themselves show us the ‘right’ and the ‘wrong’ of these lives.

## HUMAN BEINGS AT THE BEGINNING OF MAN'S HISTORY

In one way of speaking the first couple did not have to live by faith. They lived in the glories and gifts of creation, and in that sense needed no grace. They had no reason to distrust God. When they acceded to the temptation to 'be as God, knowing good and evil', they were now set to trust their own reason and discernment. The man accused the woman for his fall, and the woman blamed the serpent, but the fact is that in the moment of casting off from God they really cast off from one another. Now grace was needed, and it came in the form of the Proto-Evangel—the first prophetic announcement of the Gospel—in Genesis 3:15. The couple ought henceforth to have lived by faith, i.e. under grace. We do not know what they did, in this respect.

The first children of that marriage—Cain and Abel—were opposites. Cain was a man who went it alone. He was angry with God. Abel, born under the same conditions, was a man of faith. The Scriptures assert this. They tell us he was a prophet, did righteousness, and loved his brother (Luke 11:50f.; cf. I John 3:11–12). Because Cain went it alone, it seemed to him God was unjust, his brother a favoured 'elitist', and he, Cain, badly done by. In his anger he killed Abel. Even then God did not destroy him, but gave him evidences of grace in the mark He put upon him, that anyone who sought to destroy him would be punished sevenfold (see Gen. 4:3–16).

Abel is not perhaps the ultra man of faith, but his faith was great. In his sacrifice he trusted God for acceptance, which, in later terms, we call justification. We do not

mean Abel was not a sinner as are other human beings, but that he trusted the God of propitiatory sacrifice.

One of Cain's descendants was a man named Lamech. His sons were inventors of musical instruments and forgers of bronze and iron. Secure in such strength, and perhaps in new weaponry, Lamech killed a man who offended him, and vowed he would kill seventy-sevenfold, He had utter disregard for God. He was a graceless man. Graceless men, for the most part, think of themselves as strong.

We must not think of graceless man as ineffective. The story of Babel tells us that man was quite dangerous. Prior to the Flood, to Nimrod and to Babel, man was in a state of desperate corruption. The earth was filled with violence, and time ripe for judgement— that of the Flood. God had a man of faith—Noah—for he found grace (favour: *chen*) in the eyes of the Lord. He was not a blameless man (Gen. 6:9) and so found grace, but found grace and so was a man of faith, i.e. 'a righteous man' (Gen. 6:9) and 'a preacher of righteousness' (11 Pet. 2:5).

Prior to the Flood, Enoch was a man of faith. We are told, 'Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him' (Gen. 5:24). This is a beautiful story. He never saw death. He had union with God. Perhaps he was a gentle man: we do not know, but by contrast the strong man is Nimrod. His name is scattered over history until he almost becomes a god. It was recorded of him, 'Nimrod [was] a mighty hunter before the Lord' (Gen. 10:9). The trouble was that he hunted men, and not animals. He built famous cities and indeed a great kingdom, securing himself in his own autonomy. That he did this 'before the Lord' may mean he flaunted his powers before God.

He had successors who had a plan. God had given the command to man to spread across the earth and fill it up subduing it as he went. This would have been good for all mankind. Nimrod's successors said, 'Let us do three things: build a walled city in which we will be safe, build a tower to heaven, paralleling God Himself, and let us make a name for ourselves, rather than call on the name of the Lord'. Looking at them, God said, 'Let us go down and disturb them, for if we let them continue as they plan there will not be a thing they cannot do *which seems good to them*'. Here, then, was autonomy—gracelessness—*pas excellence*. It is at Babel that we see the vicious rejection of God, the secularity of man, and enormity of his autonomy.

## HUMAN BEINGS IN COVENANT HISTORY

Abraham is the man of covenant, the true man of history. He believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness (justification: see Rom. 4:3; Gal. 3:6). His developed biography would demand a large volume. He is important because truly a man of faith, if not *the* man of faith. How did he see the grace of God? Was it in the great covenant promise which was to bring universal blessing to all the nations? Undoubtedly, but Stephen sums it up (Acts 7:2): 'The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham'. That was enough. He who has seen God knows He is 'the God of all grace' (I Pet. 5:10). Covenant is only intelligible in grace. The vast majority of mankind today looks back to Abraham as its father. Abram means 'exalted father', and Abraham, 'father of a great multitude'.

This man mixed autonomy with grace. He played it cunningly with princes, using his wife to protect him. He cried to God concerning Ishmael, 'O that Ishmael might live in thy sight!' (Gen. 17:18). Ishmael could never have been the child of faith, as was Isaac. Isaac shared the greatness of God when he was offered up at Mt. Moriah. He submitted, as the true Son was later to submit, so that both son Isaac and father Abraham had a window into God's heart of love and grace. As Abraham was a mixture of grace and self-rule, so was Isaac, loving Esau more than Jacob, coveting food before giving blessing, and trembling when he discovered God would unswervingly fulfil His purposes through Jacob.

Jacob was a sly man, a twister and a cheat, but what better object for grace than this one! So he became a prince of God, not through achievement. Like Joseph, later he 'looked to the reward'. He suffered the bitter fruits of his own devious acts, especially in the expressed cruelty of his children, but at the last he prophesied nobly, 'bowing in worship over the head of his staff' (Heb. 11:21). A true worshipper is a man of faith, graced by God, as was he.

So we could go down what we might call 'the covenant line'. Joseph was a man of faith, believing the great covenant promises made to his great-grandfather. Moses was described as 'very meek, more than all men that were on the face of the earth' (Num. 12:3). He too believed in the covenant but how he had to be made meek! In his rashness he killed an Egyptian. He was eighty before he was prepared to commence his life's work, and yet we cannot but see grace in it all. His parents saw that he was

‘a goodly child’, i.e. one selected by grace. In action he was often impetuous, and sometimes his emotions ruled him, but he was a man of faith, as the writer of Hebrews impresses upon us. All the time he needed grace to have faith.

## GRACE AND NON-GRACE IN ISRAEL’S HISTORY

Here we come to a great medley of people, leaders judges, kings, priests, prophets and people who are faithful, with also those who are idolatrous. This elect people showed their fallen humanity as much as any race, and more, if you think of the covenant under which they lived. We have previously seen the great gifts God had given to them which He had not given to other nations—gifts such as the sonship, the law, the worship, the glory, the promises and the covenants, and the coming King Messiah. Had they lived under His grace they would have been a noble and triumphant race.

Many comparisons stand out, one of the most powerful being that of David and King Saul. Saul shows little or no response to God’s *chen* and *chesed*, His favour and His compassion. He is insecure, morose, never repentant! and only remorseful if confronted with failure. He is an example of the man who must prove himself, never daring to fail. He has *kinah*, i.e. envy, jealousy, deep brooding anger and resentment. How he mirrors so many of us of the angry human race!—anger against God, anger against others, and anger against himself, grimly remorseful in failure and ever seeking foolish ways of balancing out his guilt.

David is the man of faith. He seemed to know grace as few have, in human history. He was a bloody man, an immoral man in much of his life, yet he knew the tender mercies of God. *Chesed* shines out in his experience. He was gracious, too, to others: to Saul who hunted him, to slanderous old Shimei, to the traitorous Absalom, and, tenderly so to the lame son of Saul, Mephibosheth We learn so much of grace from his beautiful and depthful songs and psalms. His words haunt us today, for he emanated grace through his harp.

## GRACE IN A HARSH WORLD

One of the most classic contrasts of grace and self sufficiency lies in the pair of men, Daniel the prophet and Nebuchadnezzar\* the mighty monarch of Babylon. When we say Daniel was a man of faith, and that faith arises from grace, we really mean that natural creaturely dependence was lost in the Fall and can only come back into its own through grace. In that sense Daniel was independent upon grace in order to be dependent upon God.

Nebuchadnezzar had no such dependence. He was not perhaps an unusually proud man but he was soon caught up in his own *hubris*, that pride of achievement which makes a person contemptuous of lesser mortals. When Daniel interpreted his worrying dream, Nebuchadnezzar had the clue to impending disaster. The story is found in Daniel chapter 4. The king could have avoided disaster,

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\* I have developed the story of Nebuchadnezzar in the book *God and the Ghostown*, NCPI, Blackwood, 1984, pp. 212-224.

but humility is something the human spirit cannot manufacture.

At the end of twelve months he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, and the king said, 'Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?'

That was when he was told his fate, and Daniel describes the happening:

Immediately the word was fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar. He was driven from among men, and ate grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair grew as long as eagles' feathers, and his nails were like birds' claws.

Nebuchadnezzar is the paradigm and picture of every man who is proud. There is madness in human autonomy. The king, once humbled, gave glory to God, and concluded his eulogy with these words:

'Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honour the King of heaven; for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to abase'.

Of course we have scarcely mentioned the lords and idols that are surrogate gods to proud humanity. Since man makes them, he thinks he is above them, but unexpected and dreadful retribution awaits him. On the one hand the idols enslave their devotees, and on the other God's judgement awaits its appropriate hour. Quickly, quickly, we must then become men and women of faith or we will be suddenly destroyed.

## **MEN AND WOMEN WITH GRACE, AND WITHOUT GRACE (2)**

### **THE WORLD OF NON-GRACE AT THE TIME OF JESUS**

The most dangerous humans in history have been the idealists, the utopians, the messianic zealots.\* They are the secularists with a religion of their own. They are the Cains, the Esaus and the Ishmaels. Sometimes they are the terrorists doing murder in the name of justice. The bitterness of their anger vents itself in unholy self righteousness.

Jesus called the Jewish leaders who opposed him ‘the world’. He easily saw through their pretentiousness, their traditions of religion, their eagerness to be called ‘Rabbi!’ (teacher) ‘Master!’ (leader), and ‘Father!’ –terms,

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\* For a discussion, see my essay *The Justice Men and the Great Rage*, NCPI, Blackwood, 1985.

incidentally, which are beloved to the leaders of sects and splinter groups—for, as Jesus points out in Matthew 23:1–12, there is only one true archetypal Father, i.e. the Heavenly one, one true Teacher, God Himself, and only one Master, the Christ.

Jesus had strong words for these seemingly godly leaders. He called them ‘blind leaders of the blind’ (Matt. 15:14, AV). He said they were like graves whitewashed on the outside but full of rotting corpses within. When they claimed to have Abraham for their spiritual father and God as their only true Father, he said strongly that they did not act in character with Abraham, for they sought to kill him, and nothing of this nature was in Abraham. As for God being their Father, why, ‘You are of your father the devil’ (John 8:44).

The key to the gracelessness within Israel is found in Luke 16:15: ‘You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts; for what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God’. He uttered a similar principle on another occasion: ‘They love the praise of men more than the praise of God’ (John 12:43). Perhaps they thought the praise of men confirmed the praise of God!

He was not playing with words. He spoke of Israel as being like a man inhabited by a demon, whose demon had left the heart but after a time came back to it when it had been cleansed, bringing with him seven more demons even worse than the original one. It is significant that there was not one idol in Israel at the time of Jesus, but the place was infested with demons. The idols were still there, even though not visually.

On the night of his betrayal, Jesus said of ‘the world’,

i.e. the Jewish leaders and their followers, ‘They hated me without a cause’ (John 15:25). He warned his disciples that they too would be hated. Next day the leaders and their hate-crazed followers crucified the Lord of glory. Jesus had said to the scribes and Pharisees,

‘But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because you shut the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither enter yourselves, nor allow those who would enter to go in. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you traverse sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves’ (Matt. 23:13–15).

Because they were deeply in need of grace he cried concerning these very ones, on the Cross, ‘Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!’

By contrast there were those whose lives were of faith from grace. When the angel said to Mary, ‘Hail, O favoured one, the Lord is with you!’, he was using the ancient concept in Israel of *chen*. In another way Zechariah and Elizabeth were in this *chen*, for natural actions could not explain their miracle. The shepherds were the objects of grace. The angels sang to them, ‘Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace to men who enjoy his favour’ (Luke 2:14, *Jerusalem Bible*).

Amongst these were included Simeon and Anna, the disciples (however turbulent they may have been), the women who followed Jesus and ministered to him, watched him on the Cross and met him at the Tomb, and the many who were healed, upon whom miracles were performed, who had demons cast out of them, and whose guilts were forgiven. They all tasted the amazing grace of God which had appeared in the person of

Jesus the Messiah.

There can be no question: all of these *needed* grace. And it was that grace which poured out not merely in gushes or streams but in vast rivers and oceans of living water at the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

## GRACE AND NON-GRACE IN THE PRESENT ERA

Our era began at Pentecost. These are ‘the last days’. They are the days of grace. On the one hand there was—and is—‘great grace’ upon the church, called ‘glorious grace’ by Paul (Eph. 1:6). The apostles became transformed people, in fact almost unrecognizable. Thousands flocked to hear and receive the message of liberation. Through Pentecost the Spirit was flowing through the land, the dry bones were coming together, becoming en fleshed, and then standing up, a great new host of spiritual warriors, a new army terrible with banners!

We have proof that many Pharisees were transformed by grace and that ‘a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith’ (Acts 6:7). Saul the persecutor capitulated to the grace of Christ. The Spirit flowed on to Samaria, to Caesarea, to Syria, then through Asia Minor, and into Europe, taking men and women by ‘the glorious Gospel’ of ‘glorious grace’. History and tradition tell us the Gospel flowed to the Far East, through India, to China, and on to Japan.

From the beginning—Pentecost and onward—the enemies of grace arose with great anger. They felt revulsion for this saccharine Gospel, this sickly—sweet message of love and redemption. It appeared to emasculate the

human race. It offended morality and put it in danger. It was a scandal to the religious, those who had slaved to win their redemption, and it was foolishness to the secular-minded, the Stoics and the bloody-minded. Its new grace-ethic cut across the do-it-yourself mentality of human autonomy.

So it was—and is—fiercely opposed. Whilst that is as may be, the truth is that the horror of man's autonomy, his fierce resistance to God, his autocratic haughtiness, his cruelty in asserting himself, and his mad rush to build his Babels wreaks horror in the human scenario. Our Cains, Lamechs, Nimrods and Nebuchadnezzars are endemic. The rage of the 'justice men' is fearful to behold. The innocent are mown down by angry terrorists, murder is justified because of the 'fat cats', the ruthless destruction is righteous since the end justifies the means, whilst the seemingly more honest anarchists savagely tear down the structures they loathe, not knowing whether others will ever be built.

The tragedy of all this is that it began with man wishing to be independent, and to know good and evil. Now when he does that which is right in his own eyes, then he will stop at nothing to assert his 'good' and to destroy the 'not good' of others, whether it be in the family, the community, the nation, or the international community. Man plays God to man, and all slide into an horrific hell.

So then, we do not have a 'nice' assessment of the unholy Cains, Lamechs and Nimrods. and a 'decent' discernment of the good men, the Abels, Enochs, and Noahs, but we see the truth that Paul insisted upon, namely that 'all have sinned and come short of the glory of God', for the 'good' and the 'bad' men and women

alike need grace. Men and women of faith, in history, were only that because they were the objects of God's grace. Evil men and women are only what they are because they despise and oppose grace.

We had better see, without being squeamish, or selfrighteously indignant, the horror of man's history, the personal suicides and homicides, the matricides, patricides, rape and pack rape, and the wider genocides. The facts stare us grimly in the face. Man is a bloody and cruel creature, and he can be whipped into mad frenzy, can be bitter in racism, colour prejudice, and can think up devilish ways—and execute them—in brain-washing, concentration camp cruelty, mass liquidation. His wars are unbelievably horrific, the mass destruction of cities, the use of gas, chemical and germ warfare—all of it is horrible. The power of our Nimrods, our arrogant dictators, and our benevolent lords is written into history with undeniable and frightening reality.

Our history is not pretty. Too many 'case histories' mirror our evil, but then some of us are mirrored in the men and women of faith. Like them—and with them— we, too, are the objects of His transforming grace. Man can be wholly given to the glory of God, and can bring through His living powers and attributes into serving the creation as it worships its Creator and Redeemer.

## **CONCLUSION TO THE HISTORY OF MEN OF GRACE AND THOSE WITHOUT GRACE**

In this small exercise, this mere sketch of the mighty convulsions of evil in our history, as also our minimal

references to persons of grace, we can see that a book on grace, and even endless discussion on grace, need never be merely academic, the ineffectual theorizing of armchair experts. To the contrary, nothing is more needed than an understanding of grace coupled with personal experience of it.

Grace, we must see, not only redeems. It judges and judgement is liberating to the humble, though forever binding to the incorrigibly impenitent. Grace ultimately divides the human race, taking it to its destiny. Grace is the ultimate judgement, and men who oppose grace oppose it to their own doom.

## THE REALITY OF GRACE (1)

Having seen something of the history of our race—of men and women with and without grace and dependence upon God—we now look to finding an entrance into the reality of grace.

This, in fact, is quite a simple matter. We simply repent and believe in the face of the Gospel. It may well be that had God not moved we would never come, but in practice we repent and believe. Of course repentance and faith are gifts of God, but we use these gifts: we repent and believe. We may know a lot about grace without ever coming under it. We repeat then that we must repent and believe. Then we are in grace.

For those who wish to discover the grace of God as reality there can be no better introduction than the ‘case history’ of Paul. He was a Jew of Tarsus, his Jewish name being Saul, and he was trained in what we might call a

university seminary under a famous teacher named Gamaliel. He was militantly anti-Christian, so that only some dynamic invasion of his life by God could have changed him. He was a law man, and his mind was set in that direction. Then something happened to him. This is what we wish to see—Paul's personal experience of grace. It can prove helpful to us.

### PAUL'S PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF GRACE

That Paul was a man of grace, from beginning to end, can never be in doubt. His enemies might have accused him of 'over-gracing' but never of 'under-gracing'. The experience of his conversion in Acts, and his references to it in some of his Letters, show us that Paul put everything down to grace.

It was Christ's personal appearance to him which changed him radically. In one place (Phil. 3:12) he says, 'I was laid hold of'. The verb (Gk: *katalambano*) has been translated 'apprehended', 'captured' and 'taken hold of'. It was a dynamic occasion. Paul, who was blinded at the event, never forgot it, and gives a number of accounts of the happening. In one place (Gal. 1:15–16) he says, 'But when he who set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me. . . . Calling to Paul was a matter of election, that is, a matter of grace. The event was meeting Christ and the mode of grace was 'to reveal his Son *in* me'. The external happening on the road to Damascus brought the internal happening of a dynamic revelation and consequent change

of life and person.

In another place (I Cor. 15:8–10) Paul says:

Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain.

What was it then that happened in the experience and understanding of Paul?

Firstly Paul was a Pharisee, and depiction of these in the Gospels is generally of men hostile to Christ. Sometimes they are depicted as proud legalists, although doubtless not all were such, but Paul for his part had actually thought of himself, ‘as to the law a Pharisee...as to righteousness under the law blameless’. When, on the road to Damascus, Saul of Tarsus asked, ‘Who are you, Lord?’, if the answer had been, ‘I am Messiah’, he would not even remotely have connected that one with the crucified son of Mary. When the answer was, ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are persecuting’, then Paul must have been stunned.

It remained for Paul to hear the words of commission both from Jesus himself, and later, Ananias. These words—which we will now examine—plus all the teaching the Christians had given, and which Paul had tried to subvert, would form an overwhelming evidence that Jesus was the Messiah, God’s man and messenger of grace. It was to be even more than this to Paul, for Jesus did not come so much as the messenger of grace, as he came as its very actuation. Paul can never think of grace as an element which Christ introduces or imparts. Grace is Christ himself in his action. Grace—so to speak—is only present when Christ is present, and that it is in the form

and person of Christ himself we see easily enough, because this is how grace, i.e. Christ, met and transformed Paul. God revealed His Son *in* Paul, not only *to* Paul.

### **The Revelation to Paul of the Gospel of Grace**

We are continuing our description of Paul's experience of grace. The revelation of Christ (Gal. 1:15–16) was the revelation of grace. We must remember Paul's previous theology: it can be no less than a theology of merit, attached to the law. By saying this we are not stating that this is true Judaism, true covenantal theology, for nowhere in the Mosaic law—as Paul himself proves—is there a salvation or justification by works of the law. Somehow, nevertheless, Paul had had such a theology. He might even have anticipated that in the age of Messiah and the New Covenant, Messiah and the Kingdom, salvation would have been apart from the works of the law, but the rich concept of grace—as such—is not found explicitly in the Mosaic Covenant. Paul is obviously mightily amazed by the fact of grace. We might almost say he was constantly intoxicated by it. The *concept* of grace may have been amazing to him, but the *fact* of grace wholly possessed him.

So we say that his initial understanding of grace arose from his encounter with Christ and the various elements to which he was introduced. We repeat that Paul must have heard all of the Gospel from those he persecuted. He must have pressed them on every point, being the Pharisee and scholar that he was. He must have compared their theology with his. So he was by no means meagre in

his understanding of what the Christians both claimed and proclaimed. He also had at hand his own thorough understanding of the Hebrew Scriptures, Judaic theology, and Messianic expectation. He would have been wholly conversant with the prophets, and so the themes of Messiah, the New Covenant, the Kingdom of God, and all other related elements.

When then Jesus said, ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are persecuting’, Paul must have seen vividly that he had been wrong in persecuting the Christians. They had been right in their proclamation. It needed only for their teachings and his theology to come together for a rapid re-sorting of these elements which were essentially kindred.

There had been the statement of Christ, to Ananias, ‘Go [to Saul], for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel’. Then there had been the statements of Ananias to Saul:

‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came, has sent me that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit’ (Acts 9:17);

‘The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Just One and to hear a voice from his mouth; for you will be a witness for him to all men of what you have seen and heard. And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on his name’ (Acts 22:14–16).

Finally there had been the statement by Christ himself which Paul reported to King Agrippa (Acts 26:16–18). We cannot be sure whether this message was given directly, or through Ananias, but the means do not greatly matter.

What Jesus communicated was:

‘But rise and stand upon your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you to serve and bear witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from the people and from the Gentiles—to whom I send you to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’

If we draw out the points which must have been new and rich to Paul, they would conceivably have been these:

- (a) Paul the persecutor of Christ was now to be his servant.
- (b) All Paul’s sins were to be washed away: he was to know total forgiveness, and this without the aid of the Judaistic sacrificial system, i.e. full cleansing and forgiveness resided in the person of Christ.
- (c) Paul was to have the experience of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon him, something known only to few in the time of the Mosaic Covenant.
- (d) In all of this experience—on the road to Damascus and the three days of contemplation in Damascus at his time of blindness—Paul has *seen and heard* things which he was to report as Christ’s witness.
- (e) His message was to be both to the Jews and Gentiles, and its power would turn some of them from

darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, the result of which they would receive the forgiveness of sins, and be assured of a place amongst the holy people of God, the saints of the true Kingdom.

Notice that Paul is forgiven, cleansed, and placed amongst the new people of God—the Christians. He is to be a witness to Christ, *whom he has seen and heard*. It is not difficult to see how Paul obtained the Gospel which in one place he calls ‘my Gospel’. It also explains his statement in Galatians 1:11–12, ‘For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not man’s gospel. For I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ’.

Again, in I Corinthians 15:3–4 he adds, ‘For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures. . .’

When we add to these statements the saying of Christ, ‘to serve and bear witness to the things in which you have seen me, and to *those in which I will appear to you*’, then we realize that Paul had an intimate relationship with Christ that never permitted him to see grace apart from Christ. We say without hesitation that Paul’s knowledge of the truth—and hence his theology of grace—all grew from his personal experience of Christ.

It may be useful to add here that theology which is abstract, which is academic, and which comes from the study, from the works of others, and from textual

research with the current hermeneutic, may prove of a certain value, and ought not to be despised. However, in the light of the meaning of ‘witness’ in the New Testament, and of Paul’s own understanding of the truth because of the personal nature of his experience of Christ, we ought to question ourselves as to whether we can really call ourselves true and worthy theologians of the truth if our experience has not been similar.

By ‘similar’ we do not mean simply in mode; we mean in principle. Take, for example, the matter of regeneration. No person needs more or less regeneration than another. Regeneration affects the whole man. Every person must become regenerate, or, as Jesus said, ‘must be born again’. How much may we theologize about regeneration if it has not happened to us? If Paul cannot separate grace from the person of Christ, and that person working in him, how much can we separate our own experience of grace—in regeneration, forgiveness, justification and the like—from the personal working of the Father, the Son and the Spirit?

Of course, we can say that theology is the principles that we deduce from our studies, and that truth is itself the working of God in our lives. This would be correct, but theology cannot, in that case, be the truth itself. It can be terms and ideas which seek to indicate the truth, but it cannot be the truth, for again the truth of God (and there is no other truth: man, creation, and redemption all being in this truth of God) cannot be known apart from our personal experience of the Godhead. This may help to explain why so much theology seems dull and unrelated. It may also show us why we react to the living truth when it makes so many demands upon us. To believe that ‘All

is grace, and grace is all', may well be too much for the ego of man, and especially for his religious ego!

## CONCLUSION TO PAUL'S PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF GRACE

Paul's experience and teaching leave us in no doubt. A man who has been redeemed by grace knows it. He can never speak beyond his experience with truth and conviction, but then he never needs to do so. To come into, and live under, grace, is the ultimate for a human being.

Paul, whilst having a dramatic conversion, is no exception to the general rule of coming into grace and living in its reality. As he did, so may we. So many times he confessed to being a weak person. He never saw his competency as coming from himself, but only from God (II Cor. 3:5–6). Great visions placed him in danger of pride, as they would us (II Cor. 12:1–10). Only when he was weak could God's strength show itself.

When it came to doing good *of himself*, or refusing to sin *of himself*, he never succeeded (Rom. 7:13–25). Only through the Spirit and through grace could he succeed (Rom. 6:12–14; 8:13). In other words, he was a person who always needed grace. Whilst this is undoubtedly humiliating to the human spirit, the reality of grace can only be known *where we need grace*, and know that we need it.

Knowing grace, then, can be a tricky matter. This is what we will see in Chapter 20.

## THE REALITY OF GRACE (2)

### GRACE IN THE EARLY CHURCH

The writing of the Gospels sprang out of the early church, hence we would expect that since the church knew grace prior to writing these Gospels, the idea of grace would be present in them—and of course it is. Rather than draw out the text of our book, we have included an account of grace as seen in the Gospels, in an *appendix*, under the heading of ‘*Jesus and Grace in the Gospels*’ (pp. 312–317).

What is relevant for us is the experience of grace, and the use of the idea of that word in the life of the church, both in the Acts and the Epistles. In this chapter we will deal with its use in the Acts.

### Grace in the Early Church as Seen in the Book of Acts

We need not doubt that grace was a reality in, and to, the early church. We have approached this subject from

many angles, but now we need to see it as a whole. Repetition of some of the material in the Acts and the Epistles will do us no harm.

