

CHAPTER XIII

THE GRACE OF GOD

For every Christian God is to be thanked. *"First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world"* (Rom. 1:8). *"But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you"* (Rom. 6:17). Salvation is of grace both in its **planning and working**. God who made the plan also works the plan. And all is of grace, the unmerited and unmeritable favor of God. God is both the Architect and Builder of the house made of living stones. *"Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ"* (1 Peter 2:5). Christ said, *"I will build My church."* If we may change the figure, God sets the Gospel table and also gives appetite for the bread of life. The Holy Spirit fills the Father's house by compelling them to come in. This is not external compulsion, which would destroy human free agency, but an inward compulsion by which the sinner becomes willing. *"Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth"* (Ps. 110:3). And this willingness is the result of the Spirit conviction of sin and His revelation in the sinner of Christ as Saviour and Lord. In a word men believe through grace. *"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God"* (Eph. 2:8). When Apollos came into Achaia, bearing letters of recommendation to the disciples there this was recorded: *"And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace"* (Acts 18 :27).

A man was once speaking of himself as a self-made man. One who heard him in his boasting, said, "It's quite noble of you to say so. Most men would have blamed their luck, or their wives, or even laid the responsibility on the shoulders of the Creator." It seems natural and easy for a man to worship his Maker, and therefore, the self-made man naturally worships himself. But every believer is a grace made man. Paul, as a Christian, delighted to say, *"But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me"* (1 Cor. 15:10). In an experience of grace, the Holy Spirit, by the convicting power of the word, gives the sinner a sight of self, and then relieves the resultant distress by giving him, through the Gospel, a sight of Christ. An old Puritan once cried out, "Oh, where had I been if I had not spied out Christ?"

Definitions of Grace

The Greek word "charis" occurs in the New Testament more than one hundred and fifty times and is usually translated "grace" in our English Bible. It is not easy to take a word employed so many times and with such a diversity of application and develop a doctrine that will be uniform and consistent. Moreover, all the truth about grace cannot be compressed into a single sentence. Grace is one of the Divine perfections or attributes in the nature of God which is exercised in the salvation of sinners. Great and good men have grappled with the subject of grace in an effort to define and describe it. May we prayerfully ponder some of them:

Dr. Dale: "Grace is love which passes beyond all claims to love." Grace is not the sinner's due; it is not something he earns; it is not something he can lay claim to.

Alexander Whyte: "Grace and love are essentially the same, only grace is love manifesting itself and operating under certain conditions, and adapting itself to certain circumstances. As, for example, love has no limit or law such as grace has. Love may exist between equals, or it may rise to those above us, or flow down to those in any way beneath us. But grace, from its nature, has only one direction it can take. Grace always flows down. Grace is love indeed, but it is love to creatures humbling itself. A king's love to his equals, or to his own royal house, is love; but his love to his subjects is called grace. And thus it is that God's love to sinners is always called grace." This quotation deserves repeated readings.

Alexander Maclaren: "The word grace is a kind of shorthand for the whole sum of unmerited blessings which come to men through Jesus Christ. Primarily, it describes what we, for want of a better expression, have to call a 'disposition' in the Divine nature; and it means the unconditioned, undeserved, spontaneous, eternal, stooping, pardoning love of God. But there are no idle dispositions in God. They are always energizing, and so the word glides from meaning the disposition, to meaning the manifestations and activities of it, and the grace of our Lord is that love in exercise. And then, since the Divine energies are never fruitless, the word passes over further, to mean all the blessed things in the soul which are the consequences of the Promethean truth of God's loving hand, the outcome in life of the inward bestowment which has its cause, its sole cause, in God's ceaseless, unexhausted love, unmerited and free." This quotation must be studied to get the most out of it.

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

In analyzing all these definitions and descriptions of grace, we find that the word is applied to three

things in the Scriptures. First, God's attitude or disposition of love and favor towards a sinner is grace. It is said that *"Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord"* (Gen. 6:8). God's attitude towards him was a disposition of favor and love, and inasmuch as Noah was a sinner, that disposition of love was grace. Second, when God does something for the sinner's good, that is grace. *"By grace have ye been saved"* (R. V.). Third, the effects or fruit of the inwrought grace in the believer is also called grace. The graces or virtues in the saints are produced by the grace of God working in them. The disposition of the Macedonians to give so liberally is called grace: *"Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia"* (II Cor. 8:1); and the money given for the poor saints at Jerusalem is also called grace: *"For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem"* (Rom. 15:26). The changed lives of the people whom Barnabas saw at Antioch is called the grace of God. *"Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord"* (Acts 11:23).