### **Grace in Jerusalem**

The first mention of grace in the Acts is in 4:33, where it is said that ‘great grace was upon them all’, i.e. the apostles, and the whole church, young and new as it was in the faith of the Gospel. This happened when the apostles came back from the Jewish Sanhedrin where they had been forbidden—under pain of punishment—to preach the Gospel. When they told the people, the whole church prayed in unison. That prayer can be read in 4:24–30 and is remarkable.

The prayer first affirmed the sovereignty of God over the whole creation, quoted Psalm 2 as a message of the Holy Spirit, and related the rebellion of the nations to the event of the crucifixion. It showed that Jesus was truly God’s anointed King, and that Israel had rejected him. It then asked for signs and wonders to be done in the name of Christ and for the apostles to have boldness to proclaim the Gospel.

The results of the prayer were startling. The place in which they were assembled was shaken, and all present were filled with the Holy Spirit. No less remarkable were the signs of grace. The first sign was that everyone was ‘of one heart and soul, and no one said any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common’. The second expression of grace was ‘with great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all’.

Whilst this was the first *mention* of grace, it was not the first *action* of that grace. At Pentecost, as we have said, the Holy Spirit was poured out initially upon this era, so that it became (and is) *the* era of the Spirit and of grace. The absolute unity of the new people (3,120 of them) was immediately seen, for ‘all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed to all, as any had need’. They shared in the apostles’ doctrine, the fellowship, the prayers and the breaking of bread. Also ‘the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved’ (Acts 2:44, 45, 47).

From then on it is grace in every way, a reality in the early life of the church.

### **Grace in Samaria**

The word ‘grace’, as such, is not mentioned in Acts 8 where Philip the evangelist preaches the Gospel to the Samaritans. The effects of the Gospel are powerful, ‘For unclean spirits came out of many who were possessed, crying with a loud voice; and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. So there was much joy in that city’ (verses 7–8). This work of grace seemed to require apostolic sealing, which happened when Peter and John came down and laid hands on the new converts, and they received the gift of the Spirit.

Grace had come to the Samaritans with the Gospel and the Holy Spirit.

### **Grace in Caesarea**

Peter was led to go to Caesarea and speak to the household of the Gentile centurion, Cornelius. During a

fine proclamation of the Gospel, the Gentiles who were listening received the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the forgiveness of sins. It is evident that ‘great grace’ was upon this people as they represented the wider audience which was to hear the Gospel. On this occasion grace had freed the Gospel of any Jewish trappings it might have had.

### **Grace at Antioch in Syria**

With the persecution of Stephen in Jerusalem, many Christian Jews had also been persecuted and had fled from that city. They went everywhere, some making their way to Antioch in Syria. Up to that point they had thought primarily of the Gospel for Israel, but now they began to tell it to the Gentiles.

A miracle took place, for both Jews and Gentiles formed one church. The church in Jerusalem heard about it and sent Barnabas down to look into the matter. It is recorded that when Barnabas came down and ‘saw the grace of God, he was glad’ (Acts 11:23). It is a fascinating statement, ‘[he] *saw* the grace of God’. That is, grace was visible. It must surely mean that the life and actions of the new people showed the grace of God. In other words, they were generally typical of what had happened in Jerusalem, Samaria and Caesarea, and in particular showed the unity, love and care of the community, along with power to proclaim the Gospel.

This grace of God soon blossomed out. Acts 11:27–29 shows that the Christians at Antioch felt compassion for those in Judea, for they sent relief to them in the face of a famine. Again, in Acts 13:1–4 as they worshipped by fasting and praying, Barnabas and Saul were sent out on

their first missionary journey. Acts 14:26 tells us that before going ‘they had been *commended to the grace of God* for the work’, i.e. the work which they completed on that journey.

### **Grace: the Word of Grace: the Gospel of Grace**

We must not quickly pass the statement, ‘commended to the grace of God’. It is not just a pious good word: it reveals something the early church understood which, sadly enough, is not well understood today. They understood ‘the grace of God ‘ to be that action of God towards His people which never ceased, and which was always present. To put it another way: *it was the factor upon which they could count all the time, i.e. that activity of God which kept them secure, protected them, and enabled them to live the new life into which they had come.*

For this reason it is interesting to see the use of the word ‘grace’ in the remainder of Acts. In Acts 13 there is the account of Paul preaching at Antioch in Pisidia (not Syria). His sermon was on grace. He had his famous proclamation,

‘Let it be known to you therefore, brethren, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him every one that believes is justified from everything from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses’ (verses 38–39).

As a result, ‘many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who spoke to them and *urged them to continue in the grace of God*’ (verse 43). What, then, was meant by ‘continue in the grace of God’? Surely Paul meant, ‘You have now commenced the life of

grace through the Gospel. Don't stop: go on living in this grace'. The wonderful fact is that that grace was always active, and would keep them, and take them on.

In Acts 14:3 the apostles preached the Gospel at Iconium. Their message divided the listeners, but Paul and Barnabas did not desist. 'So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, *who bore witness to the word of his grace*, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands'. This 'word of his grace' is, of course, the Gospel. In this case God testifies to it, but the word of His grace is, in one sense, other than the signs and wonders.

In Acts 20:32 'the word of his grace' is again used. Paul had been speaking to the elders of the church of Ephesus gathered at Miletus to meet Paul. He had said to them, among many things, 'I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may accomplish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, *to testify to the gospel of the grace of God* (20:24). For Paul the Gospel was grace, and it was not just a form of words or ideas. It was Christ redeeming people. Whatever the formulation of the truth, people were not saved by the formulation but by Christ, through his Gospel.

In Acts 15:11 this saving power of grace is seen. Peter said, regarding, the Gentiles, 'But we [Jews] believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus. just as they [the Gentiles] will'. In Acts 18:27 the great preacher Apollos went into Achaia where Paul and Silas had been, and 'When he arrived, he greatly helped those *who through grace had believed*'. There is no believing without grace.

At the end of his message in Acts 20, Paul said, ‘And now I *commend you to God and to the word of his grace*, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified’ (verse 32). ‘God’ and ‘the word of his grace’ cannot be separated. Paul knew the elders greatly needed grace, but it was there all the time. Moreover it was the grace which would build them up and mature them. As we have said, ‘the word of his grace’ was not merely a formulation or a pattern of ideas communicated through teaching. God’s word never exists without Him, the Speaker, and He is always present in, with and through His Word. The Word is never a past word, for it is always contemporary, always effectual. ‘The words that I speak to you, they are spirit and they are life.’

## **CONCLUSION AS TO GRACE IN THE BOOK OF ACTS**

We conclude that the early church reckoned on grace as its most powerful factor for proclaiming the Gospel, for growth in the life and maturity of the church, and indeed for all things. It was that factor without which it could not live.

The question we may well ask in our churches of today is, ‘When do we reckon on the grace of God, and how much of our life is lived in that grace?’

## **THE REALITY OF GRACE (3)**

### **GRACE IN THE EARLY CHURCH (CONTINUED)**

Much of what happened in the Acts is contemporary with the Epistles. We tend to draw out doctrine and theology from the Letters, and this is not altogether wrong. What we need to see is that the early church lived the sort of things the writers communicated. For this reason we should not make too much theory of what was written but see it in the context of the day to day life of the church. For this reason it is profitable to study the Epistles.

#### **Grace in the Early Church as Seen in the Epistles**

It would be a long hike to cover the theme of grace in all the Epistles of the New Testament. Paul's material is voluminous. Peter, too, has much to say, while the writer of Hebrews, although he only occasionally mentions the

word ‘grace’, is really treating the subject thoroughly. Jude and James say only a little. John gives only a grace greeting, but then his special word ‘love’ covers the action of grace. All the Letters are redolent with grace.

In Chapter 17 we saw how Paul came to the reality of grace, and in Section Four we will cover the Pauline idea of grace in the apostle’s Letters to the Romans and Galatians. Hence we will not try to cover more Pauline material here. We will, however, treat the theme of grace in the Petrine writings and in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

### **Grace in the First Letter of Peter**

The statement, ‘The God of all grace’ (I Pet. 5:10) can mean ‘the God of every grace’, and in 4:10 Peter has talked about God’s ‘varied’ or ‘manifold’ grace. We have seen that there cannot be ‘graces’ but one grace. It has many facets. In regard to gifts, the various gifts help to make up the whole, but grace extends beyond the gifts. It is active prior to gifts received, although it comes to man through the gifts of proclamation, and the gifts of repentance and faith.

In the context of I Peter 1:5 the writer is speaking of two things, (a) suffering, and (b) glory. He is really saying:

Suffering is a hard thing to cope with, and only the grace of God can help us do that. And it does! We are not one whit worse for suffering when it is done under the grace of God. Again, God is calling us to glory, and that means we will be glorified. This will be achieved by God’s grace, especially after He has rehabilitated us from the agony and anguish of human and satanic suffering.

This is similar to Paul’s argument in II Corinthians 4:7–15, where he points out that suffering, far from

destroying us, strengthens our faith, and causes us to proclaim the grace of God, even in, and by, that suffering, so that grace will extend ‘to more and more people, [that] it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God’. Also the suffering ‘is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison’.

In 1:2 Peter uses the grace salutation, of which we have spoken. In 1:10 he speaks of the prophets who prophesied ‘of the grace that was to be yours’, i e. the coming of Christ and the salvation he would bring. Even so there is a grace which we have not experienced which is eschatological. He says (verse 13), ‘set your hope fully upon the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ’. In Section Seven we will speak of this, under the heading ‘Great Grace’s Greater Grace’, so that we will not pause to comment here, but simply say that all we have by grace now we have by faith, but then we will have it all by sight. It will be more wonderful by comparison with what we have now than we could possibly dream.

The statement in 3:7, ‘the grace of life’, is again eschatological. We mean that although we have eternal life now, yet there is a sense in which we cannot know its full reality until it comes to us ‘at the revelation of Jesus Christ’. It too belongs to the day when faith will become sight. Just as we are in the Kingdom but will yet inherit the Kingdom, so we have life but will yet inherit it. Man and wife will live closely and lovingly when they keep that in mind. The life which God gave us at creation is not by grace, but living created life now has to be a matter of grace, for we forfeited it by our sin. To enjoy created life is impossible—in the fullest sense—except by grace.

In 5:5 Peter says, ‘Clothe yourselves, all of you, with

humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble".' This is a quote from Proverbs 3:34, 'to the humble he shows favour'. Peter does not mean that humility is 'a means of grace', for such a statement is not found anywhere in the New Testament. Humility is something which marks the true Christian, and in its context God's grace is operative.

In 5:12 he writes, 'I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God; stand fast in it'. The temptation to 'not stand fast' would spring from suffering. It is often thought that if we suffer God is against us, or not for us, or that we are receiving punishment, deserved or otherwise. Peter is saying, 'No, this suffering is hard and difficult, but I have told you that God's grace will enable you to endure and to be made free from any ill effect. I want you to understand this is not all one terrible mistake: to the contrary all that is happening is God's true grace'. That is, genuine suffering arises from, and is part of, the authentic experience of grace. This is indeed a high understanding of suffering, and a rich understanding of God's grace.

### **Grace in the Epistle to the Hebrews**

The word 'grace' is used only eight times in this Letter, and one of those (12:28), '*let us have grace*, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear' (AV), can be translated 'let us be grateful' (RSV), although the *Jerusalem Bible* says, 'Let us therefore *hold on to the grace* we have been given and use it in the way he finds acceptable, in reverence and awe'. We will return to this verse.

Do these eight mentions indicate a wholesome doctrine

of grace in this Epistle? The answer is, 'Yes!' This is because the whole Epistle is written to Hebrew readers who are in danger of missing the distinctive nature of the Gospel, its transcendence of the old Jewish system— given that that system was remarkable in its day. How does the new era transcend the old? The writer of Hebrews says because Christ is its centre, and he is greater than angels, greater than Moses, and greater than Aaron. He is the mediator of the New Covenant which far transcends—and outmodes—the Old Covenant. There is a new worship which is far, far better than the old, but— most of all—the sacrifice of Christ as the true high priest and the true victim is received in the heavenly sanctuary. Thus his sacrifice is wholly effective to put away sins for ever, and to purge the conscience from past sins, this sanctifying and perfecting the believer.

This is all grace *par excellence*, and the writer strongly presses his claims. In the course of it all he has the eight situations in which he uses the word 'grace'.

The first (2:9) says, 'so that by the grace of God he might taste death for every one'. This may seem to say that it was God's grace to allow Jesus to suffer, but it goes much wider. The whole event of incarnation, life, death and ministry is God's grace. The actual 'tasting of death' must be seen as the Son wholly grasping the experience of death, suffering to the full that 'he might bring many sons into glory'. Psalm 22:15 voices the cry of the crucified, 'thou dost lay me in the dust of death', and Isaiah 53:12 says, 'he poured out his soul unto death'. Paul interprets all this: 'We are convinced that one has died for all; *therefore all have died*' (II Cor. 5:14). Hebrews simply shows that he suffered death fully.

This was the act of God's grace.

In 4:16 the writer enjoins us, 'Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need'. In the light of its context this statement is powerful. Christ is our great high priest. The 'throne of grace' was the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies, and here propitiation took place by means of the high priest. Thus this throne of grace is God's very throne. The grace-act of propitiation has taken place: we now have confidence (boldness) to approach it. Once we could never do that. Now we can. We are people of need-need of power and assistance- and all this, found in the true mercy seat, typified the old mercy seat. The phrase 'obtain grace' does not mean we use a 'means of grace', but rather 'grace emanates from this seat: let us come under it'.

The term 'the Spirit of grace' in 10:29-'How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by the man who has spurned the Son of God, and profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and outraged the Spirit of grace?'-can mean 'the Spirit given by grace' or 'the Spirit who is linked with grace'. If it is the first meaning then we are told it is a matter of grace to be given the Holy Spirit-which of course it is-and if the second, then he is the Spirit by which grace works in the New Covenant (through God and His Son), and who, himself, brings that grace to us.

In 12:15 the author says, 'See to it that no one fail to *obtain the grace of God*'. He then shows what failing to obtain the grace means. It consists in having a root of bitterness springing up within one, and defiling many others. We know bitterness causes trouble not only to the

one having it, but to countless others. ‘Fail to obtain the grace of God’ could mean ‘fall away from the grace of God’, or ‘miss the grace of God’, but the context seems to indicate it is saying ‘fail to live consistently in the grace that has come to one’, i.e. by some wrong act or attitude. It reminds us that every element of holy living is contingent upon grace.

We have glanced at 12:28, and the statement ‘let us have grace’ (*exomen charin*) which can—mean ‘let us have gratitude’ and thus give true worship, or ‘hold on to the grace we have and use it to worship God’. Gratitude, of course, springs from grace, and so does worship. We are told in 9:14 that when our consciences are purified from dead works (sins) then we worship the living God, a principle also stated in Romans 12:1 and Revelation 7:15. The outcome of grace, anyway, is true worship, a point which is further developed in Chapter 33 (Section Six), ‘The Grace of Worship’.

The final mention of grace in the Letter (apart from the salutation of 13:25) is in 13:9: ‘Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings; for it is well that the heart be strengthened by grace, not by foods, which have not benefited their adherents’. Some of the meaning here is apparent, even on the surface, namely that some are tempted to follow the kind of teaching which does not follow the freedom of grace, but rather has a ‘law-way’, of abstaining from some foods whilst eating others. This sort of thing is seen in Colossians 2:21–23 and I Timothy 4:1–5, and in a somewhat different sense in Romans 14 and I Corinthians 8. It may even include some of the Jewish food rites and prohibitions, but in any case this thing is not in the way of grace.

So much for the literal mentions of grace, but the great theme of forgiveness, sanctification and perfection—all of it by grace—is the outstanding theme of Hebrews, along with the powerful teaching of the new worship, the new sanctuary, and the new way of life, all of which spring from the grace of redemption, although these words, as such, are not used. Paul, Peter, and the author of Hebrews are one in their understanding of grace, as, no doubt, are the other apostolic writers.

## NOT LIVING IN THE REALITY OF GRACE

Had people been living wholly in grace, much that is written in the New Testament Letters would not have been required. It was required. For example, Jude writes,

For admission has been secretly gained by some who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly persons who *pervert the grace of our God into licentiousness* and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ (verse 4).

This is parallel with II Peter 2:19 (and context), ‘They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption; for whatever overcomes a man, to that he is enslaved’. Since practice is generally related to precedent teaching, and grace had been misunderstood, the practice was wrong.

## **‘DO NOT RECEIVE THE GRACE OF GOD IN VAIN’**

In II Corinthians 6:1–2 Paul has a significant warning for the church:

Working together with him, then, we entreat you not to accept the grace of God in vain. For he says, ‘At the acceptable time I have listened to you, and helped you on the day of salvation.’ Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

He is saying, ‘Do not accept the grace of God in vain’. This must mean some kind of acceptance of grace can take place which is, in fact, fruitless and futile, although it may not appear to be that way.

The *Jerusalem Bible* has ‘not to neglect the grace of God that you have received’, and the *New English Bible*, ‘You have received the grace of God; do not let it go for nothing’. The phrase ‘in vain’ (*eis kenon*) means ‘to no purpose’ or ‘in an empty way’. How then could one receive the grace of God in an empty way?

There are many answers to this question, such as, ‘You could receive grace without being aware of its nature and importance, and so be unaffected’, or, ‘You could receive grace as though it were not grace, and so refuse its purpose and action’, or, ‘You could come under grace, be glad of it and acknowledge it, but then refuse to continue in it, rejecting it by neglect or deliberate refusal’. These statements do not cover all the ways of receiving the grace of God ‘in an empty way’. We will now look at some of these many ways.

## THE EMPTY WAYS OF RECEIVING GRACE, OR OF OPPOSING IT

### Nomism and Antinomianism

In discussing the matter of law and grace, we should understand that there is no antithesis between the two. The extremes of nomism and antinomianism are two major ways of misunderstanding and misusing grace.

*Nomism* is legalism, or a life bound by law. Whilst obedience to the law of God is the true way of living, it cannot be carried out apart from grace, and yet regarding law as a means of salvation is totally unbiblical. ‘By the works of the law shall no man be justified’ is the immutable truth. One cannot be saved by grace and that salvation then be protected, sustained and maintained by works of the law. This way of acting nullifies grace.

People who walk this ‘law-way’ become the victims of their consciences. Yet legalism is strongly present today in many, if not most, churches. Paul rigorously warns against it in his Letters, particularly in Galatians 1:6–9, 2:16–21, 3:1–5 and 4:8–11. In 5:4 he says plainly that those who receive circumcision (as a way of justification) are ‘fallen away from grace’. His positive statement in Philippians 3:8–9 is his prayer that ‘I may gain Christ, and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith’.

The other extreme is *antinomianism* which speaks in much the following manner: ‘We were saved by grace (which is true) and we live by grace (which is true), so

that obedience to law is not required. In fact any drive to obey law will be an anti-grace exercise'. The error embedded here comes from a misunderstanding of freedom from law. We are never freed from God's law: He always requires obedience to it. We are, however, freed from the penalty (i.e. condemnation) of the law, and from law as a way of maintaining the justification we have been given. The fact that the righteousness of Christ has been reckoned to us does not give us a licence to disobedience, for we live in conformity with this given righteousness.

Some Christians appear to live in spasms of nomism and antinomianism. This way of life is certainly receiving the grace of God in an empty way. As long as we live, the dangers—and temptations—of both will confront us.

### **Thinking We Live Under Grace When We Do Not**

The Jews of Christ's time would have considered that they lived under God's *chesed* and *chen*. They would never have thought their rejection of Jesus as Messiah was rejection of one who was 'full of grace and truth'. When the Resurrection was declared, and the Spirit came at Pentecost, they saw only a sectarian move of some followers of Jesus. When the Sanhedrin consciously rejected the new message and witness, they would not have considered they were rejecting the full grace of God.

One of the reasons for this would be that they could not recognize grace in the form in which it came—in the person of Christ. Jesus chided them time and again, but they did not hear. We find parallels to this in the churches today. The Pauline view of grace is often considered outrageous today, but at the same time the people who see

it this way would think they are orthodox in their faith. Grace, when it comes to light, comes as a brilliant revelation. Meanwhile this group of persons is receiving the grace of God in an empty way.

### **Neglecting the Grace of God**

Hebrews 2:1–4, which speaks of getting into a drift by ‘neglecting so great a salvation’, does not speak of deliberate rejection. Other passages in Hebrews (6:1–8 and 10:26–31) speak of a deliberate rejection and a turning of the back on the Gospel. Neglect is simply letting things be, and this state of *laissez faire* is quite dangerous. ‘How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?’ It is really a passive form of rejection.

### **‘Clayton Grace’: The Grace You Have When You Are Not Having Grace**

‘Clayton’, the advertisements tell us, ‘is the [soft] drink you have when you are not having a [hard] drink’. It seems like the real thing, but is not. ‘Clayton grace’ is the grace which looks like grace but is not. There are so many ‘soft’ things such as ‘love’ and ‘fellowship’ and ‘sharing’ and ‘caring’, which in fact are not the real thing. In this case, ‘Clayton grace’ is a cloying thing, a thing of compromise, a ‘soft-sell’ product aimed at fooling us into believing that God’s holiness does not require wrath, nor His grace act in discipline.

This ‘Clayton grace’ covers nomism, antinomianism, and all forms of self-justification. Luke 16:15 says that justification of ourselves before men is an abomination to

God, and John 12:43 that men love the praise of other men rather than that of God.

### **The Age of Grace and Non–Grace**

We say that Pentecost introduced the age of grace, and this is true. From Pentecost to the Parousia is one era.

‘Great grace’ and ‘glorious grace’ was upon the church, and indeed is still so. This whole age is the age of grace, i.e. The year of grace of our Lord Jesus Christ’. God works no less today, in grace, than in the first Christian century.

Yet we oppose that grace by seeking to substitute our powers for His actions. We are aware that God has given us abilities, but we can quickly substitute these for God’s action. He who is in grace walks in and by the Spirit and so in and by grace.

Wherever the church is political or Christian persons are political, there grace is bypassed. The politicizing of the church by the Emperor in the early fourth century followed by the political power of the church in the mediaeval period, gave rise and expression to non–grace in Christendom. So much of church history is an account of men using political clout, power and cleverness to achieve what they thought was good for the spiritual and material triumph of the church.

Another–though milder–expression of non–grace is the adverting to ‘how to’ techniques. It is not that these are to be wholly rejected, but much of their purpose is to enable Christians to accomplish things by functional principles, rather than by direct relationship to, and dependence upon, God. Some seek to distil ‘principles’ from

the Scriptures, codify them, make a system, and then work by the system. This removes the need for direct obedience to God. Committees can undoubtedly be used by God, but often they operate under their own steam and wisdom.

Sometimes the entrepreneurial approach is used, marshalling all kinds of powers and abilities to accomplish a given task. Here grace is often left in the discard. Human beings are impressed by size, power and organization— not that these things are necessarily wrong. Even so, largeness of operation is intended to convey the idea of God's affirmation, that 'big is beautiful' and the bigger the operation then the vaster the grace! 'Small' is not necessarily beautiful either. It may be the result of laziness. 'Big' was seen at Antioch in Pisidia when the whole city came to hear Paul and Barnabas, but then 'small' resulted when the catalyst of the Gospel of grace divided the people, and formed a small community of believers.

We could crowd into this section many more of the things which pose as grace but rise out of neglect of grace, or from 'Clayton grace', the result of receiving the grace of God in an empty way. As we will further see, anti-grace is always present when we insist upon selfsufficiency.

### **Grace, Truth, and AntiGrace**

The Son, we are told in John 1:14, was 'full of grace and truth'. These two—grace and truth—were so much the one as to be inseparable, and remain so. Grace cannot exist apart from truth, or truth apart from grace. That is why nomism and antinomianism must always be wrong.

They are not the truth. Grace is not merely a cover-up for wrongdoing and sin. It either destroys sin and liberates the sinner from his guilt, or it does not.

Nothing is done over a sinner of which he is not conscious. He does not give himself mindlessly to grace. He comes to it through the truth, and just as love and truth are one together, so are grace and truth. The fact of grace is part of the truth. Whilst this may appear to be reasoning in abstractions, it is not. Neither grace nor truth is an abstraction. They are concrete realities, visible in the actions of God, and of man. It was of the fulness of Christ—grace and truth—that John said they had received. This was a practical fulness.

As we have said, there is no truth that is not grace. On the one hand Jesus could say, 'I am the truth', meaning he was the truth of the Father—'I, a man, have told you the truth, which I heard from my Father'—and on the other Paul could say, 'The grace of God has appeared', meaning 'the Son has appeared'.

John once said, 'These are those who lie and *do not* the truth'. The truth is something that appears in action. In Ephesians 4:15 Paul speaks of 'speaking the truth in love', which is literally 'truthing it in love'. The actions of love are truth. It is not something known cerebrally, but something known in action. Likewise Barnabas 'saw the grace of God' at Antioch.

Anything which is anti-truth is anti-grace, and anything which is anti-grace is anti-truth. Where the church talks of 'means *of* grace' and really thinks of 'means *to* grace', then the truth is not really present. Nothing can induce God to act in grace, or it would not be grace. Grace itself is not an element, a force or a power, as such.

It is God working. How then can we induce God to do certain works? We cannot. This leads us then directly to our next element of grace received ‘in an empty way’. It is the mediatorial way.

### **The Anti–Grace of Meditation**

Paul once said, ‘There is one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus’. Likewise the writer of Hebrews described Jesus as the Priest–King. In the church there are no priests, as such. There are presbyters who are leaders, but their work is not mediatorial.

Grace is the action of God in goodness to undeserving man, whether it be salvation as an initial act, or the processes of salvation as a continuing work of God. We have seen that gifts, services and workings are manifestations of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God manifests Himself through His gifts, but no person ministers grace from himself, not even via the gifts.

What needs to be watched are the heresies found in the early Christian centuries, mainly of gnosticism. They averred that salvation is by knowledge, but then the secret (occult) knowledge. Hence the possessors and purveyors of knowledge held a certain ‘priestly’ power. They mediated ‘the truth’. One was beholden to them. Their followers had to obey them implicitly, often coming under their power in much the same way as devotees of gurus serve their masters today.

What is so anti–grace is the use of therapies (healing systems) which are elements of the Gospel absorbed by counsellors and given out–in instalments–to their clients. Such an approach obscures the simple outlines of

grace. Substitute repentance and faith are induced. Forgiveness and justification are not radical and all-cleansing. A therapist may seek to 'purge the conscience' when in fact it is Christ who does this by the Spirit's 'washing of regeneration'. Often symbolic rituals seek to follow what the Spirit himself, alone, can do.

In all this we are not saying that therapies are wrong where the healing of a person can be effected. We are only saying that the work of salvation, of repentance, faith, forgiveness, justification, regeneration, sanctification, the reception of the Holy Spirit and of God's love require no mediation whatever. Whilst it is true that the Gospel is proclaimed by men and women to other men and women, it is also true that it is the Spirit and the Word who effect salvation, and not men. Whilst gifts of ministry aid the life and growth of the persons and the church, yet again it is the Word and the Spirit who effect these things.

One of the marks of the people of God is their personal intimacy with God as Father, with Christ as Lord and Elder Brother, and with the Holy Spirit as Guide and Teacher. It is to this intimacy of living in grace that we now turn our attention.

## POSITIVELY LIVING IN THE REALITY OF GRACE

### GRACE IS ABHORRENT TO HUMAN PRIDE

The drift from grace which we often see portrayed in the New Testament is in a sense ‘natural’. The desire for autonomy of life is scored deep in our human flesh. The desire to do it ‘my way’ is ingrained. We accept the fact that we must be saved by grace and not by works, and then set about to establish that salvation by our works. Hence the rise of the factors we discussed in our last chapter, such as nomism, antinomianism (‘I’ll do what I like’), gnosticism, mediation, spiritual activism, triumphalism, and many we have not mentioned.

In the second and third chapters of the Book of the Revelation, we find many problems present in the early churches. They are the abandonment of love, heresies of a deadly nature, occultism, false prophecy, idolatry

and immorality—amongst others. The churches must repent of these and get back to living the truth, i.e. to love, truth and grace. They must come back to intimacy with the Lord of the church, and hear and obey ‘**what the Spirit says to the churches**’.

The same drift from grace and truth is to be found in many churches today. What then are the ways in which we can receive the grace of God fully and not emptily?

### **RECEIVING THE GRACE OF GOD IN A FULL WAY**

In the New Testament Letters we are struck by the many exhortations to fulness and right action: ‘Go on being filled with the Spirit’; ‘Be aglow with the Spirit’; ‘Be led by the Spirit’; ‘Walk in the Spirit’; ‘Walk in love’; ‘Walk in light’; ‘Love one another’; ‘Be kind, tender-hearted, forgiving one another’; and many, many more. These are exhortations to live life fully, and to have rivers of living water flowing from ourselves.

The contrast comes in such statements as, ‘You have; abandoned your first love’; ‘Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world’; ‘You are yet carnal’; and many similar sayings. Rather than be caught in the failure of these things, let us look at the apostolic remedies for them.

One helpful example is in II Peter 1:3–11 where the writer speaks of the richness of Christian living. He singles out a man who is not rich, and who will not have ‘an abundant entrance into the kingdom’. This man lacks the riches the writer has mentioned. He is ‘blind and shortsighted’; he is ‘unfruitful in the knowledge of our

Lord Jesus Christ', and yet it appears he is a believer. What, then, is his problem? The answer is, 'He has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins'. To put it bluntly, 'He has forgotten the great grace of God'.

Here we have the key to rich and useful living: 'Always go on remembering that you are cleansed from your old sins'. The New Covenant promise was, 'I will forgive your sins, and your iniquities I will remember no more'. If God does not remember our sins, then we ought not to remember them. In the case before us, the verb 'forgotten' means 'deliberate forgetfulness, contracted obliviousness', i.e. the man refuses to remember he was purged. Why does he refuse? Because of the obligation of love, i.e. the constraint of love (II Cor. 5:14) which comes upon a person. He wants to do it his way. He wants to be free of grace. It is irksome. We realize then, that the constant rejection of grace springs from the flesh, that old humanity which wants to be independent.

The trouble is that Christian men and women know deep down that this is all wrong. They have guilt because they know they should live in grace and not 'self-help' or 'self-rule'. Then their guilt breeds anger, and anger guilt. All sorts of rationalizations arise. They even build up cases against God in order to justify themselves. In this atmosphere anger, failure and bitterness compound themselves.

The solution to these things is 'the renewing of the mind'. We are constantly exhorted to this exercise. Repentance is 'a change of mind', and is an initial happening in the action of redemption. Exhortations to repentance are not a feature of Christian teaching, but they are found in Revelation chapters 2 and 3, where the churches have

come into dire straits. In one sense initial, it is never repeated, but in another sense we have ‘repentances’ which are better called ‘the renewing (or, renewings) of the mind’. See Romans 12:2, Ephesians 4:22–24 and Colossians 3:9–10. This may also involve deliberate personal cleansing (or, cleansings), as in II Corinthians 7:1, II Timothy 2:20–22, James 4:8–10 and I John 3:3.

## **THE RENEWAL IN POWER**

Grace and power are found together. Stephen was said to be ‘full of grace and power’. In Acts 4:33 we saw grace and power were present. Paul exhorts Timothy, ‘Rekindle [‘stir up’, ‘fan into flames’] the gift of God that is within you’ (II Tim. 1:6). Ephesians 3:14–19 shows Paul praying a prayer of degrees, the climax of which is that his converts are ‘filled unto all the fulness of God’. This comports with the exhortations to being constantly filled with the Spirit, being led by him, walking in him, in love and in light. Then it is they know ‘the immeasurable greatness of his power within us’.

## **RENEWAL IN GRACE**

This, then, is the way to receive the grace ‘in a full way’. It is to recognize the greatness of the beginnings of personal redemption, the wonder of God’s love, the dynamics of grace in repentance and faith, in forgiveness, cleansing and justification, in reconciliation with God, in having ‘access into this grace wherein we stand’ and all the

glorious things that obtain no less now than when we first believed!

It is remembering that ‘God’s gifts and calling are without recall’. It is remembering that our sins are washed white as snow and can no longer confront us and induce heart–burning remorse. It is remembering that we are holy, whatever the appearances may be to the contrary! It is remembering—‘deliberate remembering, contracted recalling’—that we are the children of God, servants of the Most High, a priestly people, a holy nation, soon to be in possession of the even greater grace which will be ours at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

### **‘AWAKE, THOU THAT SLEEPEST, AND ARISE FROM THE DEAD’**

In the history of the Christian church dynamic renewal has come when the reality of grace has freshly appeared. Grace has been there all the time, unwavering in its presence, even whilst many have slept, but sometimes its insistent clarion call breaks into the inner ear, and God’s people are alerted. True, the anti–grace forces spring into action immediately, trying to destroy this brilliant revelation of God in His love, but they are hard put to succeed. ‘Great grace’ and ‘glorious grace’ cannot, ultimately, be defeated.

What we have to keep in mind is that Pentecost is the great resource of the church. It is—an illimitable reservoir of power and grace. Not that we think of grace in quantitative terms, but we use these figures to remind ourselves that nothing was available to the early church that is

not available to us, and that God works no less in grace now than He did then, albeit grace is often expressed in judgement as well as in redemption.



# SECTION FOUR

## **The Grace of Justification in the Pauline Epistles**

In the apostolic era the doctrine of justification by faith figured largely, especially in the Pauline materials. In his first recorded sermon Paul announced, ‘Let it be known to you therefore, brethren, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him every one that believes is justified from everything from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses’.

From the apostolic period through to the fifteenth century the emphasis on justification by grace gradually declined. Man is a creature destined to do works, and he values what he does, and is reluctant to agree that in the moral realm none of his works can justify him before God. The forefathers of the Reformation and—later—the fathers themselves began to rediscover this most powerful doctrine. Men such as Luther, Calvin and Zwingli began to understand justification by grace, through faith. Later again the fresh discoveries of the same truth galvanized men such as Howell Harris, George Whitefield, John and Charles Wesley, and the many preachers and teachers who rose out of the Evangelical Revival.

It is clear that the truth these men discovered is of itself most powerful. The brilliant work of Saul of Tarsus—the Pharisee who persecuted the early Christian church—was the teaching which made its impact upon those mentioned above. Paul had the task of convincing men and women of his time, many of whom were Jews and who were zealous for the law. It seems no question is left unasked or unanswered by this student of the law and Gamaliel. That is why we feel Paul’s arguments for justification vis-à-vis the law should be included in reasonable detail. Some readers may find the presentation to be somewhat difficult to follow, but it is useful to know what Paul is saying, as it brings us to the heart of grace.



## **THE GRACE OF JUSTIFICATION IN THE PAULINE EPISTLES (1)**

### **JUSTIFICATION BY GRACE IN THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS**

We need, in fact, to look at the entire Book of Romans if we are to understand our theme. Its theme is 'The righteousness of God'. The first eight chapters deal with God's justifying righteousness. Chapters 9 to 11 deal with God's righteousness amongst the nations, i.e. the Jews and Gentiles, which means 'all the nations'. These chapters cover God's dealings with all peoples. Chapters 12 to 16 deal with practical righteousness in the community of Christ's people, especially as it faces the world.

Whether we realize it or not, the problem which constantly confronts man is justice and how it works out personally, communally and universally. The most pressing problem is injustice, for it seems that God has not moved in history in true judgement. Injustice seems to rule in most situations, and man— for the most part—lays

the responsibility of it at God's feet. What the untutored human mind does not understand by reason of his fall, nature, must come to him by way of revelation. Paul says that Christ is God's wisdom (I Cor. 1:24). He must mean that the wisdom man would use to redress the world situation lies within good human reasoning, but God's wisdom is the wisdom of the Cross and Resurrection. This is the way He deals both in judgement of evil and the justification of sinful man.

In the Letter to the Colossians Paul says that in Christ are hidden 'all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (2:3). In this one man nothing of wisdom and knowledge is lacking, but in I Corinthians 1:30 Paul tells us God has made Christ 'our wisdom, our righteousness [justification] and sanctification and redemption'. He must mean that Christ is the wisdom of God in bringing man to justification and sanctification and redemption, and so must mean that the Cross—with the Resurrection—primary in effecting this work. Having understood this we are now ready to look at the Pauline doctrine of justification, i.e. in the Epistle to the Romans.

### **Romans Chapter One**

In 1:14–17 Paul speaks of his eagerness to preach the Gospel in Rome, and claims 'it is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith'. He then commences to show how:

- (a) 1:18 speaks of God's wrath being revealed upon all who do wickedness, because they suppress the truth of God;

## THE GRACE OF JUSTIFICATION IN THE PAULINE EPISTLES (1)

- (b) 1:19–22 shows man’s rejection of God in the face of the creational revelation of God and His truth;
- (c) 1:23 shows man’s application to idols to replace God;
- (d) 1:24–28 shows the nature of God’s wrath, i.e. He gives man up to his own evil, his sins and his guilt, so that man is now possessed by these, and suffers within his own deviations because ‘he exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator’;
- (e) 1:28–32 shows the natural outcome of man having been ‘given up’, i.e. abandoned by God, to his own evil. The state of man in sin and guilt is indescribable. Whilst God’s wrath is not sin, yet sin is God’s wrath, i.e. God’s giving man up to his misery, guilt and evil is the suffering man knows, and which compounds his evil. He is totally accountable for all his evil.

### **Romans Chapter Two**

In chapter 2 Paul faces the Jew with the fact that it is not only the Gentile who is so evil, for do not Jews do the very things they judge in others? Sometimes Gentiles may do the things of the law whilst the Jew does not do them, and in any case it is the one who does the things of the law who is the true Jew. An angry Jew might ask, ‘What is the point then in being a Jew, circumcised and under the law?’ ‘Well’, Paul replies in chapter 3, ‘there are advantages’, but he presses home the point that universally men sin, and gives practical examples of the states of such people.

The examples are frightening, but true to life as sinful people lead it.

### Romans Chapter Three

Paul has not spoken about wrath in order to frighten or threaten his readers, nor unmasked the Jew in his sinfulness just to be critical, but rather he has shown that all men need some kind of action which will liberate them from their fearful states of being. He now presses home a terrifying point in verses 19 and 20: ‘Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God’, i.e. every human being be proven ‘Guilty!’

The Jew is still thinking angrily, ‘Yes, but what of those to whom the law has been specially given?’ Paul is answering, ‘For no human being will be justified in His sight by works of the law, since through the law comes the knowledge of sin’. He may mean the standards of the law show us where we fall short, but probably he means, ‘When you are under law you get caught in the toils of sin and guilt, and you come to know the terrifying and tyrannical nature of sin. You also discover your own depth of sinfulness’.

Now Paul comes to the crux of his argument, and his revelation of grace. He says, in effect, ‘You will know God’s righteousness by the standard of the law He has given, i.e. its righteousness. There is no escape from guilt this way, but the good news is that there is *a* righteousness—in contrast to law—righteousness—and this too is a righteousness of God. It is not against law, for the law

## THE GRACE OF JUSTIFICATION IN THE PAULINE EPISTLES (1)

(the system Israel knew in the Mosaic Covenant) and the prophets bear witness to it, so that it is authentic. What is this righteousness? It is a righteousness which comes to a man who has faith. Everyone needs this, since everyone has sinned’.

When asked to define this righteousness, Paul says, ‘Sinful men who believe are justified by God’s grace *as a gift*, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus’. He has made an incredible statement, namely that sinful human beings who were under wrath are now no longer under it, but by God’s grace are accounted as righteous!

This statement needs to be considered, and ought not to be taken casually. Its significance is such that it can change the whole order of human living, and of countless people and nations, to boot! Paul explains this momentous fact. He says, in effect, ‘Look! God has caused Jesus Christ to become the propitiation for all sins. His blood – i.e. life taken violently in death– now becomes the agent of total justification. How? Because all the judgement which was due to man has been borne by Jesus Christ. The act of propitiation is valid because God has set Christ forth as the true propitiation. He has borne the wrath due to man, and so the law is fulfilled. Its judgements are all worked out in that Man’.

The unbelievable–in fact, the unthinkable–has happened. On the basis of true judgement and justice, God now declares sinful people to be righteous; that is, He accounts them *as* righteous, because of the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ. In terms of Romans 1:18, Christ has been ‘given up’ (cf. Rom. 8:32; Gal. 2:20) to wrath and to death–the due demand of the law for transgressions– and so man may be justified.

Apart from faith he cannot be justified, yet faith does not justify him. Grace justifies him, and faith receives that justification. Grace precedes faith, for unless God acts in grace there is no foundation for faith. Even so— and because it seems to be so far from the principle of law as the Jew interpreted it—it would seem that faith ‘overthrows the law’ (verse 31). ‘No’, says Paul, ‘faith does not overthrow the law, but rather establishes it, for where there is propitiation every sin—even those which God seemed to have passed over and neglected to judge—has been caught up in the bloody death of Christ, and has been propitiated.

The word ‘propitiation’ is not a word that is in regular use today. It would have been known to many—if not most—of Paul’s readers. The thought behind propitiation is the offering of a gift to effect the removal of wrath. Pagan sacrifices were thought to appease the god to whom the gifts were offered. Perhaps Cain saw his gift that way. God takes nothing that is in the form of a bribe, so that propitiation is not a bribe. Does God need to have some gift to put Him off from wrath, wrath such as we saw in Romans 1 :18–32? It is clear that this is not the case: God is righteously angry, and not merely an irritated or frustrated Deity who vents His spleen on a contrary mankind. No! If God is not wrathful in regard to sin, He is not a holy God. Psalm 7:11 says that God is angry with the sinner every day. His wrath is His determination to oppose, judge, and destroy all evil.

How then can propitiation be made? In Israel propitiation was expressed by the word *kipper*, i.e. ‘to cover’. Leviticus 17:11 says, ‘For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it for you upon the altar to make

## THE GRACE OF JUSTIFICATION IN THE PAULINE EPISTLES (1)

atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement, by reason of the life'. The point here is that God makes provision for propitiation or atonement, i.e. 'at-one-ment'. That is why Romans 3:25 says, 'Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith'. Unless we see God as the Initiator of propitiation, we will not see His love, and will not understand grace. Again—as we have mentioned above—if God does not act in propitiation we can never be sure the act of propitiation is acceptable to Him, in which case our consciences could never be easy and our hearts at peace.

I John 4:10 says, 'Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins'. Love is shown in propitiation, for whereas God's wrath is upon all evil and wickedness of men who by their acts of wickedness suppress the truth (Rom. 1:18), yet it can never be said, 'God is wrath'. It must be said, 'God is love', and this is seen in that He sets Christ forth to be the true propitiation by which the demands of His law are met, guilt is borne and worked out to extinction, and God's holiness is vindicated.

The dynamic nature of propitiation is seen in the effecting of justification of sinners who have faith, and in the breaking of the power of evil through the removal of guilt. John in his First Letter refers to the present power of the death, when he says, 'the blood of Jesus his Son goes on cleansing us from all sin' (1:7), and, 'he is the propitiation for our sins' (2:2), i.e. our present sins, as well as those of the past. We should note that God's wrath on sin is the same in the New Testament account as it is in the Old Testament. We should also note that the use

of the term 'expiation' in some translations for the technical word 'propitiation' is not desirable since it treats sin as a thing which can be 'worked out' and does not take into consideration the wider issues of what sin does, especially in regard to relationships between God and man.\*

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\* The interested reader is referred to two articles by Dr. Leon 84orris in the *New Bible Dictionary* (I.V.P., England, 1982) entitled 'Expiation' and 'Propitiation'.

## **THE GRACE OF JUSTIFICATION IN THE PAULINE EPISTLES (2)**

### **JUSTIFICATION BY GRACE IN THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS (CONTINUED)**

#### **Romans Chapter Four**

In this chapter Paul desires to show the nature of grace as free. We are paid wages for work, because they are our due, but Abraham simply believed God and was justified; hence ‘to one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness [justification]’ (verse 5). Paul quotes Psalm 32:1–2 to show that forgiveness and justification were as well known to David as to Abraham, and certainly were not merited by David’s works.

For those who are still thinking the law brought justification, Paul points out that Abraham was justified long

before the time of the law, indeed even before Abraham was given the covenant seal of circumcision (Gen. 17:10ff.). Paul then demonstrates that Abraham had dynamic faith, i.e. he believed God could do what He promised ('God is as good as His promises: His promises are as good as Himself'), and concludes by saying that such faith as Abraham had must be ours, i.e. 'It will be reckoned to us who believe in him that raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification' (verses 24–25).

### **Romans Chapter Five**

Paul has two sections in this chapter, the first being verses 1 to 11, and the second, verses 12 to 21. In both sections Paul points to justification as being God's grace. In the first section he says, in essence, that through justification by faith we 'have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God'. We are reminded of the Book of the Acts in which believers lived under 'great grace' and were 'commended to the word of his grace', for in Romans 5:2 the believer stands in grace.

In verses 3 to 11 Paul describes the dynamic nature of living in justification, and reviews the power of grace in what it has effected in and through the Cross. He speaks of us as having been utterly weak, ungodly, sinful, under wrath and without reconciliation. All that has been changed, for we have received 'the reconciliation' through justification. Seeing what we were and what God has done for us in the Atonement reveals to us the vastness of grace.

## THE GRACE OF JUSTIFICATION IN THE PAULINE EPISTLES (2)

When we come to the second section of the chapter (verses 12–21), we are shown again—though in a different way—the liberality and power of grace. Paul shows us first of all that two monstrous horrors are loosed into this world by Adam’s sin, namely sin and death. He then makes a comparison of Adam and Christ. He says Adam was a ‘type’ of Christ—albeit a deadly and negative type. We will take the liberty of filling out verse 12, to show the comparison within the type. Paul says:

Therefore, as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned— [here Paul does not fill out his point by completing the comparison, and this we will do, in italics] *so obedience came into the world through one man and life through obedience, and so life spread to all men because all men obeyed.*

Paul continues by showing that sin was a dreadful matter because of the death which it brought to all men. Then he shows us (verse 15) the surpassing nature of grace:

But the free gift [grace] is not like the trespass [Adam’s sin and its dreadful consequence]. For if many died through one man’s trespass [i.e. Adam’s], much more have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many.

The ‘much more’ in this chapter means ‘overwhelming by comparison’. We need to contemplate this, and not take it casually or for granted.

He continues (verses 16–17):

And the free gift is not like the effect of that one man’s sin. For the judgement following *one* trespass brought *condemnation*, but the free gift following *many* trespasses brings *justification*. If, because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that

one man, *much more* will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness [justification] reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.

This is a powerful comparison. The statement, ‘the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness’ is a dazzling one. It means that the whole of human life has changed. Its perspective is utterly changed: its new liberty of such radical nature as to be unutterable.

In verses 18 to 21 Paul continues this brilliant comparison, hammering home the same marvellous point. He says, ‘...where sin increased, grace abounded all the more’. He is anxious to show that grace does not merely equal sin (quantitatively and qualitatively), i.e. that it does not just cover sin, but that sin is piffling, trifling and diminutive against the vast and endless ocean of grace. Nothing man has done, in all his most dreadful perversions that are evil, is anything in the light of ‘great grace’. Henceforth no man can say, ‘My sin is too great for God to deal with! I am too far gone to be retrieved!’. This is ridiculous nonsense (and perverted pride) in the face of overwhelming and powerful grace, for ‘where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness to eternal life’. One wonders whether more than this could ever be said concerning the nature and dynamic of grace.

## **Romans Chapter Six**

The thrust of this chapter is:

If, through the death of Christ, you have been freed from the *penalty* of sin by the grace of justification, then so also that

## THE GRACE OF JUSTIFICATION IN THE PAULINE EPISTLES (2)

death has freed you from the *power* of sin. When you were under the law you suffered guilt of sin, and were dominated by sin: now that you are under grace, sin has lost its power. You may now—being under grace as much as ever you were under law—live a holy life.

If this is true, then chapter 6 is most important.

Paul firstly refutes the antinomian view that sinning does not matter since grace covers all sin! He refers to the horrible nature of being under sin and in dread of death, and asks, ‘Who would want to go back to that?’ Obviously, nobody. He then proceeds to show that being baptized into Christ identified us with Christ. That identification concerned his death, his burial and his resurrection. That is, we too—in union with Christ—have been crucified, have died, and have been buried.

Also we have risen with Christ. He died once: so did we, once. He rose once: so did we rise, once. So far as sin’s penalty is concerned, it cannot touch us a second time since—in Christ—we have died to that penalty. So then, we must consider ourselves ‘dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus’ (verse 11). In verses 12 to 14 he continues in the following vein:

Because you are under grace (justified) and not under law (condemned under guilt), you do not have to obey sin and its accompanying passions. Don’t therefore yield (present) your members (the parts of the body, mind and self) to sin so that it can use them for its own evil purposes, but present (yield) these very parts to God so that they can be used as means for His purposes, seeing that you are not under the domination (old master, system, condemnation and guilt) of the law, but you are under a new master (system, mode of being and living), i.e. grace.

This, rightly understood, means that the power of sin lies in guilt, and the power of grace lies in liberation from (the condemnation and dominance of) law. To understand

this is to be free to live a holy life. To live a holy life is what being a human being is all about. Paul, in the remaining verses (15 to 23), pursues this theme. The old slavery to sin and law has been exchanged for a new— dear and darling— slavery to God, the outcome and fruit of which is holiness. So much, then, for the basic power and enablement of grace. Grace delivers us not only from the penalty and pollution of sin, but liberates us, also, from its power.

## **THE GRACE OF JUSTIFICATION IN THE PAULINE EPISTLES (3)**

### **JUSTIFICATION BY GRACE IN THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS (CONTINUED)**

#### **Romans Chapter Seven**

This chapter has always proved difficult for commentators and scholars, let alone the ordinary reader of Paul's Letter. It must have made sense to its readers of his day, and should make sense to us. What then is the key—if there is one—to this chapter? It is surely that Paul is taking up the matter of law, and particularly in its relation to the power of sin, and the lack of personal moral power (i.e. the ability to obey law and not break it) in the person who is seeking to obey the law, i.e. to do good and not to do evil.

A non-believer reading this chapter might find that it makes plenty of sense to him. At the same time a believer

reading it would find that it fits his own case. Even so, it seems strange—at first sight—that Paul, who has shown us in Romans chapter 6 that sin has no power over us, seems to tell us in chapter 7 that indeed it does have power. For example, ‘I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate’ (verse 15). So we ask again, ‘What is the key to this chapter?’.

The answer must lie in the effort of the subject to keep the law, and not sin. Paul appears to have come back to the matter of law, which would be uppermost in a Jewish reader’s mind, if not in the mind of others, also. We have noted that Paul keeps referring to the matter of law. He does this in chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6. Now in chapter 7 he applies himself more particularly, but this time to the discovery he makes that when he tries to keep the law he inevitably finds himself weaker than sin, and so he sins and does not do good.

Because this does not paint a good picture of a believer, some scholars and commentators have said it is written only of unbelievers. Others have said it is written of believers who have been backsliders or become ‘carnal’. Yet others aver that it is a ‘desert experience’ through which Paul went: having learned, he did not again regress. ‘We too’, they say, ‘may well come into such a "desert experience".’

Certainly it is a difficult chapter to interpret. Paul commences it by showing us that the law is binding upon a person during his lifetime. If he should die then the law ceases its hold over him. Behind his pictures is the idea that it would be good to be freed from this hold of the law. He says that when Christ died, we died too, and so the law has no hold over us. Then comes this powerful

verse 6: 'But now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we serve not under the old written code, but in the new life of the Spirit'. This verse, as it stands, is quite liberating. Paul is surely saying that we do not serve the law under threat of death if we should transgress it, but we serve in the new life that is Ours by virtue of the presence and action of the Holy Spirit. What then, or who then, do we serve? Paul does not say, but we assume it is God.

In verse 7 Paul returns to the matter of law. From verses 7 to 13, he discusses the nature and properties of law, especially as sin seeks to use it for its own purposes.

Paul is saying, in essence:

When I say we are discharged from the law, I do not mean to infer that there is anything wrong with the law: it is not sinful. If there had not been the law I would not have known what sin is, or that I sinned. Once the law forbade something, I was provoked into wanting to do that, and then realizing this I knew something of the nature of sin. Sin itself was (is) most deceptive. It used the law to stimulate me into sinning, and as a result I came under condemnation unto death. By contrast to myself and my actions and sin and its actions, I am thus shown that the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good.

If the law is so good, how did it bring death to me? My answer is this: 'Sin, by provoking me, overplayed its hand and was unmasked for what it was. It was exposed as "sinful beyond measure".'

How clever then, was the law, or—more particularly—the God of that law!

The last section (verses 14 to 25) is a statement in the present tense, and seems autobiographical. Paul first says that the nature or quality of the law is spiritual, but his own is carnal. The meaning of the whole passage is contingent upon what Paul means by 'carnal'.\*

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\* We may note here that the word 'carnal' (Greek: *sarkinos*) must be understood in its context. What does Paul mean when he says, 'The law is

If Paul means he is fleshly as in ‘sinful’ and not as in ‘human and weak’, then the whole passage is puzzling. It looks as though Romans 6 is negated or set aside. If, however, he means ‘human and so weak’, then it comports with all that he has said up to date. If we look at the biblical picture of man, we see that from the beginning humanity is a dependent humanity—dependent upon God. Man is a creature, and as such only makes sense in the light of the Creator. When man seeks to be freestanding he fails to be truly human.