"Grace is a charming sound,
Harmonious to the ear;
Heaven with the echo shall resound
And all the earth shall hear"

How to Better Understand Grace

Perhaps the best way to understand the meaning of grace is to see how it is contrasted in the Bible with other things:

1. It is contrasted with law in its origin and nature. *"For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ"* (Jno. 1:17). Moses was the voice of law; Christ was the spokesman for grace. It is the nature of law to make demands; it is the nature of grace to bestow blessings. The law is a ministry of condemnation; grace is the ministry of forgiveness. The law puts man at a guilty distance from God; grace brings the sinner nigh to God. The law condemns the best man; grace saves the worst man. The law says, "Do and live;" grace says, "Believe and live." The law demands righteousness; grace provides righteousness. The law curses; grace redeems from the curse. As long as a man is under the law he is lost; the only way to get out from under the law is through faith in Christ, *"For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth"* (Rom. 10:4). *"For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace"* (Rom. 6:14).

2. Grace is contrasted with sin in its issue. Sin reigns unto death; grace reigns unto eternal life:

"That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 5:21). Sin gets its damning power from the law: "The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law" (1 Cor. 15:56); grace robs sin of its damning power by giving Christ for the satisfaction of the law: "But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:57). The one and only source of real danger is from violated law; the one and only way of escape is through a satisfied law. Christ satisfied the law for His people, that the law might be satisfied with them. "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death" (Rom. 8:2).

3. Grace is contrasted with works in the plan of salvation. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8,9). Salvation is by the grace of the Creator rather than by works of the creature. Salvation by grace precludes the idea of any works either great or small, moral or ceremonial. Salvation by grace excludes boasting and gives all praise to God. "And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace: otherwise work is no more work" (Rom. 11:6). "Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith" (Rom. 3:27)

"Grace first contrived the way
To save rebellious man;
And all the steps that grace display
Which drew the wondrous plan,"

4. Grace is contrasted with debt or obligation as to the moving cause of salvation. "Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness" (Rom. 4:4,5). The thought here is this: the man who draws wages for his work does not have any grace shown him, but a debt or obligation paid to him. There is no grace where a man gets what he deserves or earns. Grace excludes the principle of debt or obligation. Salvation by grace means that God is not obligated to save. If there is obligation to save then salvation is not by grace as the moving cause. It was grace in God, and not a debt He was under, that caused Him to provide salvation for sinners. Toplady well says: "The way to heaven lies not over a toll-bridge, but over a free-bridge; even the unmerited grace of God in Christ Jesus. Grace finds us beggars but leaves us debtors."

"High as the heavens are raised
Above the ground we tread,

So far the riches of His grace
Our highest thoughts: exceed."

Grace in the Trinity

All three persons in the Godhead are equally gracious towards sinners. The grace of the Father, Son, and Spirit are equal in degree and extent, but distinct in operation and administration.

1. The Father is the fountain of all grace. He proposed the fact and plan of grace. He formulated the covenant of grace, and devised the means "whereby His banished should not be expelled from Him." He made choice by grace of the subjects of grace, and then in fulness of time sent His Son into the world to be the medium of grace. "But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Gal. 4:4,5).

2. The eternal Son is the channel of grace. The only way the grace of God can reach the sinner is through the Lord Jesus Christ. "*For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ*" (John 1:17). Let no rejector of God's Son think himself to be the beneficiary of God's grace! His work reconciled Grace and Justice, as it is written, "*Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other*" (Ps. 85:10).

John Bunyan, blissfully lost in the contemplation of the matchless grace of the Son of God, cried out in these words:

"O Thou Son of the Blessed! Grace stripped Thee of Thy glory; grace brought Thee down from heaven; grace made Thee bear such burdens of sin, such burdens of curse as are unspeakable; grace was in Thy heart; grace came bubbling from Thy bleeding side; grace was in Thy tears; grace was in Thy prayers; grace streamed from Thy thorn crowned brow! Grace came forth with the nails that pierced Thee, with the thorns that pricked Thee! Oh, here the unsearchable riches of grace! Grace to make sinners happy! Grace to make angels wonder! Grace to make devils astonished!"

3. The Holy Spirit is the administrator of grace. Without the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit in conversion no sinner would ever become a beneficiary of grace. He takes of the things of Christ and gives them to the sinner. He quickens all the souls of the Father's choice, and leads to Jesus Christ all the sheep for whom the dear Shepherd laid down His life. "*I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep*" (John 10:11). He conquers the stoutest hearts, and cleanses the foulest spiritual leper. He opensin blinded eyes and unstops sin closed ears. The blessed Holy Spirit reveals the grace of the Father and applies the grace of the Son.

"We may listen to the preacher,
God's own truth be clearly shown;
But we need a greater teacher
From the everlasting throne;
Application is the work of God alone."