Is Paul then saying, ‘I, of myself, am but man, and no man, of himself, can obey law, and not do evil. This is my problem. I admire the law, and indeed love it, but do not find innate power to obey it or refrain from doing evil’? Is his conclusion then, ‘I see that it is a principle that whenever I want to do good—and I always want to

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spiritual [Greek: *pneumarikis*] but I am carnal [*sarkinos*]? It could be significant that Paul does not say, ‘I am carnal [*sarkikos*]’. The difference between *sarkmos* and *sarkikos* may not be significant, but Archbishop Trench in his *New Testament Synonyms* (Eerdmans, USA, 1978 reprint) claims there is a difference. The essence of what he says is that *sarkinos* = ‘made of flesh’, and *sarkikos* = ‘fleshly’ i.e. the first simply represents our humanity, and the second our anti-God fallen humanity I Corinthians 3:1 has *sarkinos*, and is not really reprehensible, but I Corinthians 3:3 has *sarkikos*, which in its context is reprehensible. The first is primarily a matter of humanity—‘All flesh is as grass’, i.e. simply human and perishable. The second is a matter of deliberate fleshliness, refusing the spiritual way. Peter uses the latter in ‘fleshly lusts’ (I Pet. 2: 11), and Paul the former in 11 Corinthians 3:3. ‘fleshy tables of the heart’, where the meaning is quite good.

Whilst this interpretation of Trench may not stand up to later and more penetrating scholarship, it may yet be valid, and certainly may be an indicator as to the meaning of ‘I am carnal’ (*sarkinos*). Paul is almost certainly saying, ‘I, of myself, am weak, am human, and am not essentially spiritual—as is the law. Hence I do not have powers—of myself—whereby I can obey the law, and not do evil’.

do good—then sin is immediately and aggressively present, and I am powerless to defeat it. The law (principle) of my mind is to do good and desist from evil, but sin, of itself, is stronger than I am, of myself. So then, with my mind (good intention principle) I (seek to) serve the law of God, but in my (weak and helpless) flesh I (against my will) serve sin’?

If we conclude from the text that this is Paul’s mind—and it seems that it surely is—then we may draw some valuable lessons: (i) man, though forgiven and justified, still does not have strength to desist from sin and obey the law; (ii) this fleshliness of man—i.e. his dependent humanity—cannot be treated as evil, but as innately weak; (iii) the forgiven and justified man must not seek to obey the law of God from his own resources, but realize that he is always dependent upon the Spirit of God to be able to desist from sin, and walk according to the law of God. Put in other terms, it means man—even redeemed man—is daily, even momentarily, *dependent upon the grace of God*.

In the closing part of chapter 7, Paul sees this battle over the matter of sin as most exhausting, and wishes to be freed from the body in which, daily, he has this tussle. He is grateful that one day—in the future—this release will come.

## **Romans Chapter Eight**

Immediately Paul is back on to the matter of grace: ‘There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death’.

The ‘law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus’ is the Gospel as administered by the Spirit, and ‘the law of sin and death’ is the law as it condemns to death. Paul has been freed from the condemnation of the law.

Chapter 8 would demand a lot of comment, so we will confine ourselves to the following:

- (a) 8:4–7 shows that man lives either in the flesh (which is hostile to God), or in the Spirit, in which case he knows life and peace;
- (b) 8:9–16 shows that the man who has the Spirit is ‘in the Spirit’, i.e. is spiritual and not fleshly. He has hope of the resurrection and does not submit to the flesh. He is a child of God and relates to Him as the Father, being aided in sonship by the Spirit;
- (c) 8:18–25 shows that the glory to come entails prior suffering here;
- (d) 8:26–27 shows that the saint of God is aided by the Spirit in prayer;
- (e) 8:28–39 shows that God’s sovereignty assures the safety and ultimate destination of God’s children. (i) Election and calling bring to justification, and justification to glorification. (ii) Whilst antagonistic forces are against God’s people, God is for them. Those forces will seek to accuse and condemn, but *God has justified His children!* Also, since He has given His Son up for us all, will He not also *freely give us all things?* He will. Finally nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ, because the grace of God especially in justification—will keep us safe and in His love.

## Conclusion to the Study of Romans

Perhaps the reader has found the study of Romans chapters I to 8 somewhat extended and tedious, but not one of the chapters is written without reference to grace, because they all have to do with justification. We have only touched the edge of the subject. In Romans chapters 9 to 11 the matter of God's sovereign grace is also brought to the fore, and in terms which seem too strong for us today.

Paul is showing that nothing happens other than what God has planned, and His election is a matter of grace, and not of human effort. Speaking of Israel, Paul says (Rom. 10:1–4):

Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer for them is that they may be saved. I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but it is not enlightened. For, being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God [i.e. justification], and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law, *that every one who has faith may be justified.*

To the end, then, Paul is saying that 'grace is all, and all is grace'. Chapters 12 to 16 are speaking of the grace of ministry in the use of gifts, the grace of life in the Kingdom of God, and the proclamation of grace which is aimed at the nations. None of it is apart from God's eternal plan and election.

If what Paul says in this Letter is true, then the only way of life—the dynamic and free way—has been wonderfully expounded. There can be no other way for human beings to live truly. From being sinners under judgement, guilty creatures who cannot fully enjoy creation and

themselves, God has—by His grace—brought such men and women to guilt-free life, and given them hope for a rich and beautiful eternity. Their footsteps are not dogged by law demands, but they are made serene in peace and love. They are not expected of themselves to accomplish anything, but are given the grace to possess all things, and to accomplish the deeds which will help them to fulfil their calling, live holily, and be secure in the love of God.

Being free from (the condemnation of) the law means that the enemies of man—sin, Satan, the world and its evil powers, the rebellious flesh of man, the domination (by guilt and dread) of death, the tyranny of law, the accusation and judgement of conscience, and the *angst* (agony) of conscience—are all nullified by the act of propitiation. Man, as we keep saying, is now free to live. Grace brings him to the gifts of forgiveness, cleansing, and new living in Christ, and, having done that, ‘great grace’ never departs from the life of the newly redeemed.

## **THE GRACE OF JUSTIFICATION/ON IN THE PAULINE EPISTLES (4)**

### **JUSTIFICATION BY GRACE IN THE EPISTLE TO THE GALATIANS**

Paul's best objective setting forth of the grace of God in justification is in the Letter to the Romans. Here he is rarely arguing with his opponents. He is not seeking to answer heresy as such. This cannot be said of his Letter to the churches in Galatia. He had not visited Rome prior to writing his Letter to that city. He had visited the Galatian churches, for they were founded by him, and even visited by him a second time.

His Letter is written with deep emotion and with astonishment that some believers could have veered away from the Gospel of grace. His indignation can be easily sensed in his writings. It is the indignation that was roused by the visit and teaching of a group of people known as

Judaizers. Their thesis was, ‘Oh yes, you were saved by grace, the grace of Christ’s death and resurrection, but this was so that you would come into obedience to the law’. By ‘law’ the Judaizers meant the law of Moses.

They argued that being saved was good, but only a beginning. It was not enough. The Gentile converts should be circumcised and virtually become Jews— proselytes, as they were then called. Their salvation would be neither valid nor sustained and preserved without obedience to law. Law has always had a fascination for man—especially guilty man. Paul’s analysis of law in Romans 7 is brilliant. He knew its psychological powers to involve the human race with ever—deepening and compounding sin.

Because Paul was an expert in the law and its being used as a fulcrum by sin to lever believers into sin and guilt, he fiercely rebutted the Judaizers. His Letter is wholly applicable to the churches today, for the incipient and debilitating heresy is the Galatian one. A contemporary saying is, ‘The Gospel flies on two wings: law and grace’, but the truth is ‘The Gospel flies on two wings, and both are grace’. ‘Grace is all, and all is grace.’

For purposes of brevity, we set out the argument of the Letter:

### **Galatians Chapter One**

In the first chapter we find Paul saluting the church, and affirming his apostleship as proceeding from the Father and the Son, expressing astonishment that the Galatians are on the verge of departing from the Gospel. He then describes the way in which the Gospel and apostleship came to him.

## Galatians Chapter Two

In chapter 2 he tells of going to Jerusalem three years after his conversion, and then once more another fourteen years later. In none of these trips did he ‘check out’ the authentic nature of the Gospel with any apostle. Titus, Paul’s companion (a Greek), was not compelled to be circumcised. It was recognized by Peter, James and John that Paul was a minister to the Gentiles, whilst their ministry was to the Jews.

The controversy regarding grace then arises. This was when Peter who had come to Antioch had first eaten with (Christian) Gentiles, but on the appearance of Jews of the circumcision party he withdrew, eating only with the (Judaizing) Jews who had come down from the church at Jerusalem. Other Christian Jews (of Antioch) also withdrew from eating with their fellow Christian Gentiles. Paul publicly rebuked Peter because Peter’s act was a public Gospel scandal. It inferred that there was still something lacking in the Gentiles. Paul was saying that Peter’s ‘fearing the circumcision party’ smacked of political chicanery. Since Peter knew the Gospel of grace, why did he infer there was something lacking in the Christian Gentiles at Antioch?

Some may suggest it was merely a ‘cultural thing’. Certainly it was linked with culture. The Jews thought that eating with Gentiles defiled them, for Gentiles were considered unclean. However, Peter long ago had learned that the Gentiles had been called clean by God, and that there was no difference between Jew and Gentile. Indeed he had acted in accord with this until those of the

circumcision party came to the church at Antioch.

His act of refusing to eat with the Christian Gentiles was a reprehensible one. By inferring something was lacking in the Gentiles he was also implying that they were not wholly clean. This in turn was a shocking indictment on the Gospel. It had not cleansed the Gentiles (cf. Acts 15:6–11, especially verse 9). Chronologically, some see this event as happening after the events of Acts 15. If that was so, then Peter's unwitting attack upon grace is shown as even more terrible.

Paul, for his part, knew that if Peter's principle of withdrawal was to be taken as normative within the church, then grace would be lost forever. Hence his famous statement to Peter in Galatians 2:14–21.

The substance of these verses is:

We who are Jews know that by works of the law no man is justified. These men who come for the purpose of making Gentile Christians into proselytes by circumcision, are emphasizing 'works of the law'. You see, when we talk about being justified in Christ, we have to admit that that first of all makes us sinners— yes, we who are Jews—but we cannot go back and rebuild the old thing, for the new has come. The law did nought but kill me, but my death with Christ in his Cross also brings me to life, and life that is only Christ's life. He loved me and gave himself up for me; therefore if ever I try to justify myself by works of the law, I nullify the grace of God!

### **Galatians Chapter Three**

Paul's argument in chapter 3 is this: that everything needed for justification came to the Galatians when they heard the word of the Cross. By faith they understood the truth of the Cross, were justified, and received the gift of the Spirit.

## THE GRACE OF JUSTIFICATION IN THE PAULINE EPISTLES (3)

They received *nothing* by law! In fact their faith was exactly the same as that which justified Abraham; hence they are Abraham's children.

The law will only bring the curse, and since Christ was made that curse of the law, faith is the only way, and this accords with the ancient covenant made with Abraham. Made prior to law, it is not dependent upon the law for its power. If one asks the purpose of the law, then it must be said—among other things—that it was to show there is no way for justification but the grace which was to come.

What is more, the law was a guardian to the people of Israel as though they were, in fact, children who could not accomplish anything until Messiah came. Now he has come, and being baptized into him means participation in him, and so being part of his Sonship of the Father, which makes all sons of God who believe. This is not limited to the social and racial distinctions of 'Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female', for all become Christ's and thus are counted as Abraham's offspring, which of course means they have the blessing of Abraham and will inherit the earth. In verse 14 Paul says the gift of the Spirit is part of the blessing of the Abrahamic Covenant. Although Paul does not use the words, yet all of this—the gifts of justification and the Spirit—is 'great grace'.

### **Galatians Chapter Four**

In chapter 4 Jewish people who were restricted children, and Gentiles who were under the tyranny of their gods, are both receivers of sonship. This is grace, and with the sonship comes the Spirit crying, 'Abba! Father!' to God.

Sadly enough, it seems that a fascination to go back to law as a means of justification has gripped some Galatians, but Paul shows the danger of that in an allegory relating to Sarah and Hagar. Sarah the true wife of Abraham represents the woman of faith, of grace, and of the Spirit. So does her son Isaac. Hagar (Abraham's concubine) and her son Ishmael represent the flesh. Hagar stands for the earthly Israel gripped by law and living in flesh, whilst Sarah represents the Jerusalem that is above and is free.

### Galatians Chapter Five

In chapter 5 Paul continues the argument of true freedom by justification from the law, and points out strongly that if the Christians go back to law—to circumcision— then they are 'severed from Christ'. They are 'fallen away from grace'.

It is difficult to comprehend how terrifying a prospect this is, but the thought of falling away from grace is horrifying. It shows both the ignorance and gullibility of the wavering Galatians, and the deadly doctrine of the Judaizers. Paul faces other threats to grace in various churches, namely those of docetism and agnosticism.

From verse 13 Paul goes on to show that serving one another in love (i.e. not being in competition with one another which the principle of justification by law provokes) is the way of the Spirit. To walk in the Spirit is to be free of the domination of the flesh. To be led by the Spirit is to get out of the legalistic tangles of the law. Law and flesh are closely linked.

Because we are not doing a *commentary* on the Letter

to the Galatians, but simply seek to get the thrust of Paul in regard to grace, we are not trying to examine or vindicate Paul's argument. However, we must not miss the powerful fact that legalism and fleshly lusts are closely linked. This can be understood by referring to Romans 7, where what is forbidden provokes a person into unlawful action. Also, since no genuine pleasure comes from legalism, man is bound to seek compensatory pleasure, and will seek it in forms of 'the flesh'. These forms of course are many, and not all are included in Paul's list of 'the works of the flesh'.

Although Paul does not say it in so many words, 'walking in the Spirit' is really 'walking in grace'.

### **Galatians Chapter Six**

In the sixth—and final—chapter, Paul returns to the matter of circumcision (law, not grace) and emphasizes that it is only in the Cross (grace, not law) that the true spiritual reality is to be found and known, namely the 'new creation'. He sees all enemies of the Cross as the enemies of grace.

### **Conclusion to the Study of Galatians**

Such a study is immensely valuable, for it gives us examples of those who would go back to the law, whilst agreeing that justification comes initially by the Cross. It is the 'Cross plus' factor which is so dangerous. Paul's statement is, ' . . . far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world'. On this basis he

claims that circumcision (sign of law–adherence) and non–circumcision (sign of the non–Jewish law people) is irrelevant. It is the Cross which matters and it alone. He is really saying, ‘Grace is all: all is grace’.

## **THE GRACE OF JUSTIFICATION IN THE PAULINE EPISTLES (5)**

### **SOME CONCLUSIONS ABOUT PAUL'S DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION**

The two Epistles (Romans and Galatians) do not exhaust Paul's references to the theme, naturally enough, since this subject gripped his mind so powerfully and affected all his thinking. A few passages in other Epistles need to be included, for they are most important.

In Philippians chapter 3 Paul is warning against 'dogs'. It seems these were at least one brand of the Judaizers, since they desired to have the Gentile Christians circumcised. Claiming that the Christians are 'the true circumcision', he then outlines all the elements which would justify them, if indeed such things could justify. However he rejects these things, not regretfully but insistently, and names them as 'dung' or 'useless rubbish'. Indeed they

had hindered him from seeing Christ. His prayer is ‘that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, *the righteousness from God that depends on faith*’ (3:8–9).

Again, in a strongly worded passage (I Cor. 6:9–11), Paul avers that those who are idolaters, immoral, homosexuals, alcoholics, gluttons and compulsive thieves shall not enter the Kingdom of God. Some of the Corinthian converts had been just that. ‘Yes’, says Paul, but everything has been radically changed, for you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God’. It is good to see that ‘washing’ and ‘sanctification’ precede ‘justification’; and note that the persons of Christ and the Spirit effect this triple work.

Equally worthy of note is the fact that justification is mentioned in the context of the antinomian idea, prevalent amongst the Corinthians, that it did not greatly matter if they were drunkards, immoral, homosexual and the like. Some seemed to think these things put no impediment in their way of entering the Kingdom.

The third passage worthy of note is that of Titus 2:11 to 3:7. In this, Paul speaks of the grace of God as having appeared, coming as a radical and highly notable event in the history of mankind. He links grace with the following elements: (i) discipline or teaching: training God’s people to renounce all that is evil and espouse and habituate themselves in all that is good, so that they would grow into a holy people having zeal for good works; (ii) ‘the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit’ and being ‘justified by his grace, and becoming heirs in hope of eternal life’.

### THE GRACE OF JUSTIFICATION IN THE PAULINE EPISTLES (3)

Although we have not exhausted all Paul's teaching we can conclude from the passage we have so briefly examined that the grace of justification was no small matter to Paul. For him it was not merely a saving part of grace, to be followed by other—and perhaps deeper—elements. Justification is for Paul a standing before God which ultimately involves all the other workings and gifts of grace, e.g. regeneration, redemption, reconciliation adoption, sanctification and glorification.



# SECTION FIVE

## **God's Grace Action of Love to His Beloved**

The term 'beloved' in the New Testament is a significant one. We read it in Romans 9:25, Colossians 3:12, 1 Thessalonians 1:4, II Thessalonians 2:13 and Jude 1. It primarily refers to God's elect— His chosen covenant people. At the same time it is part of the thrust of the New Testament in saying that God loves the world, that He sent His Son to bring life to the lifeless via the Cross and the Resurrection.

One of the interesting—and moving—elements is that in loving humanity it is the Father who takes the initiative, it is the Son who takes the mediatorial role of redeeming us, and it is the Spirit who acts as God's agent in applying the work of redemption. At the same time the three Members of the Triune Godhead continue to keep the people of God in the love He has towards them. Whilst dark powers seek constantly to unseat and destroy the 'beloved of God', yet nothing can separate them from the love of God in Christ. God loves and gives the gift of love into their hearts, the Spirit is the agent in bringing this love to the heart, and the continuing love of the Son constantly constrains the believer to true and godly action.

This section is, then, most important, since the love of God is the mainspring of all our actions. When the mind and heart grasp the truth that God is love, that His love is personal, and that He constantly, unwaveringly loves us, then—and only then—true stability comes to us, and we make steady growth in spiritual maturity.



## **THE ACTION OF THE TRIUNE GOD IN GRACE AND LOVE (1)**

We have spoken almost entirely of God's grace, and in such a way that it might seem this has been exclusive of His love. This, of course, was not intended, but because God's love has been mistaken—by some—as a general cover for all sinning, it is salutary to speak of grace. God's love is nothing if not holy, as also His holiness is nothing if not loving. We saw that the Holy One of Israel is Israel's Redeemer, which means the Redeemer is holy.

Matthew 5:43–48 assures us that God loves all men wholly, and without partiality. Sinner and saint alike come under that love. We can conclude that all men are loved but this does not mean that all will be redeemed. Many will go into everlasting punishment, and it is difficult to deny that this is the straight sense of Scripture. Man may think God ought not to judge and punish, but then that human thinking is not biblical.

What we need to see is that God's love, in order to be

true love, must be free. God must be free to love unconditionally, and not—as human thinking would seek to make Him—the object of His love rather than its subject. God must not be helpless before His own love. Because He is love, He may love as He desire. Of course, this is what He will do.

Grace is that action of His love which reaches out to sinful men and redeems them. His love does not stop there, but goes on to make His elect holy and bring them to glorification. When we say ‘His elect’, we come up against the mystery of foreknowledge, predestination and election, a mystery which man’s mind can never accept apart from the effect of grace upon it.

We do not intend to spend time trying to explain and defend the doctrine of election. It is there in Scripture. and we must accept it. To argue against it is to argue against grace, and to argue from our way of thinking as to what God ought to do, and how He should act! We must let grace be grace, and every man a fool if he will not understand it.

What we now need to see and experience, is the warm action of God in His Triune Being, moving towards His elect in His wonderful grace. Previously we have spoken briefly of God’s action of grace in His Being as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Now we need to speak more personally and particularly.

## **THE FATHER ACTS IN GRACE**

Paul prays for grace for his readers, ‘from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ’. He knows that grace

lies primarily in the Father. He writes to the church at Thessalonica, and calls them ‘the church. . .in God the Father’ (I Thess. 1:1), and ‘the church...in God our Father’ (II Thess. 1:1).

What, then, does Paul mean by ‘the grace of our Father’? He means all that is contained in the redeeming work of the Father. In Isaiah 63:16 the exiled Israelites

For thou art our Father, though Abraham does not know us and Israel does not acknowledge us; thou, O Lord, art our Father, our Redeemer from of old [from eternity] is thy name.

To them the terms ‘Father’ and ‘Redeemer’ were synonymous. What father would not redeem his wayward child—if he could?

This redemptive Fatherhood is precisely what we find in the New Testament. In Ephesians 1:5 Paul says, ‘He destined us in love to be his sons through Christ Jesus, according to the purpose of his will’. In Acts 17:28 Paul teaches that God is Father of all men by creation, hence it is evil to worship idols, making God in their images. Paul may well have had Jeremiah 2:26–27 in mind:

As a thief is shamed when caught, so the house of Israel shall be shamed: they, their kings, their princes, their priests, and their prophets, who say to a tree, ‘You are my father,’ and to a stone, ‘You gave me birth.’

Against idols, God is Creator–Father, generating His offspring; but more, He is redemptive Father, moving in grace towards Spiritless sinners. He plans the action of His grace before time, and in time teaches something of His Fatherhood to Israel. Then He sends His Son, ‘full of grace and truth’, to show that grace and truth to the

world, and in particular to His elect. The grace of His Son is that he shows God's Fatherhood to the world. He shows this Fatherhood simply by being the Son in the midst of men. He teaches concerning that Fatherhood. In the Synoptic Gospels the Sermon on the Mount is filled with references to the Father and revelations concerning Him. In John's Gospel almost everything is of Fatherhood and Sonship, and in chapters 14 to 16, where much is made of the Holy Spirit, there is only one mention of the Spirit to every three mentions of the Father.

It is in the Cross and Resurrection that God's Fatherhood is shown most powerfully. The writer of Hebrews speaks of the Father 'bringing many sons into glory'. How does He do this? The answer is that He crowned him (Christ the Son) with glory and honour for the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for every man, and He made the pioneer of their salvation perfect (complete) through suffering (see Heb. 2:9-10).

This must mean that the Father caused the Son to take every man's death into himself, and caused him to suffer to the uttermost so that all man's sin and suffering was encapsulated in that Cross. No suffering that was necessary for man's redemption—'bringing many sons into glory'—was omitted. This sort of thing is clear from the Gospels, Epistles and prophecies, namely that the Father took the initiative in redemption. 'God made him to be sin for us'; 'God sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins'; 'God set him forth as a propitiation'; He 'abandoned him up for us all'; 'the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all'; 'it was the Lord's will to bruise him' (see II Cor. 5:21; I John 4:10; Rom. 3:25; 8:32; Isa. 53:6, 10).

These and many other Scriptures show us that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. He loved His Son because he laid down his life for the sheep (John 10:17). The Son was commanded by the Father (John 14:30–31; 10:18). Jesus was also raised from the dead ‘by the glory of the Father’ (Rom. 6:4). The Resurrection sealed and vindicated the work of the Cross. ‘He was delivered for our offences and raised for our justification’ (Rom. 4:25). Thus, in every way the Father is shown to be ‘full of grace and truth’.

In the next chapter we will look at the grace of the Son, and of course the grace of the Father and the Son are inseparable. ‘I and the Father are one’, Jesus said; ‘My Father has always gone on working, and I go on working’. Yet the Father is discrete in His person and always works in a Paternal (Fatherly) way, whilst the Son being the Son always works in a Filial way.

It is God’s Fatherliness which elects and redeems us. But does His work stop at the Cross? No, it goes on into Resurrection. The Father will not suffer His Holy One to see corruption (Ps. 16:8–11; Acts 2:25–28; 13:35). The Father raises him from the dead (Rom. 6:4). He also sets him at His own right hand on high to send forth the Spirit and to give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel (Acts 2:33; 5:31). Hebrews 1:5–13 shows that Christ’s ascension is also his coronation. He thus becomes the Son–King (cf. Ps. 2; 45; 107; 110).

The work of the Father continues. The Sermon on the Mount tells us that He cares for us daily, and supplies our physical needs. He attends to our prayers, is intimate with us in the place of worship, and brings us into the Kingdom of the Son of His love. He is Father–King of

that Kingdom.

The Holy Spirit is sent by Him as ‘the Spirit of promise’, and the Father gives him as a gift to those who ask Him. When the Spirit comes, he brings the gifts of the Father: repentance, faith, forgiveness, cleansing, love, sonship, and the Holy Spirit. When the Spirit comes, he cries ‘Abba! Father!’ and sets up the same cry in our hearts so that we know we are sons of God. It is the Father who forgives and goes on forgiving, for He is the one who is sinned against. He goes on supplying grace and peace to His children, so that they are never without ‘grace in time of need’.

The Father’s purpose from before time was that His children should be holy and blameless before Him, and He who has begun this good work in His children shall complete it right up to the day of Christ. He is faithful who has promised, and He will do it (see Eph. 1:4; Phil. 1:6; Heb. 10:23).

The idea of the Father giving over creation, and the work of the church, to His Son (which He has, John 3:35; Matt. 11:27), and Himself resting and refraining from participation in such work, is foreign to the Scriptures. We are to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, but it is God who is working in us to fulfil His will and good pleasure (Phil. 2:12–13). He is determined, through the work of the Cross, ‘to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him’ (Col. 1 :22).

That is why so many times in the New Testament Letters the idea of giving thanks to God the Father is present. If what is said in the Sermon on the Mount is true, and if the times and seasons are in the Father’s hand, and if the Father is working through the Son, then

there is little that happens which is not initiated by the Father.

Paul says, 'I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named' (Eph. 3:14). He means all relationships stem from the Father, for the people of God are the family of God (cf. Gal. 3:26; 4:4-6; Rom. 8:14-16; Eph. 2:18-20; I Tim. 3:15; Heb. 3:1-6; I Pet. 1:17, 22; I John 3:10f.; 4:20-5:2). He says, 'one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all' (Eph. 4:6).

We have seen that eternal life consists in knowing the Father and the Son. It is not a reward for coming to know them, for it is the very experience of knowing them that constitutes eternal life. In earthly life we have good life if we know people well by loving them. In loving them is rich relational joy and satisfaction. We have just seen above that all relationships stem from the internal relations of the Godhead. These, of course, are love, and are unconditional. They are the spontaneous and right expression of the oneness of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This constitutes the unity of the Triune Godhead.

When the Son came, he translated that unity into human terms, demonstrating it before our eyes by the actuation of it in our midst, so that now the Father's love reaches us via his powerful revelation, be it the mode of his life, the human expressions of love, goodness, holiness, righteousness and truth, or the verbal teaching concerning God as Father. As we have suggested—and as we will see—he made his most dynamic revelation of the Father by his death and resurrection.

One of Jesus' stories is particularly rich in the telling, namely the parable we call 'The Prodigal Son'. It should

really be called ‘The Story of the Prodigal Father’. ‘Prodigal’ has many meanings, such as ‘wasteful’, ‘extravagant’, ‘thrifless’, ‘lavish’, ‘generous’ and ‘abundant’. The prodigal son has been called a ‘waster’, but then his father wasted his money by giving it to his son. The point really is that ‘prodigal’ can be equated with ‘grace’.

Jesus told the story because traditional Jews were shocked that Jesus received sinners and ate with them, which was a sign of acceptance. Jesus was showing that as the shepherd has joy in finding a lost sheep, a woman joy in finding her lost betrothal coin, and a father in finding his lost son, so ‘there is joy in heaven’—in the presence of the angels—over one sinner who repents. It was the prodigality of the father which brought home the sinner, and it is the prodigality of the Father—i.e. a sight of His grace— which brings home the sinner to his Heavenly Father.

What we might easily miss is the fact that man is made for God. Being made by Him, he is functionally fulfilled only when he is one in union with Him. What we must grasp is that the whole plan of redemption— i.e. grace—is what the Father is all about in history. It has been said, ‘In every man there is a God-shaped blank’, and it is implied that until that blank is actually filled with God man will never become his true self, i.e. truly man. If we say, ‘In every man there is a Fathershaped blank’, then we see that is wholly fulfilled when he becomes a son of God.\*

It is then that the rush of true emotional fulfilment comes to a man and transforms him. He now has a rich

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\* This theme is further developed in *Oh, Father! Our Father!*, NCPI, Blackwood, 1985.

warm relationship with God, which in turn becomes a rich relationship with the Son and the Holy Spirit. On the earthly plane, he can now love men and women as his brothers and sisters. The whole race is a family— however disturbed it may be in its relational deviations, in perversions, and in anger and hatreds. The new son of God loves all the family, nevertheless, and he has particular (and generally reciprocal) love with his fellow believers.

What we want to concentrate upon most of all is that; for it is then we see that apart from the grace of the Father we would have no hope of authentic and life changing emotional fulfilment, and the filling out of our humanity, since life really consists in relationships. It is in this case that we see the grace of the Father, and ‘Abba! Father!’ becomes a most personal cry, highest of any utterance, and most satisfying of all vocatives.

We will never be able to encompass all the grace of the Father, nor compute adequately the dimensions of that grace and love. We know the whole of the ministry of the Son and the Spirit is encapsulated within it. We know the Father raised the Son from the dead, by His glory, and has seated him with Him—in glory. We know that the Son now works with the Father for the ultimate consummation of His plan, and we know the Son will be sent ‘in the glory of the Father’, so that he can take us to the Father’s home.

We also know that the inheritance the Father has laid up will come to us, for the Father has sealed us for His own by the Holy Spirit, and will now give us the inheritance—that shining, incorruptible and beautiful inheritance—which constitutes (a) sharing the glory of God, and (b) the ‘all things’ that have been created and ‘re-primed’

through grace. Because His names are written on our foreheads and we are His elect children, and because the King, Christ, standing at the right hand of the Father will say, ‘Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world’, and the Father Himself will say, ‘Well done, you good and faithful servants’, then we will truly understand grace, and comprehend at last—when we will know also as we are known—the wonderful love and grace of the Eternal Father.

## THE ACTION OF THE TRIUNE GOD IN GRACE AND LOVE (2)

### THE SON ACTS IN GRACE

The Son is not merely God's personal representation of God's grace—although he is that. The New Testament speaks often of 'the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ', as though such grace were inherent in him. In II Corinthians 8:9 Paul says, 'You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ', and it is part of the Triune blessing in II Corinthians 13:14. John 1:14 speaks of him as 'full of grace', and says (verse 16), 'And from his fulness have we all received, grace upon grace.'

Another way of speaking of him as *the* person of grace relates to both his incarnation and the purpose of that incarnation:

But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law (Gal. 4:4);

'For to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord' (Luke 2:11);

'Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel' (Matt. 1:23);

. . . you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins' (Matt. 1:21);

For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him (John 3:17);

In him was life, and the life was the light of men (John 1:4);

God. . . sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh (Rom. 8:3);

And he died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised (11 Cor. 5:15);

For our sake he [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (11 Cor. 5:21);

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness (I Pet. 2:24);

For Christ also died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God (I Pet. 3:18);

. . . [he was] crowned with glory and honour because of [for] the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for every one (Heb. 2:9);

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature, that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil! and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage (Heb. 2:14–15);

The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil (I John 3:8b);

For the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died (11 Cor. 5:14);

## THE ACTION OF THE TRIUNE GOD IN GRACE AND LOVE (2)

...the Father has sent his Son as the Saviour of the world (I John 4:14);

...our Saviour Christ Jesus...abolished death and brought life and immortality to light (II Tim. 1:10);

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood (Rev. 1:5b);

. . . the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (Gal. 2:20);

. . . Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God (Eph. 5:2);

For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living (Rom. 14:9).

### He himself said:

'I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst' (John 6:35);

'He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day' (John 6:54);

'I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life' (John 8:12);

'As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world' (John 9:5);

'I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die' (John 11:25–26);

'For the Son of man came to seek and to save that which is lost' (Luke 19:10);

'The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy, I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly' (John 10:10);

'I am the door; if anyone enters by me, he will be saved' (John 10:9);

'I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep' (John 10:11);

For the Son of man also came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many' (Mark 10:45);

'...this is my blood of [in] the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins' (Matt. 26:28).

There are many similar references but he knows them who understands Paul's basic affirmation, 'You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ'. Rightly enough, all this grace is towards us, so that 'of his fulness have we received, and grace upon grace', yet we have only begun to understand something of grace. We need to ponder thoughtfully, think devotionally, contemplate in humility, worship as we realize, and grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. A haughty spirit, a proud cast of mind, an intellectualistic mind-set—all these will prevent us exploring the vast treasures of grace. To put it simply, if the things we have quoted in the paragraphs above are a mere summary of his acts, and not material for theological cogitation, and if they do not strangely startle, warm, and move the heart, then grace is still far from us, or we are receiving the grace of God 'in an empty way'.

The event of Christ's coming was a world-shattering and a mankind-shattering one. 'The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation' equals statements such as, 'When the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared'; 'God sent forth [out of Himself] his Son'; 'the Word became flesh and dwelt among us'; 'he was made in the likeness of sinful flesh'; 'Since ..the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same'. These statements should cause the human mind to reel. 'Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour', should be an event for us

which would cause us to tremble in joy and awe. For some of us, these powerful blows are no longer felt; we have become biblically, exegetically ‘punch–drunk’. We develop a casual and blase spirit. We are inert, static, sterile and passive under the great revelations of the grace of the Son.

Given in that all such Scriptures are rich and startling in their content and significance, it is equally true that the unaided human mind–fallen from innocence as it is– does not find these ‘things of grace’ attractive, for they are clean contrary to the human spirit of autonomy. Grace, as we have said many times, is repugnant to the independent and selfish man’s spirit. We need to come with humility, and read and study the life of Christ. We need to allow him to confront us with his being and his actions.

### **His True Humanity**

When we do this, then we discover his humanity. This is a genuine and not imagined humanity. His humanity is normal created humanity, and not superhumanity. We may never understand the co–existence of his deity living with that humanity, but we can be sure the two are distinct, and that Jesus lived, suffered, died and rose again, without calling on his deity to accomplish those things. In that sense he had no ‘edge’ on us. Any person may call upon all the resources of God, especially when he walks within God’s will– which the Son assuredly did. He kept saying, ‘I do nothing of myself’. He even said, ‘The Father who dwells in me, he does the work’. He said, ‘My food and drink is to do the will of him who sent me’.

The first great work of grace is shown in a verse we

have already discussed: ‘For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich’ (II Cor. 8:9). Now it is incomprehensible to us as to how the eternal Son of God could submit to become man, and what is more, appear as a servant and not a mighty Lord. Philippians 2:1–11 should here be read carefully, thoughtfully, and without haste.

### **His Humble Humanity**

The gist of Philippians 2:1–11 is the humility of Christ. He ‘thought others better than himself’. Doubtless in quality he may have recognized something of a better state of being—we do not know. But to consider others better than oneself is to place them before oneself. This is what he did. Coming to be man, he was no ‘reluctant dragon’. What is amazing is that his love made him deeply desire to become man— and forever he is still man, and always will so be, albeit glorified man, which we too will ultimately be. So then, his grace gave great dignity and honour to humanity, more even than would have appeared at his pure creation of being in that primary act of God.

### **His Saving Humanity**

Hebrews 2:14–17 shows us that one purpose of the Incarnation was to die and deliver us from Satan’s dread grip upon us, so that we could then live as truly free people. Another reason was so that he could enter into all our sufferings and understand and help us. A third and

most powerful reason was that on the Cross he could execute that required suffering which would liberate us from guilt. All the apostolic writers major on this.

One of the great statements (and one we keep repeating) is, 'The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation'. Whereas we think of salvation in terms of deliverance from evil and reconciliation with God, we must also see a secondary but most significant meaning of salvation –namely, healing.\*

We need then to see in the Son's personal movement towards us (in grace) that when 'for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might become rich', his poverty was not simply taking our humanity upon himself. By comparison with his former glory he seemed to be poor, but in fact his giving is always his glory. No, the poverty consisted in what he subjected himself to suffer in becoming man.

If grace is to be real to us, then we have to enter in, somehow, to some understanding of what his suffering really was. The Epistles go to great lengths to explain this, but much can be discovered in the Gospels; yet its value will be little unless we identify ourselves with those who opposed him. We must understand the exceeding sinfulness of those who were the religious ones of the day:

He came to his own home, and his own people received him not (John 1:11 );

When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. And they rose up and put him out of the city, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw him down headlong (Luke 4:28–29);

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\* See Chapter 32, 'The Grace that Heals'.

Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, 'Who is this, who even forgives sins?' (Luke 7:49);

Some of the scribes said to themselves. 'This man is blaspheming' (Matt. 9:3);

'An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign' (Matt. 12:39);

'blind leaders of the blind' (Matt. 15:14);

'...but it [the world] hates me because I testify of it that its works are evil' (John 7:7);

'You seek to kill me, because my word finds no place in you' (John 8:37);

'Now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth which I heard from God' (John 8:40);

Many of them said, 'He has a demon' (John 10:20);

But some of them said, 'He casts out demons by Be-elzebul, the prince of demons' (Luke 11: 15);

So from that day on they took counsel how to put him to death (John 11 53)

Those of us who think we are not religious in this deadly way may be judgemental in our hearts concerning those who were—those above whose words we have quoted—but there are other countless facets of opposition which Jesus met:

- (a) He had baptized many disciples, but when he spoke the truth, they said, ' "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?". . .After this many of his disciples drew back and no longer went about with him' (John 6:60, 66).
- (b) Although they were his own people (John 1:11) yet, 'Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have

## THE ACTION OF THE TRIUNE GOD IN GRACE AND LOVE (2)

necks; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head' (Luke 9:58).

- (c) 'And he looked around at them [his own people in the synagogue] with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart' (Mark 3:5).
- (d) 'O faithless and perverse generation, how long am I to be with you and bear with you?' (Luke 9:41).
- (e) 'He upbraided them [his disciples] for their unbelief and hardness of heart' (Mark 16:14).
- (f) 'O foolish men [his two disciples], and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!' (Luke 24:25).

So then, when we realize how he entered into the suffering of man, and comprehend how little we have, we see the nature of grace in suffering, and the healing he brought with it.

Without doubt Jesus suffered at the sight of man in the bonds of sin, iniquity and the chains of Satanic evil powers, and that moved him deeply:

That evening they brought to him many who were possessed with demons; and he cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick. This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah. 'He took our infirmities and bore our diseases';

When he saw the crowds he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd (Matt. 8:16–17; 9:36).

We are told in John 11:33 that 'he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled'. Some have translated it,

‘He trembled with indignation’, and when it was written ‘Jesus wept’ (verse 35), the weeping was from anger at the hardness of hearts, the grovelling before death, the failure to be upright and unafraid of death. In so many ways Jesus saw the deceit and evil of man, and in other ways man’s fearful bondage. Caught in demonic oppression, suffering many diseases that had come upon them in their sin, they were riddled with guilt and darkness. He saw the whole sorry plight of man, and knew they did not hear his words or heed his revelations. The climax of this was, ‘O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!’ (Luke 13:34)

In Gethsemane we see ‘the beginning of sorrows’. It was here, in that powerful move to identify with us to the last element of our evil and sickness, that he went down into great darkness and sorrow. Such suffering visited him as to cause him to cry, ‘My soul is very sorrowful, even to death’ (Mark 14:34); ‘[He] began to be greatly distressed and troubled’ (Mark 14:33); ‘And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground’ (Luke 22:44, AV); ‘In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard for his godly fear’ (Heb. 5:7).

Gethsemane was simply the preparation for the Cross. Set firm in spirit he now entered the deepest of all poverty, such as man can never comprehend. He identified totally with all sinners, and particularly with each sinner:

‘he . . . was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many’ (Isa. 53: 12); ‘For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin’ (II Cor. 5:21); ‘the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all’ (Isa. 53:6); ‘For Christ . . . suffered for sins, the just for the unjust’ (I Pet. 3:18, AV); ‘God . . . condemned sin in [his] flesh’ (Rom. 8:3, 4); ‘He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed’ (I Pet. 2:24); ‘Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows’ (Isa. 53:4); or, ‘Yet on himself he bore our sufferings, our torments he endured . . . the chastisement he bore is health for us and by his scourging we are healed’ (Isa. 53:4–5, NEB).

No human commentator can enter that suffering and describe it. We can piece much together and know something of his sorrow. ‘Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow which was brought upon me, which the Lord inflicted on the day of his fierce anger’ (Lam. 1:12). Jeremiah’s cry about his desolate city of Jerusalem pales beside the great day of wrath—and love—the day of the Cross. Paul said, ‘We are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died’ (II Cor. 5: 14). He also said, ‘I have been crucified with Christ’ (Gal. 2:20). All of this tells us of the marvellous identification of Christ with each sinner, becoming that sinner upon the Cross, and bearing his condemnation.

Yes, but he did even more. He ‘bore their infirmities and healed their diseases’. Do we mean by this that an automatic healing of our present sicknesses flows from the Cross? This may or may not be the case, as God wills and works, but far deeper is the healing of the wounded,

lacerated, guilt-bound and sin-ridden person of man. No one can compute the state of any human being, but that it is dreadful is beyond doubt. The wounds we receive and give in this fallen human depravity are not even fully covered by Robert Burns',

Man's inhumanity to man  
Makes countless thousands mourn!

None of us can compute his inner evil, his departure from the glory of what he was and what God is. What we must seek to do is to realize that *Christ became one with us*. The prophet cried, 'Is there no balm in Gilead?', and the answer is, 'Oh, yes! Much balm in Gilead!'. There is balm to heal all the wounds of man. For the most part those wounds are self-inflicted or wounds given in the exchanges of our human hatred and angers, our bitternesses and malices, our vaunting rage in a world of injustices. We cut and parry with sin's expertise.

Now we are talking about 'the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ', and this has appeared, bringing deliverance and healing. It is the Son 'full of grace and truth' revealing the Father 'full of grace and truth'. The Father has 'made him to be curse', and caused him 'by the grace of God to taste death for every man'. So the Son has become *the way* to the Father, *the truth* of the Father, and *the life* of the Father, and we have all three in him.

What we need to see is that he came not only to show us the Father but to share his Sonship with us. We saw in Chapter 11 that we are participators in his corporate Sonship. In baptism we put on the Son. This is the only way we can truly-rationally-know the Father, and, indeed, the brethren.

We are now ready, every day, to walk in the grace and life of his Sonship. The Father is conforming us into the image of His Son so that we will be like him (I John 3:1–3; Rom. 8:29). There was a time when we had no beauty, no true glory, and no true innocence. That was the time when ‘he was not ashamed to call us brethren’. Psalm 22:22 tells us that at the completion of his suffering he cried, ‘I will tell thy name to my brethren, in the midst of the congregation I will praise thee’. What love, what amazing grace!

Every day all of this grace comes to us and upon us. Every day the Son is no less one with us than when he identified with us in such great love on the Cross, and shared our death in the tomb. Yet the height of grace is that he has made us one with his resurrection and life. He has seated us with himself in heavenly places. So then, for us to live is Christ. We must see this grace as personal, close to us, and wholly intimate every moment of our lives.

This is surely what Paul means when he says, ‘Grace be to you, and peace from. . . our Lord Jesus Christ’.

## THE ACTION OF THE TRIUNE GOD IN GRACE AND LOVE (3)

### THE SPIRIT ACTS IN GRACE

We saw in Hebrews 10:29 that he is called ‘the Spirit of grace’. It may mean, ‘grace has given us this Spirit’, and that would be true, for he is the gift (Greek: *dorea*) of God (Acts 2:38); or it may mean, ‘He is the Spirit of grace, he brings grace, and acts in grace: he knows grace and reveals grace’.

What then do we mean by ‘the Spirit of grace’ and ‘the grace of the Spirit’? We must see firstly that the Spirit is the one who gave life to man at creation (Gen. 1:2; Job 33:4; Ps. 104:29–30). In the Fall man became ‘Spiritless’ (cf. Gen. 6:3 *passim*). This did not mean that the Spirit did not uphold man as a creature (Ps. 104:29–30), but it did mean that to be born of the Spirit was always a matter of God’s grace (cf. Paul’s argument in

Gal 4:21–31, where Isaac is said to be ‘born according to the Spirit’ and Ishmael ‘born according to the flesh’). The second work of the Spirit, then, is to bring Spiritless or fallen man into true life, the life he forfeited when he rebelled.

### **The Redemptive Work of the Spirit**

Jesus emphasizes this principle when he says, ‘That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit’ (John 3:6). Here the term ‘of the flesh’ may simply mean ‘natural birth’, but nevertheless it carries the meaning ‘Spiritless’. In I Corinthians 2:10–16 Paul’s argument is that no man can understand the things of grace (‘the gifts of God freely given’) except by the Spirit. Such grace will seem foolish to the ‘natural’ (*psychikos*) man (sometimes called ‘the unspiritual man’), i.e. the man without the Spirit cannot receive the things of the Spirit.

This means—in effect—that the whole Gospel, and indeed all the things of God, are hidden from fallen man. Jesus said, ‘Unless one is born anew [or, ‘begotten from above’], he cannot [even] see the Kingdom of God’ (John 3:3). This means, then, that without the Spirit he can neither see nor enter the Kingdom of God. This highlights the grace of the Spirit, for it is he who ‘searches everything, even the depths of God’ (I Cor. 2:10). Having searched these depths he then reveals God to us (I Cor. 2:10; cf. John 16:12–15).

In order to understand the ways in which the Spirit works through grace, we must see him as working in every detail of God’s salvation history, His saving plan. If

the Son be called ‘the Mediator’ in this plan, then the Spirit must be called ‘the Agent’. Jesus even refers to him as ‘another Counsellor’ (‘one such as I am’), so that it has been said the Holy Spirit is Jesus’ *alter ego*. Thus we may equally speak of ‘the grace of the Father’, ‘the grace of the Son’, and ‘the grace of the Holy Spirit’, for all three Persons of the Trinity work in concert in salvation history. That is why, roughly speaking, we may refer to the Father as ‘the Initiator’ of salvation, of the Son as ‘the Mediator’, and the Spirit as ‘the Agent’ of the other Two.

### **The Spirit of Grace In History**

Now we come to the work of the Spirit in grace. That work has always been to bring life to God’s elect. We find the Spirit working in God’s people prior to the Flood as well as posterior to it. References are made to the patriarchs being men of the Spirit, i.e. men of the covenant. When Israel is brought together as a nation, God’s Spirit is working in it (cf. Hag. 2:5). He leads Moses and the children through the wilderness (Isa. 63: 11ff.), and equips the artisans who fashion the Tabernacle and its furniture (cf. Exod. 31:1ff.), for to Israel is given ‘the worship’ (Rom. 9:4). Worship—along with the concomitants of ‘sonship’, ‘law’, ‘the glory’, ‘the covenants’ and ‘the promises’—is extremely important.

Stephen’s sermon in Acts 7 ought to be studied closely for the work of the Spirit since, in everything— as Peter told the Sanhedrin—‘you always resist the Holy Spirit (see Acts 7:35–41, 51–52). It was the Spirit in Israel’s prophets who ‘prophesied of the grace that was to be yours’ (I Pet. 1:10). The ‘Spirit of Christ [was] within

them when predicting the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glory’, because ‘no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God’ (I Pet. 1:11; II Pet. 1:20–21).

This means then that all that was spoken of Messiah, as also the preparation for his coming, was by the Spirit, i.e. he could rightly be called ‘the Spirit of grace’. It may well be said that it was the work of the Spirit—from creation to the birth of Jesus—to prepare Israel first, and then the world, for the coming of Messiah, i.e. for the coming of grace.

As surely as the grace of God came in Jesus Christ, as surely too was it locked away from man by his own pride and stubbornness. We have said that grace humiliates the proud and humbles the repentant. No one, of himself, could perceive grace or understand it, much less be a recipient of it. This was to be the work of the Spirit.

### **The Spirit of Jesus In His Work of Grace**

The primary work of the Spirit was to aid Jesus—as a man—to be the Son, the Son of man, the Saviour, Messiah of the Kingdom, and Lord of all. Thus, being present in Jesus’ conception, childhood, baptism, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension (Luke 1:35; 2:40, 52; Matt. 3:16–17; Luke 4:17–19; Acts 10:38; Matt. 12:28; Heb. 9:14; Rom. 1:4; Eph. 1:19–20), the Spirit is now able to bring the whole person and work of Jesus to bear upon man. This is immensely significant, since the way is blocked off from other avenues of obtaining such knowledge. In Matthew 11 :27, John 3:35, 6:44–45, 65 and 14:6, Jesus made it clear that no one could know God as

Father apart from the Son, or know Jesus as the Son apart from the Father. Only to those to whom the Father is pleased to reveal the Son will true knowledge of the Son come. Likewise only those to whom the Son is pleased to reveal the Father (cf. John 1: 18) will come to know God as Father.

It is nevertheless the Spirit who is ‘the Spirit of the Son’ (Gal. 4:6), and ‘the Spirit of your Father’ (Matt. 10:20), who reveals both Father and Son to us. Jesus said of the Holy Spirit, ‘He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said he will take what is mine and declare it to you’ (John 16:14–15). We may well conclude that only by the Spirit are both Father and Son known and to know them is to know the grace of God, for it is he who ‘searches the depths of God’ and shows them to us. All of this, incidentally, bypasses the searching and researching of the mystics. The way, in Christ, is clear enough, and leads to the Father.

As we saw previously, the Holy Spirit brings the gifts of God to man. These gifts comprise repentance and faith which—when exercised—bring the further gifts (both *dorea* and *charismata*) of forgiveness, cleansing, justification, sonship, sanctification, love, and the Spirit himself, and so—ultimately—complete glorification.

To mention the gifts above in so closely packed a paragraph is to pass by the dynamics the Spirit uses to effect so radical a change in sinful man. In fact, so far as man is personally concerned, it is here the great work of the Spirit is operative. Man himself will never be able to understand the activity of the Spirit within the human personality.

## **The Spirit Brings the Completed Work of Christ**

Some of the older theologians spoke of the work of the Spirit as ‘merely applicatory’. They meant by this that the Spirit simply applies the work of Christ to the human personality, especially the person who is elect. ‘Simply applies’ is an inept understatement. If this were the only work of the Spirit it would be magnificent. However, the Spirit—as we have seen—has always been working in the matter of salvation history, not only to aid Christ in his salvation work, but to prepare the ground for such work.

In addition to this he was the Spirit who led and aided Christ in both his person and work. Christ’s work as Messiah of the Kingdom came from the anointing of the Spirit which the Father gave. Christ confessed that he could do nothing in ministry apart from the Spirit. It is not untheological to say that apart from the Spirit’s aid the work of the Cross would not have been fulfilled. Nor, for that matter, the work of rising (or ‘being raised’) from the dead. The same power which raised Jesus from the dead (i.e. ‘the glory of the Father’ and ‘the Spirit of holiness’) also set Jesus at the right hand of God, above all other names and powers (Eph. 1:19–22) for all time and over all aeons. These works cannot be called ‘merely applicatory’.

When we face the so-called ‘applicatory work’, we see the immense grace which goes into operation. If we go back to our earlier chapters, and grasp Paul’s understanding of the gifts of repentance and faith—as also forgiveness, Christ’s Lordship, justification, sonship, love sanctification and glorification—then we will know these gifts are not mere ‘hand-outs’ given by a laconic Deity.

We have said that grace is repugnant to the proud human spirit. How, indeed, would man manufacture repentance fit to please God, create faith that would be acceptable to Him? How would he cancel out and neutralize the evil of his past, and make his polluted heart to shine with purity? Even now many Christians do not believe that is the work that God has *already done* in them. Justification has continued to fascinate the great theologians of, and the simple believers in, the Atonement.

What a work of grace, then, is that of the Spirit as he brings the dynamic grace-work of the Atonement and applies it to every cell, fibre and filament of a hitherto hardened and doomed sinner! How does the Spirit break through the concrete self-righteousness such as he met in the religious leaders and holiness sects of his day? We have the equivalents today both in Christian and non-Christian religionists and secular ‘do-gooders’. It is indeed a powerful work of the Spirit to bring conviction, repentance and faith to the stubborn human heart.

To speak, then, of his going on to effect holiness of living, compassion for a lost world, the constraint that thrusts people into proclaiming the Gospel, and the ministry which redeems, heals and makes whole, must mean that the Spirit identifies with man no less than the Man who died for them.

### **The Fruits of Pentecost**

We know that grace is not only personal, but operates in the way of God’s corporate people. That is why Israel was the true people of God—because God’s Spirit was amongst them (see Isa. 63: 10ff.; Hag. 2:5). God’s promise

### THE ACTION OF THE TRIUNE GOD IN GRACE AND LOVE (3)

was that His Spirit would continue to be among them, and the prophecies concerning the Spirit in Isaiah, Ezekiel and Joel all confirm this. When Joel 2:28 promised that God would pour out His Spirit upon 'all flesh' (perhaps in contrast to the special ones in Israel who had such an anointing), most Israelites may have understood, 'all flesh in Israel'. This of course happened at Pentecost.\*

However, the pouring out of the Spirit upon Samaritans and Gentiles changed that view. There was to be a universal outpouring or 'baptizing' of the Spirit. Hence the grace of the Spirit was manifested in love, fellowship, reconciliation, unity and harmony, transcending the boundaries of race, class and gender. Hence Paul's statement:

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body— Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and were all made to drink of one Spirit (I Cor. 12:12–13; cf. Gal. 3:28; Col.3:10–11).

If the transformation of a sinful person is the greatest miracle humans know, then no less is the transformation of self-seeking individuals into the community of Christ, the family of God, the people of the Spirit. Only in the light of that change by grace can we understand the gifts of prayer, of love, of fellowship and unity, let alone the *charismata* of the Spirit which forward such love and

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\* It has been pointed out that the Feast of the Passover was fulfilled in the passion and death of 'Christ our Passover'. The Feast of Pentecost—the offering of the first fruits of the harvest—was fulfilled when the Holy Spirit came, but the Feast of Tabernacles, the ingathering of the entire harvest, is yet to take place. What an ingathering that will be, with the Father, the Son and the Spirit participating as they did at the Passover and Pentecost! In that sense 'the best is yet to be'. See Section Seven, 'Great Grace's Greater Grace'.

unity, meeting the needs of the new community, and strengthening it to face the world and take the message of salvation to it.

The work of the Spirit in all aspects of grace is so vast that we cannot here reasonably describe it in detail, although those details are required to be known so that we may see the dimensions of the grace the Spirit effects. As we have seen, the Spirit prepared Israel and the world for the coming of Messiah through the history of the patriarchs, and the nation of Israel. Whilst the Spirit was as a Shepherd to the nation, yet it was by the prophets that he prepared the nation for Messiah's Advent.

The Spirit aided Christ to fulfill the prophecies and effect the Atonement. From Pentecost onwards the Spirit applies Christ's redemptive work to God's elect, both saving and sanctifying them, and keeping them from destruction by evil powers. This means the daily preservation of the saints, and involves the ministry of hope, in addition to that of love and faith. We could then speak of 'saving grace' and 'keeping grace'.

In this our third chapter concerning the Triune God who acts in grace, we are powerfully reminded that the Holy Spirit is the one who is 'the Spirit of your Father' and 'the Spirit of His Son'. This means the grace of the Spirit keeps us in awareness, daily, of our sonship of the Father. He cries 'Father!' within us, and we—with him—cry 'Father!'. This is the daily sonship that grace gives to us, and with it the rich experience of a secured life—eternal life through the Spirit of life.

We cannot then evade the conclusion that grace comes daily to God's people through the Holy Spirit. How right it is then to call him 'the Spirit of grace'.

## CONCLUSION

In the wealth of detail which describes the grace–action of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, we could easily miss the unity of the grace–work of the members of the Trinity. We need to see that ‘God is One’, and that He works fluently out of His unity. It is this which makes His grace so amazing to sinful man. When redeemed man realizes what God has done for him in grace, and what He is now doing, and will do for man’s future, then the measure of grace becomes overwhelming.

No wonder Paul, in viewing the work of redemption was forced to cry,

O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgements and how inscrutable his ways! ...For from him, and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory for ever. Amen (Rom. 11:33, 36).



# SECTION SIX

## **Dynamic Grace in the Life of the Community**

As previous sections in the book indicate, grace has to be most unusual if it is to change human nature, and renew the community of man. In this section we take a long look at the way in which, having come to man, grace constrains him into ways of life which are foreign to his prior self-centredness .

It is amazing to see what takes place in life when grace works freely in human experience. Grace not only lifts man out of his sinful self-centredness but it introduces him to a life of holiness, worship, useful service to others, and fervid proclamation of grace to the whole world, and this in spite of the suffering it entails.

What is really thrilling is the fact that grace can radically change man, take away his pointlessness of living, set him moving towards a given goal, and dissolve boredom forever. Men and women of grace really enjoy the lives they live, even though enjoyment is an affront to those who are about establishing their own security, and securing themselves against calamity and failure.

This section is stimulating because it shows the utter practicality of grace.



## THE GRACE THAT DISCIPLINES

We have spoken strongly of grace throughout this book. So often grace has seemed a weak work of God, as though He caves in to the demand by man that He be without judgement, that He pass over the evil of man as though it did not matter. It is even suggested that grace is little enough, since God set the creation moving, having implanted a deplorable moral weakness in man, so that He is not in a position to judge the human race, anyway!

Contrary to this view of grace as God's weakness, or a device of His for getting man off the hook of judgement, one of the functions of grace is to teach and to discipline. The *locus classicus* of this is Titus 2:11–14:

For the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men, training us to renounce irreligion and worldly passions, and to live sober, upright, and godly lives in this world, awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.

## GRACE TEACHES, TRAINS, EDUCATES, DISCIPLINES

The word used here by Paul, i.e. ‘training’ (*paideuosa*), is a present participle of the verb *paide!lo* which has various nuances in its meanings. In Luke 23:16 and 22 Pilate said, concerning Jesus, ‘. . . I will therefore *chastise* him and release him’. The same word is used for chastising in Hebrews 12:6, 7 and 10, i.e. ‘For the Lord disciplines him whom he loves, and *chastises* every son whom he receives’. Here ‘disciplines’ and ‘chastises’ are synonyms.

A similar idea is found in I Corinthians 11:32, where Paul speaks of eating the Lord’s Supper ‘unworthily’: ‘But when we are judged by the Lord, we are *chastened* so that we may not be condemned along with the world’. In Revelation 3:19 the Lord says, ‘Those whom I love, I reprove and *chasten*’. In II Corinthians 6:9 Paul speaks of suffering in ministry, and says, ‘. . . as *punished*, and yet not killed’. In this case the punishment is unwarranted.

In Acts 7:22 we are told that ‘Moses was *instructed* in all the wisdom of the Egyptians’. In Acts 22:3 Paul said that he was brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, ‘*educated* according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as you all are this day’. In II Timothy 2:25 Paul advises Timothy that the servant of the Lord must not be quarrelsome, ‘*correcting* his opponents with gentleness’. Quite strongly in I Timothy 1:20 Paul speaks of the troublesome Hymenaeus and Alexander, ‘whom I have delivered to Satan that they may *learn* not to blaspheme’.

We give this contextual word study of *paideuo* to show how strong a word it is. It is not simply teaching, but

teaching with strong discipline. With Pilate, ‘to chasten’ meant to scourge. When Paul delivered the two troublesome men to Satan it must have meant something very painful for them.

Even so, when we come back to Titus 2:11–14, grace, whilst being strong, is also a powerful constraint in itself. Paul is not saying, ‘Grace liberates us, then we come under teaching as a second thing, a strong discipline’. He is saying that grace *itself* trains, teaches, educates and chastens us. This goes very close to Paul’s statement in II Corinthians 5:14 that ‘the love of Christ constrains us’. ‘Constrains’ can mean ‘controls’, ‘holds’, ‘keeps in’, ‘overwhelms’, ‘presses’, ‘leaves no choice’, ‘straitens’, and so on.

This is most important, for grace and love cannot be separated. We saw briefly that when God called Israel to worship Him by obedience to His commandments, He first of all showed them He had delivered them from Egypt, so that there is first liberation and then (and thus) obedience. All commands to obedience are based on prior grace. So here, in our passage in Titus. Something quite powerful and wonderful has happened to them, i.e. ‘the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation’. It is God’s salvation which makes grace an instructor, and teacher.

What is taught is seen in Titus 2:12–14, namely denial of irreligion and worldly passions, the living of sober, upright and godly lives, and the living in hope of the Lord’s return, meanwhile being God’s holy people who are ‘zealous for good deeds’. This, of course, is no small accomplishment. It is vast in its results. In fact it catches up everything of true godliness. When we say ‘the grace of God. . . bringing salvation’, we mean all that

encompasses repentance, faith, forgiveness, justification, sanctification, sonship, with the gifts of love and the Holy Spirit. We have seen how these radically transform a life, and it is out of this transformation that grace acts as a powerful constraint. This teacher has willing students, those who are prepared to ‘become obedient *from the heart* to the standard of teaching to which you were committed’ (Rom. 6:17). This is the New Testament equivalent of ‘. . . God will circumcise your heart . . . so that you will love the Lord your God’ (Deut. 30:6).

Another way of saying this is that when the human heart has removed from it its guilts and fears, its traumas, hurts, resentments, bitternesses, angers and burdens, then it is lightened to know love, joy and peace, and is liberated to listen to the voice of God and learn how to live in holiness.

## THE HORIZONTAL AND THE VERTICAL

A false view of grace is that it is there to meet man on the horizontal level of living, to fulfil his needs, to heal him, and supply what he requires for living. At first sight grace then seems to be the servant of man, and man the object of its ministrations. Man, however, is not designed only for horizontal living. He is one who is vertically related to God. Man is a creature of glory, and a special servant of God. Having fallen short of God’s glory he fell short of his own—through sin.

Grace is there to restore him to his full stature. In his full stature he serves God, and has a rich sense of vocation, of usefulness and purposefulness in the universe.

He is now able to fulfil the requirements of God, and this gives man and woman dignity and honour. 'He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?' (Micah 6:8). 'God', said Paul, 'condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit' (Rom. 8:3–4).

In other words, we are not spineless creatures, justified and forgiven but yet always needing grace 'hand-outs' like moral beggars. Rather, God treats us with dignity, requiring us to reach up to our full stature and maturity. As Paul enjoined, 'Brethren, be not children in understanding...but in understanding be men' (I Cor. 14:20, AV. The RSV has, 'in thinking be mature'). For this we need the teaching, instruction, training and educating of grace.

## THE WAY GRACE TRAINS US

The law was there to instruct its adherents. The word for law *torah* meant 'direction' or 'teaching'. The priest's ministry was to teach the law. Psalm 119 speaks of the way God's commands instruct us regarding the nature of God and the way of life. However, when we use what is called 'law-way' then law, becomes a tyrant. If we use it to justify ourselves we are wrongly using law, for 'by the works of the law shall no one be justified' (Gal. 2:16). In another vein Paul speaks of the law being a custodian or 'trainer' (*paidagogos*) to bring us to Christ (Gal. 3:24). The writer of Hebrews sees all the law as the 'shadow' of the

‘substance’ yet to come, and sees it as teaching us concerning that ‘substance’.

We have seen that grace always precedes the way of law, and acts as the true constraint to obedience. This is brought out powerfully in Romans chapter 6. Paul says, ‘For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace’ (verse 14). First he has shown that grace abounded beyond the dimensions and power of sin and liberated us from sin’s penalty. Now he is showing us that by being delivered from sin’s penalty we are delivered from sin’s power, since the power of sin lies in guilt: ‘The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law’, i.e. the guilt of the penalty.

It is grace, then, that beautifully delivers us from guilt and sin’s power. Thus we are taught and instructed by it, and move on to new ethical action, for now we are ‘obedient from the heart’.

## THE AGENTS OF GRACE

We keep saying that grace is what God does for man to do him good, and that no man can himself give grace to another. However, he can be used by grace. If grace teaches us, then every instrumentality or means of teaching is the way grace instructs us. John in his First Letter insists that when the Holy Spirit came to us and anointed us, he set the truth in our hearts. Hence he says, ‘I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and know that no lie is of the truth . . . the anointing which you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that any one should

teach you; as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie, just as it has taught you, abide in him' (I John 2:21, 27).

In this case the Holy Spirit is the Teacher, but then he teaches out of grace. God also has given gifts to the church, through Christ, of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, and *all* these teach. The elders are also 'apt to teach' (I Tim. 3:2). Parents are to teach children (Eph. 6:4). The older women are to teach the younger (Titus 2:3–5).

## THE FRUITS OF INSTRUCTION AND DISCIPLINE

Grace's strong instruction, teaching, chastening and constraint causes us to renounce irreligion and worldly passions, to live sober, upright and godly lives, looking for the Saviour who is to appear, meanwhile shaping us up as God's holy people, and giving us zeal to do good deeds. This is a large programme, but grace is abundant, and its teaching, if sometimes painful, always issues in a good outcome.

## THE GRACE THAT SANCTIFIES

If we look back to Chapter 10 (pp. 66–69) we will see a short section on ‘The Gift of Holiness, of Sanctification’. In that section we did not do what we propose to do now, i.e. develop the idea of grace in all of sanctification.\*

### THE GRACE THAT ELECTS MAN TO HOLINESS

In Ephesians 1:4 Paul says, ‘He [God] chose us in him [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him’. This means that holiness is primarily by election, and election is all of grace. This is confirmed by I Corinthians 1:2, ‘to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints’, and I Peter 1:2, ‘chosen and destined by God the Father, and sanctified

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\* For amplification of this material, see *The Splendour of Holiness* (NCPI, 1985). For a shorter treatment, see *The Christian Doctrine of Holiness* (CTS 7. NCPI, 1985).

by the Spirit for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with the blood'. In this last quote, the Father elects and the Spirit sanctifies *before* believing the Gospel and receiving its purification. This same order is followed in II Thessalonians 2:13, 'God chose you from the beginning to be saved through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth'.

This election is more easily understood when we look at the history of Israel. God chose Israel, not selectively, but electively, from all the nations. He made them a holy nation (Exod. 19:5–6).

The grace that *elects* also *effects* holiness. Ephesians 1:4 shows that what God has begun He will complete. There is no other assurance for holiness but this. So see Philippians 1:6, 'He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ', and I Thessalonians 5:24, 'He who calls you is faithful, and he will do it'. We see, then, that from beginning to end holiness is dependent upon elective grace. This relieves us from the strain of making holiness a human work and endeavour.

## THE GRACE THAT MAKES MAN HOLY BY PURIFICATION

Paul tells us God's intention was carried out in Christ's action. In Ephesians 5:25–26 he says, 'Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word'. He refers to baptism which has its basis in the work of the Cross. As Peter says, 'Baptism. ..as an

appeal to God for a clear conscience’, or as Ananias told Paul, ‘Rise and be baptized, and wash away your sins’ (I Pet. 3:21; Acts 22:16).

This cleansing can take place by virtue of the Cross: ‘When he had made purification for sins’, and ‘the blood of Christ...purify your conscience from dead works’ (Heb. 1:3; 9:14). It is effected by the Holy Spirit: ‘the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit’; ‘You were washed, you were sanctified . . . by the Spirit of our God’ (Titus 3:5; I Cor. 6:11). The Cross and the Spirit are God’s action and means of grace. This action of cleansing must be seen as total. The covenant promise of Ezekiel 36:24–28 is completed: ‘I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you’. Yet the promise was not only for Israel, for, as Peter said of the Gentiles, ‘He . . .cleansed their hearts by faith’ (Acts 15:9).

Purification is dynamic in that it clears away man’s shame. His sins which were crimson have, themselves, become white as snow. No darkness from the past lurks in the cleansed person. He, or she, is holy.

## THE GRACE OF THE CROSS THAT SANCTIFIES

To be purified is to be holy. The writer of Hebrews uses the verb *hagiazō* which carries the ideas of ‘to consecrate’, ‘to purify morally’ and ‘to declare God’s holiness’. The key to this lies in 13:12b, ‘to sanctify the people with his own blood’. In 2:11 Christ is the sanctifier: ‘For he who sanctifies [Christ] and those who are [being] sanctified are one’. This relates to Christ’s death (2:9–10). Thus

in 10:12 and 14 we read, ‘When Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins . . . by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified’.

This settles the matter: through the Cross Christ’s people are sanctified for ever, and also are perfected in that sanctification.

## **GRACE SETS THE ELECTED AND PURIFIED PERSON IN THE HOLY PEOPLE**

Election always relates to the people of God. Whilst it is personalized with each saint, it is, too, a corporate matter. The people of God are holy. The Gentiles had been unholy, but God revealed to Peter (Acts 10) that He had made the unclean to be clean. In I Peter 2:9–10 the matter is settled: ‘But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people... Once you were no people, but now you are God’s people’. Thus Exodus 19:5–6, which referred only to Israel, now refers to the new community of Christ.

Living in the context of the holy people—‘those who are sanctified by faith in me’ (Acts 26:18)—is an aid to practical holy living.

## **GRACE AND PRACTICAL HOLY LIVING**

We now come to that aspect of holiness which may seem to require the energies of the believer. If, however, we see from passages such as Philippians 1:6, 2:12–13, Romans 8:13, I Thessalonians 5:24 and I Corinthians 15:10 that

our ‘energy’ or power for holiness comes from God working in us, then we will not fall into the error of thinking we help God to accomplish practical holiness within us. This does not mean we do not work in any sense, but it does tell us that it is the constraint of love that draws us on in the life of holiness (cf. Phil. 1:9–11; I Thess. 3:12–13).

The following terms are helpful if we can remember them and the holiness which can be practised through them:

(i) *Concentration* (Col. 3:1; Heb. 12:1–2; II Cor. 3:18). To concentrate is to be constrained (II Cor. 5:14), i.e. hemmed in to a given object and purpose. Our concentration is, of course, upon Christ.

(ii) *Realization*. This is a state of knowing the grace of God in what has happened to us, and is happening, along with what will happen. If we do not know we will not act in response. See Ephesians 3:16 and 20, Philippians 4:13 Romans 8:37 and I John 2:20.

(iii) *Imitation*. This does not mean mimicking, which is more mocking than copying. Since we belong to the Father (Eph. 5:1) we imitate Him (as did His Son). We imitate Christ (I Cor. 11:1; Phil. 3:17) and so we are examples (I Thess. 1:7–8; 2:14). Imitation comes from within.

(iv) *Habitation*, i.e. the Father, the Son and the Spirit dwell in us, and we in them (John 14:17, 23; 15:1–8; 17:2–21; Gal. 5:16, 18, 25; I John 4:16). We know we are not alone, and the power within us for holiness is God Himself—Father, Son, and Spirit.

(v) *Abstinence*. ‘For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from unchastity’ (I Thess. 4:3). This relates to rejection of evil as in I Corinthians 6:18,

‘Shun immorality’, and II Timothy 2:22, ‘Shun youthful passions’. At this point grace becomes an enabling power.

(vi) *Mortification*, i.e. ‘putting to death’. In Colossians 3:3–5 the principle is, ‘You must put to death what Christ has already killed on the Cross. Don’t give power to anything when—because of Christ’s death and resurrection—it has no power’. The basis is, ‘They that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh’ (Gal. 5:24), and the power for living in accordance with this is the Holy Spirit: ‘If by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live’ (Rom. 8:13).

(vii) *Vivification*. This means ‘bring to life’, ‘give life to’, but it is best to see it as meaning ‘live in the life of’. In Colossians 3:5–11 the mortification is seen as killing what is killed, and vivification as putting these things away, whilst in 3: 12–14 vivification is ‘putting on’ or ‘giving life to’ the things of holiness. In Romans 6 mortification and vivification are seen as having power over sin by the reign of grace (e.g. verses 12–14), and by yielding one’s members to ‘righteousness for sanctification’.

(viii) *Loving*. Love, as we have seen, is the true constraint to holiness, but the process of loving in action brings growth in holiness and development in maturity. See Philippians 3:9–11 and I Thessalonians 3: 12–13.

(ix) *Self-Purification*. This seems an impossible task. It is enjoined many times, as in II Timothy 2:20–22 and II Corinthians 7:1, and in I John 3:3 hope constrains the child of God to ‘purify himself as he [God] is pure’. In a way this principle is linked with that of *abstinence*. II Corinthians 7:1 speaks of perfecting holiness ‘in the fear of God’. This holy fear makes for holy living.

These nine points are simple aids to practical holiness,

but behind them all is the grace of God, assisting the believer in his weakness, and making him strong. Apart from grace the attempt to live a holy life becomes dreary legalism, or harsh asceticism, and tends to bring hard pride into the life of the Christian. True holiness is a matter of personal health, and is a joyful thing.

As I Chronicles 16:29–30 (NEB) has it,

Bow down to the Lord  
in the splendour of holiness,  
and dance to his honour,  
all men on earth.

## THE GRACE THAT HEALS

The statement, 'The grace of God has appeared bringing salvation', may appear to relate only to redemption, for salvation's primary meaning is 'to save' and 'to deliver'. In much of Western theology the thought of salvation is of being saved from the penalty and punishment of sin, and of being delivered from the powers of darkness. This is, of course, a true understanding.

The Hebrew view of salvation was on a wide canvas. Hezekiah said, 'The Lord will save me', meaning, 'save me from my sickness' (Isa. 38:20; cf. verse 9). The Psalmist said, 'Bless the Lord, O my soul...who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases' (103:2,3). He knew the link between sickness and sin.

When the grace of God appeared in the form of Jesus, he spoke as Messiah from Isaiah 61:1, saying, 'He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering

of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord' (Luke 4:18–19). This good news undoubtedly held the promise of healing, and Peter later summed up that ministry in the words, 'God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. . . he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him' (Acts 10:38).

## JESUS' HEALING MINISTRY

Jesus healed in the name of the Kingdom of God:

' . . . if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you' (Matt. 12:28);

'Heal the sick...and say to them, "The kingdom of God has come near to you" ' (Luke 10:9);

Now when the sun was setting, all those who had any that were sick with various diseases brought them to him; and he laid his hands on every one of them and healed them. And demons also came out of many, crying, 'You are the Son of God!' (Luke 4:40–41a)

One of the most interesting statements concerning his healing is Matthew 8:17, which is a commentary on the passage cited immediately above: 'This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah, "He took our infirmities and bore our diseases." ' This cannot mean that at the point of the healing he took from them their infirmities and bore (vicariously) their sickness. He had simply been given power to heal because he was Messiah. Even so, there must have been something which helped them in regard to the causal sin, and its guilt.

## SIN AND SICKNESS IN JESUS' VIEW

It is clear that Jesus did not think all human sickness was caused by sin. In John 9:3 Jesus said, regarding the man born blind, 'It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him'. However, he told the man who had been healed by the pool called Bethzatha, 'See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse befall you' (John 5:14). Obviously Jesus thought this man's sin had caused his sickness.

The paralysed man brought by his friends and let down in front of Jesus is another case in point (see Matt. 9:1–8). When Jesus said to him, 'Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven', he went straight to the heart of the matter. His hearers grumbled at him for claiming he could forgive sins. He then said to these grumblers, in effect, 'You think it is easy for me to say, "Your sins are forgiven," when in fact I cannot prove that? Very well then, I will now prove it. I will heal this man, which will mean, in turn, that he has been forgiven, for we, here, all believe his sickness came from his sin'.

It is clear from what happened that his audience was forced to believe he had power to forgive, for the sickness was healed. This fits the Hebrew idea of sin and sickness which we will examine below, but it is enough here to say that Jesus saw much sickness as coming from sin. The question is, 'When he healed, did he simply heal the sickness? Did he go further to the cause of that sickness, the sin, and did he lift the guilt of the person?'. That is not an easy question to answer because the Hebrew, when he was healthy, figured that he was also guiltless, i.e. a forgiven person. Of course he had sacrifices which helped

him in this matter, and those sacrifices were provided by God (Lev. 17:11), and man lived in health by the grace of God. Left to his own self-atoning, no man could deal with the deep problem of guilt and its consequences.

## GOD IS THE ONE WHO WOUNDS AND WHO HEALS

If we say that God is the One who wounds and heals,\* then the matter is very simple, especially if we believe that God punishes sinning by sickness, provides continual health where there is no sinning, and heals where there is repentance from the sin which caused the illness. Indeed the matter is not as simple as that because of the powers of darkness which seize upon man's guilt in order to oppress him, and who, in some way, are often linked with the sicknesses man has. Because of this latter fact some have developed a simplistic view of sickness and health. 'All sickness comes from Satan,' they say, 'and all health from God'.

This latter view can prove highly dangerous. It seems to infer that Satan has the right to impose all sickness, and also seems to take some of the responsibility for illness off those who are ill because of sin, for illness, in this view, is represented as an attack by evil. God seems not to work in this area, and in this way His sovereignty is impugned. The Hebrew—no matter what the calamity was that came upon him—believed that God was responsible. Nor did he seem to have a philosophy of God's *direct* and God's *permissive will*, as though, in a sense

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\* See *The Wounding and the Healing*, NCPI, Blackwood, 1982, pp. 13-18, and *A Biblical Way of Counselling*, NCPI, Blackwood, 1985, pp. 56-58.

there were two kinds of will. All illness and health, all wounding and healing, is under God's hand directly, even though evil forces may act, for such forces are under His control.

The *locus classicus* of the principle that God heals is in Exodus 15:26:

'If you will diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord your God, and do that which is right in his eyes, and give heed to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will put none of the diseases upon you which I put upon the Egyptians; for I am the Lord, your healer'.

Notice that whilst healing—or the maintaining of good health—is promised, the warning is implicit that He will impose sickness where there is disobedience. In fact it is more a passage about this than about healing.

Other Scriptures which talk about God's healing are: Exodus 23:25; II Kings 20:3ff.; Psalms 6:2, 9; 30:2; 41:4; 103:3; 107:17–20; 147:3; Jeremiah 33:6–9; (cf. 8:22; 30:12–17; 46:11); Isaiah 57:18–19; 58:6–9; Ezekiel 37:1–14; 47:12; Revelation 22: 1–3. The healings by prophets (e.g. Elijah and Elisha), as also by Jesus and the apostles, are all included in God's work as the Healer.

We have already seen that not all sickness comes from a person's sin. A case in point is Hezekiah's illness described in II Kings 20:1–11. Hezekiah was suffering a terminal sickness, and protested to God's prophet that he had walked before God 'in faithfulness and with a whole heart, and have done what is good in thy sight'. The Lord heard his plea and healed him. Elisha also had a terminal illness which God did not heal. It can scarcely be described as arising from the prophet's sin, especially as his dead bones were the cause of a dead person coming to life (II Kings 13:14–21)!

## HEALING IS AN ACT OF GRACE

We have said that the action of healing is included in salvation. The verb ‘to save’ (*sozo*) can also mean ‘to heal’ or ‘to make whole’. This is seen in Mark 5:23, referring to the healing of Jairus’s daughter, and the healing of the woman with a chronic haemorrhage (Mark 5:28, 34). It is also used of healing the Gadarene demoniac (Luke 8:36), of the lame man healed at the temple (Acts 4:9, ‘has been healed’, *sesostal*), and of the healing of the cripple at Lystra (Acts 14:9).

We take it that had man not fallen, had sin and death not entered the world through that incident (cf. Rom. 5:12), then sickness would have been unknown. If this were the case, then man would have needed neither ‘wounding’ nor ‘healing’. As it is, he comes under both the wounding and healing of God. If we recognize that much sickness comes through a person’s own sinning, some through the sinning of others (John 9:3), and some simply because we live in a fallen world, then we will realize that unless grace comes to save and restore, our plight would be fearful. We might almost speak of a thoughtful ‘pregrace’ which God exercised at creation in placing in the vegetable and mineral worlds remedies for illnesses which are—in some way or another—related to sin.

## SIN, SICKNESS, AND THE HEALING OF GRACE

The Hebrew view that much sickness resulted from sin and its guilt is easily shown in the Old Testament. We must not confuse the causal sin (Ps. 32:3–4; Isa. 1:4) with

the resultant sickness, making them the same thing, although they are in the one bundle, together. Psalm 31: 10, 32:3–4 and 38: 1–8—amongst other Psalms— show that sickness results from living with unconfessed sin and its consequent guilt. Isaiah 1:4–6 shows (a) the sin of the people (verses 4–5), and (b) God’s smiting of the sinful people (verses 5–6).

The whole principle is seen in Jeremiah 30: 12–17. This passage, too, ought to be studied closely. God says, ‘I have dealt you the blow of an enemy, the punishment of a merciless foe, because your guilt is great, because your sins are flagrant’. Then He says, ‘Because your guilt is great, because your sins are flagrant, I have done these things to you’. At the end He proclaims, ‘I will restore health to you, and your wounds I will heal’.

This act is seen in Jeremiah 31:2–3:

‘The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness;  
when Israel sought for rest, the Lord appeared to him from afar.  
I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you’.

Israel could always be healed because of God’s covenant with them, and His covenant love towards them. In fact Jeremiah time and again pursues this matter of healing, as we see in 6:14, 8:18–22, 30:12–17 and 46:11.

If then mankind has sinned and meets the judgement and consequences of sinning in sickness and demonic oppression, why should God move out to heal, deliver, and save man? The answer is, ‘Because He is the God of all grace’. In His covenant with Israel He promised to be the Healer. Now this healing is extended to the entire

human race. That is the meaning of Christ's incarnation, i.e. to be 'a light to lighten the Gentiles [nations], and the glory of thy people Israel' (Luke 2:32). The promise becomes universal: 'Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing'; 'For you who fear my name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings'; and, 'And the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations' (Ezek. 47: 12b; Mal. 4:2; Rev. 22:2).

Doubtless God's 'pre-grace' included in creation the medicines and skills needed for healing people— whatever the causes of their sicknesses—but such healings could not touch *the root and cause of illnesses*, and it is the grace of the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ which came to do that.

## HEALING IN THE ATONEMENT

Some readers of the Scriptures have linked Matthew 8:17 and Isaiah 53 (especially verses 4–6), and come to their stated conclusion, 'There is healing in the Atonement'. By this they have meant, 'Because of Christ's death all sickness, as such, has been overcome in the Cross, and so wherever sickness is met it can be overcome by the application of this death'.

This statement is an over-simplification. For one thing, it would seem only to apply to sin—and-guilt caused illnesses. If Christ has borne our sins and iniquities, then it is the *guilt* of these he has borne, and so the Atonement does not make us proof against sinning, although it certainly breaks *the power* of sin (cf. Rom. 6:10–14). Likewise because he has attacked the root of illness—guilt of

sin—it does not account for those illnesses which do not have this root. Nor does it make any person proof against the immediate judgements of God (Exod. 15:26, Acts 5: 1–11; I Cor. 11:27–34), or illnesses that are His chastisements (Heb. 12:5–11) or which are for the manifesting of His works (John 9:3).

When we talk about being forgiven, and being justified, we do not mean we will never sin, and when we talk about being made whole (i.e. being saved) by the Gospel, we do not mean we are proof against sickness, or that God will have no purpose in any kind of illness we may experience. It has been said that ‘Some people are only healed through sickness’, which may be something like, ‘Before I was afflicted I went astray’ (Ps. 119:67).

What we do know regarding the Atonement is that all the guilt of the human conscience has been purged. The purified person has been delivered from evil powers, from the fear of death and judgement, and from the effects of the guilt of sin. This is a state of true health, the state to which Jesus often referred when he said, ‘Go in peace; your faith has saved you’.

## THE GRACE OF WORSHIP

### MAN WORSHIPS BY GRACE

In the New Testament the new person in Christ—and indeed all the people of God—worship by means of grace. That is, worship issues out of grace. This is seen in passages such as Romans 12:1; Hebrews 9:14; Revelation 7: 14–15; John 4:20; Philippians 3:3; I Peter 2:4–10; Romans 1:9 and other passages. As we will examine these passages later, we simply refer to them at this point. At the same time we must recognize that man’s worship of God was a gift of creation, and so cannot strictly speaking be called a gift of grace.

We must establish a working description of worship, and it is simply ‘the giving of worth to a person, principle or object’. What worth or value we give to anything is our worship of it. Worship also implies some kind of service. In the Old and New Testaments worship and service are often synonymous, and indeed there are single words in Hebrew and Greek which contain and combine the two.

## MAN'S INITIAL WORSHIP OF GOD

We are not told much about this, so that we do not really understand his modes of worship as an unfallen creature. The fact that man was made in God's image and had affinity with Him is enough to show that when man gave worth to God, he really was recognizing his own worth. The first two chapters of Genesis show that man was to serve God and creation (1:28; 2: 15). God was also said to 'walk in the garden at the time of the evening breeze', and we assume that was a special time of worship.

Ironically enough we discover what was worship when men refused to render it to God, i.e. in terms of Romans 1:21–25. In refusing God, he

- (i) refused to honour Him as God, i.e. give Him His due glory,
- (ii) refused to give thanks, and
- (iii) worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator.

We assume then that worship was the giving of honour, the giving of thanks, and serving the Creator. From this passage in Romans we see that worship is a compulsive drive in man: if he will not worship God he must worship gods, even if he has to invent them, or give deity to created creatures and things.

## MAN AND WORSHIP AFTER THE FALL

There is plenty of material to indicate true and false worship. Abel gives worth to God with a faith-offering, whilst Cain's heart is not right toward God or man. 'By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain'. Cain 'was of the evil one' (Heb. 11:4; I John 3:12). Rightly understood Abel offered as a result of

grace, since grace always precedes faith.

Similarly we find altars raised by the patriarchs in the context of the blessings of God. Genesis chapter 22 was the paradigm for true offering, but it was rooted in covenant grace, i.e. the covenant worship of Genesis 12, 15 and 17 and the later reiterated covenant promises of universal blessing. Likewise in Israel's case grace was the basis of worship. The principle, 'Let my people go that they may worship [serve] me', which God spoke through Moses to Pharaoh, was effected by God. He liberated Israel from Egypt amidst great signs and wonders, thus setting the basis for true worship, i.e. the giving of honour and thanks, and the adoration of His covenant people.

God instructs His people to serve Him with love, and gives them a heart to love and serve Him (cf. Deut. 10:12–16; 11:1, 13–16; 30:6). When He gives the Ten Commandments, it is on the basis of grace, 'I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage, [therefore . . . ]' (Deut. 5:6; cf. 7:8–11). Because He had liberated them they could now worship Him. We repeat, 'Grace was the basis of worship in Israel'.

The worship of Israel is no arbitrary matter, not something 'off the cuff'. It is finely structured, and significantly functional. The New Testament writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews saw that cultus as outmoded and superseded by Christ, but he did not denigrate it. In fact he gave it high praise, for it was a 'shadow of the good things to come' (10:1). In Israel worship was no small thing. Israel was God's servant, and as such should serve Him, both by embodied worship, and the life it lived.

## WORSHIP BY GRACE IN THE NEW ERA

Paul made a statement of high significance in Philippians 3:3. He said, ‘We are the true circumcision, who worship God in spirit, and glory in Christ Jesus, and put no confidence in the flesh’. At first sight his statement does not seem highly significant, but in fact he was contrasting two systems of worship—that of those who trusted that their offering to God was genuine worship but whose worship was in fact fleshly, and those who really offered spiritual worship. Probably at this point he was not contrasting Jewish and Christian worship, but worship by some who were not ‘in the Spirit’ but ‘in the flesh’ (cf. Rom. 8:5–8).

In Acts 24:14 Paul admitted some difference in his worship and that of current Israel. ‘But this I admit to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the law or written in the prophets’. He insisted that he worshipped only ‘the God of our fathers’, and claimed that the worship was consistent with the law and the prophets. In this sense it was not a new worship.

When, however, we read John 4:20–24 we find the following points or principles:

- (a) the only authentic worship to the time of Jesus centred in, and was typified by, the temple at Jerusalem;
- (b) worship and salvation are linked. *Where true worship is, there is salvation.* Until the coming of Jesus this was only in Israel, i.e. linked with the temple at Jerusalem;

- (c) a radical change was now taking place with the coming of Jesus as the Messiah, for new worship was being inaugurated;
- (d) the worship would not be located in any city as such (i.e. Jerusalem and Israel), but would be universal;
- (e) this worship could only be, (i) ‘in spirit’, and (ii) ‘in truth’;
- (f) it would be initiated by God as Father, which would mean that those who are His true children worship Him.

Translated into terms of the New Testament, it meant that true worship was based on the person and work of Christ, and that this became apparent on the day of Pentecost. The Spirit came, so that now men and women were filled with the Spirit and could worship ‘in spirit’, i.e. in their spirits by the Holy Spirit. Because he was the Spirit of truth, and as such revealed to them the truth of the Son and the Father (John 16:12–15), they could now worship ‘in truth’, i.e. the truth of God.

### **PENTECOST OPENED THE ERA OF WORSHIP THROUGH GRACE**

Pentecost, then, opened the new era of worship. Paul said, ‘We are the true circumcision, who worship God in spirit [‘in the Holy Spirit’]’, and said of himself, ‘For God is my witness, whom I serve [worship] with [‘in’ *en to pneumati*] my spirit’ (Rom. 1:9). We will see that all

worship in the early church was by the Spirit, and only by the Spirit.

The worship at Pentecost has many aspects. Filled with the Spirit, the group were telling (extolling) ‘the wonderful works of God’ (Acts 2:11). Of course these works were of God sending Messiah and he redeeming Israel by his death and resurrection, thus ascending to the right hand of God. Romans 1:21–25 shows the death of true worship, for they did not honour God or thank Him but exchanged the truth of God for a lie. At Pentecost this was reversed: they exchanged the lie of God for the truth and honoured Him, praising Him for His great works.

They also worshipped by proclaiming the Gospel. This was serving God, and the fruit of such was the baptism of 3,000 new believers. They all worshipped by being busy in the apostles’ doctrine, the prayers, the fellowship, and the breaking of bread. Their worship took the practical forms of love and compassion as they shared what they had with all of the new company who had needs. In Acts 4 we see further worship as the church prayed in unity for the persecuted apostles. Again the Spirit fell on them, and they were one in heart and mind, and even expanded their works of love and mercy, whilst the apostles spoke with renewed power.

## **WORSHIP IN THE SPIRIT**

We can now look more particularly at what it means to worship ‘in spirit’ or ‘in the Spirit’. Hebrews 10:29 calls the Spirit ‘the Spirit of grace’. As we saw, this could mean

(i) ‘the Spirit given by God’s grace’, or (ii) ‘the Spirit who ministers grace’. Both of these elements are present, anyway, and when the Spirit reveals the grace of God, then worship can—and does—begin. It flows out of grace, as we are about to see.

In Ephesians 5:18 Paul speaks of being filled ‘with the Spirit [‘in spirit’: *en pneumati*]’. He then describes the resultant worship:

. . .addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father (verses 19–20).

Notice the honouring of God and the giving of thanks to Him, by the Spirit. This is worshipping God ‘in spirit’ (Phil. 3:3; John 4:23).

In Colossians 3:16 Paul says, ‘Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God’. Here ‘the word of Christ’ virtually parallels ‘the Holy Spirit’ of Ephesians 5:18ff. Since it is the ‘Spirit of truth’ who brings the word of truth, then worship is in the Spirit.

I Corinthians 14 is a passage given over to the modes and meaning of worship. These relate to the gifts (*charismata*) which Paul calls ‘manifestations of the Spirit’ (verse 12). Paul talks about prayer ‘with the spirit’ or, ‘in the Spirit’. He says,

But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you (verses 24–25).

Here worship begets worship, and witness is the evangel. Paul then proceeds in verses 26–33 to describe the use of spiritual gifts in the modes of true worship.

These passages—amongst others—show us that indeed Pentecost and the coming of the Spirit brought the new and radical worship of which Jesus had spoken to the woman at the well.

## WORSHIP IN AND THROUGH GRACE, BY THE SPIRIT

We have seen briefly that the Spirit reveals the truth of the Father and the Son. Jesus said, of the Spirit of truth:

‘ . . . he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for *he will take what is mine and declare it to you*. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you’ (John 16:13–15).

This really means that the Spirit will give a full revelation of both the Father and the Son. This is too wonderful to be conceived or described, yet it is so. It means ‘the truth of God’ is now apparent, and vividly so. Because God is ‘the God of all grace’ and because ‘the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation’ in the very person of Christ, grace is now a dynamic revelation to the believer. This revelation is not merely conceptual: it comes personally and powerfully, bringing all the gifts of which we have spoken, such as repentance, faith, the forgiveness of sins, regeneration, purification, sanctification, sonship, love, and the Holy Spirit himself. The

immediate result of receiving these gifts is worship of God. How could the new person fail to adore the God who redeems him (or her) with grace? This is seen vividly in the following Scriptures:

How much more shall *the blood of Christ*, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify your conscience from dead works to serve [worship: *latreuein*] the living God (Heb. 9:14);

I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship [reasonable service: *logiken latreian*](Rom. 12:1);

‘These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve [worship: *latreousin*] him day and night within his temple’ (Rev. 7:14–15).

These statements embody the one principle: ‘He who receives grace will worship God’. It is the principle contained in Abel’s worship, in the worship of Abraham, and in the true worship of Israel. The joyful obedience of faith always follows the full revelation of grace. Hence out of grace men and women worship their wonderful God, the true Father and the Redeemer Son.

## **WORSHIP AND SERVICE ARE ONE—IN GRACE**

In Romans 12:1–2 Paul appeals ‘by the mercies of God’ for believers to present (yield) their bodies to God ‘as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God’. He calls this ‘spiritual worship’ or ‘reasonable service’, i.e. the worship and service of heart and mind. We notice he exhorts the giving of the body. This must mean that everything the

body does is both worship and service. The verb here (*larreuo*) combines the two ideas. This means that worship (service) is not something limited to a worship service, but that worship is expressed in every action of the body, i.e. eating, drinking, working, walking, talking, giving, receiving—and so on. This means there is not one action of our lives which is not worship, albeit it may sometimes be deficient worship, wrong worship, and false worship. We can do nothing but worship, and so every action is significant.

A problem we have in discussing the matter of worship as service comes from the idea which has grown up in the Christian community that following conversion there has to be a period for growth and maturation *before* one begins to serve. Paul dispels this idea. When he was converted, ‘immediately he proclaimed Jesus, saying, "He is the Son of God"’ (Acts 9:20). In Galatians 1:15–16 he wrote, ‘When he who had set me apart before I was born, and *had called me through his grace*, was pleased to reveal his Son in me, in order *that I might preach him* amongst the Gentiles. . .’ When we look at the accounts of Paul’s conversion in Acts chapters 9, 22 and 26, we see that grace—so to speak—catapulted him into immediate service. This is why he says, ‘God. . . whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son’ (Rom. 1:9). The same principle is seen in I Thessalonians 1:9, ‘. . . you turned to God from idols, to *serve* a living and true God’.

## THE NEW WORSHIP IN THE NEW TEMPLE

Worship out of grace is the highest experience God’s people can know. It was so in Israel when they worshipped

God in the temple. The temple in Jerusalem (the tent in the wilderness and during the early days in Canaan) meant that God was present with His people. The temple also typified the covenant people of God.

In the Gospels we find something new emerging. Jesus said on one occasion that if they destroyed the temple of his body he would raise it up in three days. He was speaking of his resurrection. They took it to mean he desired to see Herod's temple destroyed so that he could raise up a new temple. They took *this* to mean the outmoding of the law, and in a sense they were right. Christ was looking forward to a new temple, and new system of worship.

The Epistles take up the fact that Christ is the new temple, and that the temple is constituted of Christ's people. They are living stones, forming the new shrine of God, 'Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord . . . a dwelling place of God in the Spirit' (Eph. 2:19–22). Hence Paul says, 'Do you not know that you are God's temple, and that God's Spirit dwells in you?'

Peter teaches much along the same lines:

Come to him, to that living stone, rejected by men but in God's sight chosen and precious; and like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (I Pet. 2:4–5).

We saw in Revelation 7:14–15 that the purified believers worship God in His temple, day and night. The expression of this on earth is the practice Peter indicates in this passage.

The offering of ‘spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God’ is described by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews:

Through him [Christ] then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have for such sacrifices are pleasing to God (13:15–16).

We see that these sacrifices are worship to God in honouring and praising Him, and giving Him thanks. On the horizontal level the writer might be describing what happened on the day of Pentecost and following, i.e. the sharing of one’s goods with others in love.

The living temple, then, is presently upon earth. The new spiritual priesthood—in contradistinction to the Levitical priesthood of Israel—is the people of God, and the sacrifices they offer are their ways of service to God and man. This gives a rich and full meaning to our worship of God. We see that it must spring out of grace, and continue to operate in grace.

## **THE ULTIMATE (ESCHATOLOGICAL) WORSHIP**

The Book of the Revelation has powerful descriptions of the worship of God. Celestial creatures are continually occupied in worshipping God for the creation He has made, for His own eternal Being, and for the works He does. Along with them humanity and other earthly creatures praise God and the Lamb for the great work of redemption. Finally God is praised for His judgements which—all proclaim—‘are true and righteous altogether’.

John’s great prophecy depicts the redeemed people of God worshipping Him day and night in His temple, but

when we come to 21:22 we read, ‘And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.’ This must be the ultimate in any statement of grace, for now the living Temple, the people of God, has become one with the Lord God almighty and the Lamb. It is not that they are merged with God, but it is that they are in total union with Him, i.e. they have become ‘partakers of [participators in] the nature of God’ (II Pet. 1:4).

This statement is not only incredible, but difficult to follow in its meaning unless we see history climaxed in the marriage of the Bride and the Lamb, and know that the Bride (the church) is now one with the Father and the Son. That is why we say this is the ultimate in the worship that flows from grace, i.e. union with God!

## THE GRACE THAT WITNESSES

### THE WITNESS TO THE LIE

‘They exchanged the truth of God for a lie’ (Rom. 1:25). This was the great revolt against God by Adam and all in his following, the human race. Man claimed to know good and evil, and so man made his own gods, after his own image, and that image was not the likeness of God. Man has always produced his religions, his philosophies and his gods out of his own experience, his own contemplation, his own thinking.

No less within the history of the Christian church the process of self-reasoning has gone on. We keep shaping God in our own thinking as we think He is, or ought to be. Innumerable people have been scandalized by the God of the Hebrews and early Christian church. They have revised these views until the scandal has been screened out. These things have not been done ‘in spirit

and in truth'. The brilliant revelation of the Father and the Son by the Holy Spirit has been ignored or set aside. The gods who brought us up out of our Egypts have been cast in gold and studded with jewels, and have great beauty, exciting great and unusual worship, but they are not God.

History has been a continual witness to the lie man has devised. It is the lie of his autonomy, the lie of self-preservation, self-justification and self-progress. It has taken many fascinating forms, modes and expressions. It has not, however, brought peace, joy and love to the human race. Man's history is a sickening testimony to his evil, his devious mind, his cruel and ruthless autonomy. Some of the judgement that has come to man has come from his perverted and angry view of God. Casting God in his own image has done little for God. He is not the God of idealism, messianism, and utopianism. He is the God of love, but then of holy love which incorporates judgement and justice into His plan and action of redemption. Grace finds its way to mankind through the grim darkness of Golgotha as well as the glory of the Resurrection morning.

## THE WITNESS TO THE TRUTH\*

'You shall receive power, the Holy Spirit coming upon you, and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and all Judea, Samaria, and to the uttermost part of the earth' (Acts 1:8). These were the words of Jesus to his disciples, following his resurrection.

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\* For a fuller treatment of the ideas of witness and truth, see my *Truth the Golden Girdle* (NCPI, 1983), and *Is Prophecy for Today?* (NCPI, 1982).

He also told them that it was written ‘that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem’ (Luke 24:46–47). Then he added, ‘You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city [Jerusalem], until you are clothed with power from on high’ (verses 48–49).

Out of these things we see (i) the apostles were to be witnesses of the truth as it had been lived and worked out by Jesus, under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, and (ii) they could only be witnesses when the Spirit of truth came upon them.

Long before Jesus spoke to his disciples God had said to Israel, ‘You are my witnesses’ (Isa. 43:10, 12; 44:8), and indeed from the beginning that was the purpose He had for the nation. It was to be the priest nation among all the (non–priest) nations (Exod. 19:5–6). God had also spoken personally of His servant David (‘Great David’s greater son’): ‘Behold, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples’ (Isa. 55:4)

Jesus, then, was the true witness. He was God’s witness to the truth. Many things witness to him—John the Baptist, the works which he (Christ) did, and the Scriptures also (John 5:30–47). Yet most powerfully the Father witnessed to him. At his baptism and at the transfiguration He attested Jesus as His Son. This one witnessed to by so many powerful witnesses was himself the witness to God and the truth of God. Bearing in mind that man had ‘exchanged the truth of God for a lie’, we see the work of Jesus was to unmask the lie and reveal the truth.

He told Pilate, 'For this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth' (John 18:37). He told the Jews who opposed him, 'But now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth which I heard from God'. (John 8:40). The statement concerning him, that he was 'full of grace and truth', settles forever the fact that grace and truth are irreversibly linked, and that there can be no truth without grace, and no grace without truth.

Again, when we see that grace is God's action, and that truth is something which is done, and so is known in and by its acts, then we can see that those who 'lie and do not the truth' also live the lie, and are wholly outside of grace. This is seen in Christ's statement, 'I am the way, the truth and the life: no man comes to the Father but by me'. Christ was really saying, 'I am the way to the Father: I am the truth of the Father: I am the life of the Father. That is why you can only come to the Father through me'.

## **THE GRACE TO WITNESS GIVEN TO GOD'S PEOPLE**

We have seen that Paul speaks about ministry as a gift of God, springing from His grace. Time and again he emphasizes this theme, as in Ephesians 3:1-9, 4:7-11, Romans 12:3ff. and I Corinthians 15:10. We also saw that he was called to this ministry, and that calling is always a sovereign act of God's grace. We saw, too, that ministry is not a second act of God which is separated from conversion but is innate in that conversion. The following description of Christ's commission to Paul on the road to Damascus makes this clear:

‘. . . rise and stand upon your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you to serve and bear witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from the people and from the Gentiles—to whom I send you to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me’ (Acts 26: 16–18).

Paul would sum up such a commission as ‘the grace given to me’, meaning, ‘It is God’s grace that He calls me into the ministry of witness’. Such a ministry is coveted by Paul, and not seen as a burden or a bondage.

In II Corinthians 4:7–15 Paul speaks of a suffering which always accompanies the proclamation of the Gospel, i.e. ‘the testimony of Jesus’, and says that far from discouraging a servant of God, this suffering actually strengthens him. Being in the business of proclamation and suffering keeps us in the reality of the Gospel. He concludes, ‘For it is all for your sake, so that *as grace extends to more and more people* it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God’. He shows that grace can only be truly communicated when we ourselves are in need of grace in order to be able to witness. Of course he shares this matter of the need of grace in I Corinthians 15:8–11 and II Corinthians 12:1–10. When we read descriptions of his suffering in II Corinthians 4:7–12, 6:3–10, 11:23–29 and Colossians 1:24, then we know that without grace Paul would have been quickly destroyed.

Again, when we read the Book of the Revelation, we are struck by the fact that God’s servants are in constant persecution and suffering. John says, ‘I John, your brother, who share with you in Jesus the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance, was on the island

called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus' (1 :9). It is said that he 'bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus' (1:2). In 6:9 we see, under the altar, 'those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne'.

In 12:11 the saints of God have conquered the dragon by 'the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony', whilst in 12:17 'the dragon...went off to make war . . . on those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus ['having the testimony of Jesus']'. This helps us to understand 19:10, 'The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy'.

A vivid glimpse of powerful witness is seen in 11:3–13. Here are the two witnesses from whose mouth comes forth fire, and this is undoubtedly the word of God (cf. Jer. 23:23ff.; Rev. 20:9). Here, rightly enough, the giving of witness is the giving of prophecy. This is the powerful word against which no one can stand (cf. Acts 6: 10). Two things become clear to us: (i) that witnesses must be persons filled with the Spirit of truth so that they can have power to witness, and know the truth to which they witness, and (ii) they must have 'great grace' in order to sustain the persecution and suffering that comes as a consequence of that witness.

## **A CONCLUSION TO THE WITNESS OF GRACE**

We noted that grace and truth are bound up together. We need grace to know truth, to live in it, and to proclaim it. We have also seen that proclaiming the truth is a high privilege. We also need to see that witness is both service

and worship. It is a lofty and thrilling calling to be commissioned to proclaim the grace of God. The depths of 'the word of grace' are unfathomable, and the impact of that word cannot be described in its effects.

As we saw, no man can devise the Gospel out of his own contemplation. It is the living truth of God, and it must be real to us before we dare proclaim it to others. The 'witness of Jesus' is, in fact, Christ's own life, and his working out of God's plan through his people. When they work, live and proclaim, it is 'in Christ', in his everpresent person. In this way 'the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ' shows itself, and makes its effects upon those called into God's Kingdom.

## THE MINISTRY OF GRACE TO THE WHOLE WORLD

### THE DESIRABLE SPREAD OF GRACE

In II Corinthians 4:7–14 Paul has a powerful passage on the suffering that accompanies the proclamation of the Gospel, and in verses 8 to 10 he says,

We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed, always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.

He is really saying that as we experience and proclaim Christ–crucified we suffer deeply. Even so, such suffering makes the whole matter real to us, and so strengthens our faith. What we know increasingly we are constrained to proclaim.

When Paul comes to verse 15 he sets out a principle of proclamation. He says, 'For it [the suffering in proclamation] is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God'. He is saying that as grace comes to more and more people, they will be so changed from anti-God sinners that they will become His worshippers. In Romans 1:21 Paul says of mankind (i.e. of us): 'For although they knew God they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him'. He then recounts their fall into spiritual darkness, sin and error. Grace—he tells us—brings man back to thanksgiving and glorification of God.

The ultimate of God's plan for mankind is that His elect shall be 'to the praise of the glory of his grace' (Eph. 1:5-7; 2:7), as also—by grace alone—'to the praise of his glory' (Eph. 1:11-14), and we should note the difference between the two. The first relates to being brought back to true humanity by grace, and the second relates to being fully in the image of God—to His glory. The outcome of the proclamation of the Gospel of grace is that men and women come to thank and glorify Him, and this—of all—delights the heart of God.

## THE FACT OF THE SPREAD OF GRACE

We saw in our studies regarding the action of grace in the Book of Acts, that grace was the dynamic presence of God—of the Father, the Son and the Spirit—working to effect salvation in men, and so to draw them into the Body of Christ, the church, where—grace working

powerfully—yet more would be redeemed by grace and come to live under the word of His grace, i.e. the whole Gospel which is the entire truth.

The first mention of grace was in Acts 4:33 where ‘great grace’ was upon the church. In one sense it was tangible, and was visible in the life of unity and powerful proclamation. In Acts 11:23 Barnabas came to Antioch (in Syria) and ‘saw the grace of God’, i.e. in the life of the new church, the unity of Jew and Gentile. In 13:43 Paul recommends new converts to ‘continue in the grace of God’, and in 15:11 Peter says that both Jew and Gentile are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus. In 14:26, 15:40 and 20:32 the servants of God are commended to His grace. In 20:24 Paul sees his ministry as that of testifying to the grace of God. All of this can be summed up under ‘great grace’, and it was a primary factor—if not *the* primary factor—under which the apostolic church lived and worked.

When we read the Epistles we discover how the grace of God has worked at the different churches. In I Thessalonians chapter I we see the same power and unity we viewed in the Book of the Acts. The use of what we have called ‘the gifts of grace’ (i.e. repentance, faith, forgiveness, justification, regeneration, sanctification and sonship) is present. Also the gifts which are called the *charismata* are also used. Likewise the weapons for spiritual warfare are constantly in action. All of this can be called the living grace of God, so that by it the churches are constantly breaking new ground and seeing new churches born of God.

What we need to understand is that the entire church lived in the fulness of God’s grace. Whilst Paul could

warn members against receiving the grace of God ‘in an empty way’ (II Cor. 6: 1–2), yet he was showing that grace was available for all. When a community lives in grace— as against the extremes of antinomianism and nomism (legalism)—then that community has a liberty, a joy and a peace which is not found elsewhere. If we can talk about such freedom being infectious or contagious, then we know that this was (and is) the way grace spreads.

## THE WAY IN WHICH GRACE SPREADS

There is no mystery in this. It is simple proclamation of the Gospel. We know Christ’s command to his followers was—and is—‘preach the Gospel’. His people are to go into all the world. They went in those early days, and they are still going. The Gospel—of itself— has the inbuilt constraint which sends, and the power which enables us to go and to proclaim. Since grace is unique to the Gospel, grace is the force which liberates from guilt, and establishes a person in forgiveness and justification. Paul said that the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16–17), and in slightly different language said ‘the word of the Cross’ is the power of God. Thus when the Gospel is preached a powerful offer is made to the hearer. For nothing he receives liberation and eternal life. The acts of repentance and faith are not of themselves works, and so justification is by grace, through the faith of the believer. If the Gospel has not changed the proclaimer then the proclamation is without power and conviction.

Linked with this is the fact that all believers are

witnesses to Christ. There is more spoken in the New Testament about witnessing than proclaiming—not that the two are separate or different. It is simply that when something happens to one, then that one witnesses to its reality. In doing this, that one witnesses to Christ and not himself. Since witness is simply telling the truth, then the witness must be somebody radically changed by that truth. In our chapters relating to Paul’s view of the grace of God as seen in his own experience, and as set forth in the Epistles to the Romans and Galatians (chapters 17 and 22–26), we see how Paul could do nothing but preach the grace of God. Hence his statement in Acts 20:24,

I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may accomplish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to *testify to the gospel of the grace of God.*

# SECTION SEVEN

## **Great Grace's Greater Grace**

If the title to this section is intriguing, it is certainly apt. Something in man always causes him to look to the future. He can easily be attracted—and beguiled—by horoscopes, divinations, bizarre prophecies, and weird systems which promise the ultimate. Marxism is one of these promises

a godless kingdom of God, where there will be peace, equality, and security. One portion of Western society looks to Eastern mysticism and religions to give it some future, but the future lies not in ideals and ideologies, but in God's grace.

Grace—as we have seen—is beyond man's best dreams, and 'the grace that is coming' exceeds even this view and action of grace. Only grace permits a man to see the great things of the resurrection of the body, the obtaining of incredible glory, the possessing of a beautiful inheritance, and of finally entering the Kingdom of God.

Other things which are a mystery to us now, such as the new heavens and the new earth, the peerless City of God (i.e the true Holy City), the beatific view of God forever, and the high calling to royal priesthood—all these are the things which form and create our section title, 'Great Grace's Greater Grace'.

Certainly no treatment of grace such as we have undertaken in this book can be complete without viewing the outcome of present grace—the future life that God's grace has prepared for those who love Him!



## **GREAT GRACE'S GREATER GRACE**

### **THERE IS GRACE WHICH IS YET TO COME**

Peter said, 'Therefore gird up your minds, be sober, set your hope fully upon the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ' (I Pet. 1:13). His statement, 'the grace that is coming', tells us we do not know all the story of grace, nor have we seen it all.

What does Peter mean by 'the grace which is yet to come'? It is literally 'the grace that is being brought', meaning that it is coming to us now, and is being revealed to us, as Christ himself is being revealed to us. It is not, then, all in the future. At the same time, so much is to be revealed which as yet we do not know, and which we have not yet experienced. In Paul's words, by comparison with the brilliance of the grace we will see at the coming of Christ, we see 'through a glass, darkly' (I Cor. 13: 12, AV). Those of us who see the grace of God brilliantly now

must realize it is yet ‘through a glass, darkly’, and the glory to be will greatly outshine the glory that is now.

## THE GRACE THAT HAS ALREADY COME

‘The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation’; ‘We beheld his glory...full of grace and truth’; ‘When the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared...’ Yes, the grace of God has appeared in the person of Jesus Christ, and this is ‘grace abounding’, ‘great grace’ and ‘glorious grace’, sufficient, and more than sufficient, *now*, for the human race. The contrast between the pitifulness of sin, disobedience and death, with obedience, life and grace in Romans 5:12–21 is so strong as to say we have all the grace, here, in this life, that we would ever need, so that we might think ‘more grace to come’ as somewhat of an anti-climax.

To the contrary! The grace we experience now—i.e. the action of God towards us—is sufficient for all our needs for spiritual growth and maturation, but all our life here is in anticipation of what is yet to be. In Galatians 5:5 Paul says, ‘For through the Spirit, by faith, we wait for the hope of righteousness [justification]’. Paul knows he has already received justification by grace, but his faith operates in hope. He yet looks to the time when that justification—so to speak—will be by sight rather than just by faith. Faith is good for now, but it will not be needed then.

This principle obtains for all things, such as forgiveness, purification, sanctification, sonship and glorification. We have all these and yet they are all ‘eschatological’, i.e. they

will not be realized in fulness until Christ appears. This is part of what Peter means by 'the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ'. These things are gradually being revealed in the present, but will be fully revealed at the coming of Christ. So then, the things of grace we have now are wonderful, and could not be more wonderful in the present time. Even so, they will appear more wonderful when Christ is revealed, i.e. when he will reveal them.

## **ANTICIPATING THE THINGS OF GRACE'S GREATER GRACE**

John said, 'Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is' (I John 3:2). He is saying that what we shall see will be greater than what we now can see. Likewise Paul told the Corinthians (I Cor. 2:9–10), 'What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived. . . God has prepared for those who love him'. He is really saying, 'You have no precedent by which to imagine the wonderful things God has prepared for those who love Him'. When we ponder those words our pulses must quicken because of the glory that lies ahead.

Paul talks about having grace in the present and hoping for wonderful things in the future. He says, 'Through him [Christ] we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God' (Rom. 5:2). In one sense we share that now, and in another sense we are yet to share it. As we need to

say repeatedly, we have everything in hope, by faith.

We do have some sense of the coming things. Paul says that ‘God has revealed [these things] to us, by his Spirit’ (I Cor. 2:10). He adds, ‘For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God’. He means the Spirit can communicate to us, in the depths, something of the depths of God. John told his readers that they had an anointing from the Holy One, and that they knew ‘all things’ (I John 2:20). This would include things eschatological. Peter says, ‘Without having seen him you love him; though you do not now see him you believe in him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy’ (I Pet. 1:8). ‘Exalted joy’ can be translated ‘joy that is full of glory’, i.e. the glory to come is already part of your joy. You are tasting ‘things to come’.

## **THE THINGS OF THE GRACE WHICH IS TO COME**

The key to this section is that whilst these things are yet to come in all their fulness, we already have something of them. We may call them ‘the first fruits’ (Rom. 8:23), as though they were a minimal token of what is yet to come, but such first fruits are real to us now, and are our present possession: they are grace working *now*. Knowing this, and being incredibly enriched by these first fruits, we may now proceed to discuss the anticipated fulness which lies ahead. As we take each element of grace we will see that we know it in part now, and will know it in fulness in the end-time, i.e. that time which we call ‘the eschaton’. In one sense there is nothing to come which we do not have

in part now, yet its fulfilment will be beyond human dreaming (I Cor. 2:10).

### **The Grace of Holiness**

Nothing is of grace which is a natural outcome of creation, yet because the 'natural' outcome of creation has been arrested by sin, then when God determines to fulfil His plan, it must be 'all of grace'. This is the case with the holiness of man. Man was holy by creation but lost that holiness. Even so grace had determined— before creation— that 'we should be holy and blameless before him'. In Chapter 31 ('The Grace that Sanctifies'), we saw how God's grace brought us to present and eschatological holiness.

In Revelation 7:9–15 God's action in purifying man is seen. Christ's death has cleansed, and without fear the redeemed enter the temple to worship God. In Revelation 19:6–9 the marriage of the Bride and the Lamb is described, and the bride is decked in 'fine linen, bright and pure, for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints'. This holiness is reflected in 'the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen white and pure' (verse 14). In Revelation 21:27 it is said that nothing unclean shall enter the Holy City, and that Holy City (Rev. 21:1–4, 9–11) is the people of God, the true Bride, 'having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel'.

John said (I John 3:1–3) that 'we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is', and added, 'and every one who thus hopes in him purifies himself'. What we are yet to be, we seek now to be. Hence Paul's exhortations, 'Let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and

spirit, and make holiness perfect in the fear of God', and, 'If anyone purifies himself from what is ignoble, then he will be a vessel for noble use' (II Cor. 7: 1; II Tim. 2:21).

At the same time the apostolic teaching was one of God continually working to perfect holiness in us. Christ sanctifies the church, 'having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish' (Eph. 5:26–27; cf. Col. 1:21–22; I Thess. 5: 23–24). Philipians 3:1–6, 8–11 and I Thessalonians 3:12–13 show that at this present time love works that process of holiness which climaxes in the eschaton as the intrinsic holiness of each believer.

What the sheer joy and relief of a believer will be at coming to ultimate and irreversible holiness we cannot say, but we can imagine it. Jesus said the pure in heart will see God, and John says, of the saints, 'They shall see his face, and his name shall be on their foreheads' (Rev. 22:4). To be in the intimate presence of God, to know nothing of impurity is present, and to be finished with the old struggle with it, will be a glorious state in which to live. The rare times of feeling utterly utterly pure, and being shed of old impurity, are enough foretaste of the coming reality to make us rejoice in the grace that is coming to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ, for he is the complete revelation of utter holiness.

### **The Grace of Sonship**

Paul places the 'sonship' (i.e. 'adoption') as the first of the great grace-gifts to Israel (Rom. 9:4). Like holiness,

sonship was planned before creation, yet Paul is keen for us to know it was planned in *grace*: 'He predestined us in love to be his sons *through Jesus Christ*, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved' (Eph. 1:5–6). We may well debate whether sonship was a natural part of creation (Acts 17:28; Luke 3:38), but we cannot debate that eschatological sonship is only of grace. Because it is 'through Jesus Christ' it is not of nature but of grace.

What, then, is the ultimate sonship? Romans 8:29 says 'For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brethren'. This is the same principle as found in I John 3:1–3, where we are shown that 'we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is'. The Son is the Older Brother (cf. Heb. 2:11–17; John '20:17). By saying, 'he is not ashamed to call them brethren' the author of Hebrews is insisting we are of the same stock as the true Son, and Jesus' saying, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father', is confirming the use of 'my brethren', a term which he used only after his resurrection; never before.

All this means that the sonship which we now have through grace we will know fully at the end-time, and throughout eternity. God says, 'He who conquers... shall be my son' (Rev. 21:7). What it will mean to look into the Father's face and cry 'Abba!' to Him in all assurance-like other elements of grace—defies present description. What we do know is that Fatherhood is what created us, what redeemed us, and sonship is what is the essential core of our being. Emotionally, relationally, and in every other way, our humanity will find its

total fulfilment when it comes into the absolute grace of sonship.

### **The Grace of Inheritance**

Inheritance represents a vast subject through Scripture. We cannot say it is explicitly stated in Genesis 1:28, but it is certainly inferred. Man is told to ‘be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it’, and the thought is that he will possess it. By the Fall, man, in some sense, abdicated this role of stewardship, but he is commanded afresh following the Flood (Gen. 9:1), ‘be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth’. In this second mandate there is an element absent from the first, i.e. ‘the fear of you’ will now be upon all creatures. It is reasonable to think—though we cannot conclude—that had man not sinned he would not have met death as he now knows it: he would have ‘inherited’ the world. Doubtless because he was not immortal—of himself—if a ‘death’ had come to him it would have had no unpleasantness attached, and perhaps have been like Enoch’s translation.

Paul sums up the Abrahamic Covenant by saying it applies to the world as Abraham’s inheritance, ‘The promise to Abraham and his descendants, that they should inherit the world, did not come through the law, but through the righteousness of faith’ (Rom. 4:13). It sounds very much like, ‘Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth’ (Matt. 5:5; Ps. 37:9, 11), and it is exactly that.

In Galatians Paul makes much of being the children of Abraham, and so of being heirs within the covenant. He says that ‘men of faith are blessed with Abraham who

had faith', and, 'If you are Christ's then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise' (3:9, 29). In the same context he is saying that to be persons of faith is to be sons of God, and in Romans 8:14–17 he pursues the matter of being sons of God, concluding, 'If children [of God] then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ'.

The inheritance of sonship is stated clearly in Revelation 21:7, 'He who conquers shall have this heritage, and I will be his God, and he shall be my son'. What, then, is the heritage? It is 'the new heavens and the new earth'! That makes us gasp, for we will inherit 'all things'. The principle of receiving 'all things' as conquerors is seen in Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26–27; 3:12, 21. Notice, then, that the inheritance is never apart from the sonship, and a true son is a true conqueror.

Peter speaks in glowing terms of 'an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled and unfading, kept in heaven for you' (I Pet. I :4). It must, then, be very beautiful. And so it is. Elsewhere it is spoken of as inheriting the Kingdom of heaven, and nowhere no more powerfully than in the parable of the sheep and the goats. Jesus said, 'Then will the King say to those at his right hand, "Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world".' He concludes that 'the righteous [will go] into eternal life' (Matt. 25:34, 46).

So highly esteemed is the fact of inheriting the Kingdom that many warnings are given against presumption. If one lives in 'the works of the flesh' and assumes he will enter the Kingdom, then that assumption is presumption. 'Those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom

of God' (Gal. 5:21). Nothing impure shall enter the Holy City. There the will of God and the Lamb is done in entirety.

### **The Grace of Resurrection to Eternal Life**

I Peter 3:7 speaks of 'the grace of life'. Created life was a gift, but eternal life is the gift of grace. Peter says, 'By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead' (I Pet. 1:3). The 'living hope' is also 'the hope of life'. Daniel's angel had prophesied,

' . . . at that time your people shall be delivered, every one whose name shall be found written in the book [of life]. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever' (Dan. 12:1-3).

Eternal life is not merely a continuum of time, or even of being. It is the true life of God possessing a person: it is an unbroken relationship with the Father and the Son lived out on earth and in heaven (cf. John 17:3; I John 5:12, 20). As Peter shows, it comes to man out of the Cross and Resurrection of Christ. Paul asserts, '[He] has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel' (II Tim. 1: 10).

The idea of death has always been abhorrent to man. Even the deterioration of the body, its gradual decay, and the final dissolution of it in corruption—'ashes to ashes, dust to dust'—has always troubled him. As one has said, 'Man's fear of death is not because he will die, but

because he has to die'. The dread of coming judgement in facing the Holy Creator and Judge is what profoundly disturbs man.

In the light of this, the prospect of the brilliant coming grace assures believing man. He will have 'a body of glory'. 'Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven' (I Cor. 15:49).

Our commonwealth is in heaven, and from it we await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself (Phil. 3:20–21).

His 'glorious body' is 'a body of glory', and ours shall be like his! To anticipate this grace is wonderfully comforting, but to come into it—why that is amazing! To have a body which has not only the properties of Christ's resurrected body, but of his whole glory, is beyond present comprehension.

### **The Grace of Inherited Glory**

Whilst we are dealing with different elements of 'the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ', yet they really constitute one whole. There is the glory of sonship, of the inheritance, of the Kingdom, of eternal life. We repeat the principle of I Corinthians 2:10 regarding this glory: that nothing the eye has seen, the ear heard, or the mind imagined can conduct us to the reality of the glory—to-come. Paul adds that the Holy Spirit has revealed these things to us, that what we grasp becomes the basis for genuine hope.

Paul, in Ephesians 1, refers first to 'the praise of the

glory of his grace', and then to 'the praise of his glory'. As we have said, these are two different things, although related. The hymn which says, 'He maketh the rebel a priest and a king', really tells of grace 'from the guttermost to the uttermost'. It may be humiliating to human pride but it is exhilarating to the humbled believer. Paul talks about 'the riches of his grace which he lavished upon us'. 'Lavished' is a beautiful word. Paul also speaks of 'eschatological grace', saying, 'that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus' (Eph. 2:7). This, then, is 'glorious grace'.

Glorious grace is, of course, 'the grace of glory', but as we have mentioned, Paul also speaks of us being it the praise of His glory', i.e. both Jews and Gentiles will ultimately reflect the glory of God (Eph. 1:11-14). Man, by creation (and recreation also), because he is 'the image and glory of God', will, in the eschaton, be 'the brightness of his glory and the express image of his person'. The glory of God's holiness, goodness, righteousness, truth and love will be seen to have expressed itself wholly in redeemed man. We can call this the ultimate triumph of God's grace. This is what Paul refers to in such glowing terms as 'the unveiling of the sons of God', i.e. 'the liberty of glory of the sons of God' (Rom. 8:19, 21). This is assured by Christ being amongst and in his people: 'Christ in you, the hope [fixed assurance] of glory' (Col. 1:27).

All of this adds up to something quite substantial. At this time, and in this life, we, as believers, have the first fruits of glory. We are being changed from one stage of glory to another (11 Cor. 3:18), and in the process we

experience suffering (Rom. 8:17–25; II Cor. 4:16), yet this is not the *cost* of glory, but rather the way of glorification: ‘For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison’. When we see His glory we shall be glorious. Indeed we will have that body of glory which is like his (Christ’s) body of glory. All of this is what Paul calls ‘the surpassing glory’.

### **The Grace that Is Coming to You**

When we heap up the references to coming grace, as we have in this chapter, we see the material is so prodigal as to defy capturing the whole picture and filling in the details of so vast a canvas. It is overwhelming both in its immensity and quality, for it involves the new heavens and the new earth and all eternity. It involves the Father, the Lamb and the Holy Spirit, all creatures celestial and terrestrial, and the family of God’s people. It involves the plan or ‘mystery’ of God, and its final and irreversible fulfilment.

In Revelation 10:1–7 there is a brilliant picture of a ‘mighty angel’:

And the angel whom I saw standing on sea and land lifted up his right hand to heaven and swore by him who lives for ever and ever, who created heaven and what is in it, the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it, that there should be no more delay, but that in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel, the mystery of God, as he announced to his servants the prophets, should be fulfilled (verses 5–7).

Paul speaks of this ‘mystery of God’ in many ways. He speaks of ‘the plan of the mystery’ and claims that ‘He has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery

of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fulness of time, to *unite all things in him*, things in heaven and things on earth' (Eph. 1:9–10). In Ephesians 2:11 to 3:11 he speaks of the uniting of Jew and Gentile in the new body, the new humanity, i.e. the church.

In Colossians 1:19–21 Paul further uses the figure of reconciliation. He says that the mystery of the plan is 'to *reconcile to himself all things*, whether on earth or in heaven'. Yet another figure is used in Ephesians 4:10, namely 'fulness' (*pleroma*): 'He who descended is he who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he *might fill all things*'. He fills all things which are 'empty' (*kenos*), from his own fulness, as in Ephesians 1:23 where the church is filled from his fulness, and so shares with him in filling 'all things'. The means by which this is done is love, 'which binds everything together in perfect harmony', i.e. 'the bond of completeness' (Col. 3:14).

This ultimate unity, reconciliation, filling up and harmonizing of all things is 'the plan of the mystery'. This is grace consummating God's plan which was fore-ordained and predestined to completion. God does not fulfil it by sheer naked power, but by His holy love. We see then that the whole creation is groaning together, waiting for this wonderful day when the sons of God shall be unveiled and all the glory shall be revealed to the Father's entire creation, the day when His children shall 'see him face to face' and serve and worship Him forever as a mighty kingdom of priests. This they shall do in the Holy City whose dimensions cover 'all things', the City in which flow the waters of the river of life, and on the banks of which is the tree of life, endlessly bearing the

fruits of love, and whose leaves are (were) 'for the healing of the nations'.

Then we will fully understand the nature, essence, and dimensions of 'great grace', 'abounding grace', 'the riches of His grace' and 'glorious grace', i.e. the grace of the surpassing glory. We will understand why all creation thunders adulation to the King of glory, and how it will be 'to the praise of His glorious grace' and also be 'to the praise of His glory'.

## APPENDIX

### JESUS AND GRACE IN THE GOSPELS

Sometimes in the search for the historic Christ we have sought to clear what we call the accretions of myth and churchly interpretation to get to the man Jesus. No one seems to have succeeded. The Gospels—for their part—portray Jesus as a person who was sure of his calling and of himself, i.e. who he was, and what he was about. The form of who and what he was seems generally to have been given its true substance by the Gospel writers. The sum total of the Gospel picture leaves us with no doubt that he saw himself as God's Son, and that he said and did nothing but what the Scriptures had foretold, along with what his Father was telling him directly—these two, in reality, being the one.

It is true enough to say that much of our picture of him is formed by the teaching given in the Acts and the

Epistles, and this is how it would have to be. We come to the Gospels via the Acts, Epistles and the Revelation, as we keep coming to these via the Gospels. We are left in no doubt as to how the early church saw him. Of course the apostles interpreted him to their hearers as they believed the Holy Spirit had interpreted him to them. They saw themselves as witnesses, firstly to Christ himself as the Sent One of God, and as the Redeemer of humanity by virtue of his cross and resurrection, to say—nothing of his incarnation, lifelong obedience to God and his ultimate ascension to the Father’s side to reign as Lord of history. We would expect the followers of Christ to paint him on a vast canvas. This prophetic and eschatological canvas was already there. After his resurrection he averred that all the Old Testament Scriptures spoke of him. His statement might be summed up by Revelation 19: 10, ‘The testimony of Jesus is the spirit [Spirit?] of prophecy’. Hence the apostles said they proclaimed nothing but what the prophets had spoken. What we have to realize is that the Gospels, Acts and Epistles were all expressions of the dynamic community that arose out of the redemption of Christ and the coming of the Spirit. It is difficult to see how our inquiry into these documents can be a purely scientific one, and even how our textual examinations, along with form criticism and the like, can add— or subtract—from what was there.

We say these words by way of introduction to seeing the picture of Jesus in the Gospel accounts, especially as that picture relates to the matter of grace. In fact, Jesus never used the word ‘grace’ as such, and whilst his life shows grace, he was not much concerned with the subject as such; not, anyway, directly. The Gospels are no

resource to lead us to a word study on the subject of grace, yet when Paul reported, ‘The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation, he was speaking only of the person and work of Jesus.

The person and work of Jesus was one of love. This is shown in his receiving of sinners. Luke 15 tells of the lost coin, the lost sheep and the lost son, as against ‘the Pharisees and scribes who murmured, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them.’ ‘ He told the parable of the Pharisee and the tax gatherer in the face of ‘those who thought they were righteous and despised others’. The conclusion to the story was that the tax gatherer went down to his house *justified*, but the Pharisee remained unjustified.

Again Jesus received ‘the woman who was a sinner’, and told her, her sins were forgiven, for she had loved much. The latter was the test and proof of her having been forgiven. He spoke the effective word of forgiveness to the paralysed man. The woman at the well was virtually cleared of her past sins: ‘Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did!’ His saying to the woman taken in adultery, ‘Neither do I condemn you. Go, and sin no more’, sounds like the Pauline, ‘There is therefore no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus’.

His healings of men and women were from the oppression of the devil (Acts 10:38; cf. Luke 4:18). It was not only that demons were cast out; a woman who had been bent for eighteen years was set upright, and whilst a tax gatherer Zacchaeus was liberated from his idolatry of wealth, the guilt of the past was also cleared away.

The story of the labourers in the vineyard (Luke 20: 1–16) is perhaps the most difficult of Jesus’ grace teaching

to receive. Whilst it has proved a relief to countless converts who have come into the Kingdom after the wastage of many years, yet it stirs a sense of injustice in those who call themselves ‘fair-minded’. ‘Every man a penny’ (AV) causes anger where it should evoke admiration. If we loved we would be glad of its message. We hate grace because we think we earn all we have, and to see anything given gratuitously to another seems unjust. We are, by fallen nature, bitter enemies of grace.

Grace is the most difficult of all messages to receive. That sinners should go scot-free through forgiveness, that mere fishermen should become apostles of the Messiah, and that one of them should be a wretched tax gatherer—this is beyond belief! That that tax gatherer should make a great feast of celebration and call his friends, is wrong in the face of legalistic religion. The statement, ‘I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance’, was clearly enough in the spirit of the Jewish faith, but it had long ago been lost in practice. Such grace seemed to encourage sinners in their sin!

In fact it portrays the enormous joy repentance brings. A prodigal son repents before his father and heaven, and knows the sweetness of acceptance. The short-statured tax gatherer knows the release from his money-idolatry and freely gives because he has freely received. The tax gatherer called in apostleship from his mean craft is stunned by the total acceptance of the Messiah. A woman walks away from the shame of her adultery to live free from such unholy passion, whilst a prostitute is granted a pure mind and a rehabilitated personhood. A woman who lives in the uncertainty of a life possessed by demons becomes a classic for a woman’s love of the

Master when her demons are exorcised for ever. A dying thief hears the Son address the Father in words that cry out for grace, and he knows he is forgiven and anticipates entrance into the very Kingdom of God.

Jesus has other ways of indicating the plenitude of grace. The Cross is ever in his mind. He cares to speak of its indispensability. Three times in one Gospel he prophesies the event of the Cross and Resurrection (Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33). Anyone who would follow him must see the Cross at the end of the road he travels: this is true 'taking up the Cross'. On the Mount of his transfiguration he discusses the event of the death with the glorified Moses and Elijah. He claims he is the suffering servant come to serve by giving his life a ransom for many. Every man must eat the bread sent down from heaven if he would live, and 'the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh' (John 6:51).

Amongst such sayings and indications, nothing is stronger than his act at the Last Supper. The paschal wine is 'my blood of the covenant which is poured out for the forgiveness of sins'. The cry for forgiveness on the cross is based on the grace of the Holy Father. It admits a thief into the Kingdom of God, and it is in the matter of the Kingdom that grace is so evident. Jesus 'whole proclamation was of the Kingdom—thy God reigns'—and yet the Gospel of the Kingdom was soon—through Cross and Resurrection—to become the Gospel of redemption. John the Baptist had called for repentance of sins with a view to entrance into the Kingdom, and at the Last Supper Jesus had linked both the forgiveness of sins and entrance into the (eschatological) Kingdom so closely that henceforth they would be inseparable.

When we see Jesus' ministry holistically, and not piece-meal, and when we view the grand total of his words, his actions and his unique self, then we are struck by the extravagance of grace. We only have to ask—as we ought to ask time and again—'What if he had never come? What if he had not said what he said, and did what he did, and had not been what he was? What then? What of the world, and what of history?'

To seek grace as a mere theme, or as evidence piled up through use of that one word to prove its presence and authenticity—this is impoverished research. We must face the man. Indeed, we must face the question, 'What think you of Christ? Whose Son is he?', and the answer to that question will decide what we know—or do not know—of 'the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ'.

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