



FEED MY SHEEP

PUBLISHED BY DR. JAMES W. BRUGGEMAN
STONE KINGDOM MINISTRIES
P. O. BOX 5695
ASHEVILLE, NC 28813 U.S.A.

See my blog at www.stonekingdom.org

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Grace for the Race

Part 1: Grace in the Old and New Testaments are Different

Last issue, we concluded our study on love, one of the fruits of the Spirit. When we began our study on the fruits of the Spirit, it did not occur to me that I might be getting the cart before the horse. It seems to me that we really ought to lay a foundation for our understanding of the fruits of the spirit by first making sure we understand some of the basics about the doctrine of grace. Otherwise, we run the risk of becoming entangled in legalism and becoming “works-oriented.” If we are not careful, we will find ourselves in a Roman Catholic mindset in that area. In fact, much of evangelical Protestantism has been afflicted with exactly that in practical terms for many generations.

In the title for this study, *Grace for the Race*, I use that word *race* as a reference to two places in the New Testament: First, Paul says in.....

1 Corinthians 9:24 Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.

The word *race* in Greek is *stadion* and referred to a contest in the Greek games which today would be the equivalent of the 200-yard dash. A theological question arises: Since Paul noted that there are many runners, but only one can win; was he likening this to the race for salvation!?

In other words, there are many Christians trying to “get to heaven,” but was Paul inferring that only *one* would win the prize? Not hardly. So why did Paul liken it to a footrace? Let’s look at the context. We notice that in verse 23, Paul talks about being a partaker

of the good news with the Corinthian believers.

1 Corinthians 9:23 And this I do for the gospel’s sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you.

So it is a ridiculous notion that it is a race that only one can win; but still, why the analogy? Let’s look at the other reference to a race in the New Testament

Hebrews 12:1 Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,

What kind of race does one run with patience? That almost sounds oxymoronic. Here, the word *race* is the Greek word ἀγών {ag-one’}and it really does not mean a footrace per se, but rather *any* struggle or contest or battle. The race that is set before us is the personal struggle or battle that each of us wages against sin and iniquity. So the race Paul is referring to is not a me-against-you type of race where one of us will win while the other loses.

The competition is not between you and me. The competition is between you and yourself; and there is another race between me and myself. That is to say, in my race, it is a struggle between James-Adam and James-Christ. It is a battle between the old, carnal Adamic nature and the new, spiritual Christ nature.

The carnal and the spiritual are at war within us. What we need to *win* this battle or race is grace. In fact, without grace, we cannot even *commence* the race—and

we will show that in our discussion of “grace for the race.”

The term *grace* is used in several different ways in Scripture. It was in very common usage in classical, secular Greek and many of these meanings are found carried over into the Scriptures. We will give examples shortly. As in our common parlance today, there are a variety of meanings for the word “grace.”

For example, we say grace before a meal or we ask someone to grace us with their company. Yet, that means something quite different from when we speak of how the ballerina glided across the stage with such poise and grace. Or how superbly the violinist played the grace notes in Mozart’s violin concerto. None of those meanings is synonymous, though, with the meaning of *grace for the race*.

The grace for the race is the kind of grace whose meaning was developed primarily in the writings of Paul. What Paul did was to take some of the common secular meanings of grace (the Greek word *charis*) and he welded them together and elevated it into a peculiarly Christian concept.

It is that uniquely Pauline meaning of grace on which we wish to focus. This is the grace which is very simply defined as *the unmerited favor of God*. We will expand on that later, but going back to Paul as the inventor of this peculiarly Christian word...

One might wonder, “Well, who does Paul think he is...to invent new uses for words?” And of course, some Higher Critics and liberal theologians promote the idea that Paul is the real inventor of the religion called Christianity; and some say that he perverted the true religion brought by Jesus, and on and on they criticize Paul *ad nauseam*.

In discussing the subject of grace, they might accurately point out that the Greek word for grace is not found at all in the gospels of Matthew and Mark and rarely in the gospels and epistles of John.

In fact, they would continue, Jesus spoke in Aramaic, but even in Luke’s gospel, there were only four times when Jesus mentioned the idea of grace and when He did, it carried the common, secular meaning of thanks or gratitude, not the very specialized meaning that Paul gave it. So it was Paul who really formulated much of the theology of Christianity, not Jesus

Himself, so the anti-Paul gang accuses.

And I would say, “that is correct.” So who does Paul think he is? Well, he himself admits he was the chief of sinners, but he also confesses that he was saved by the grace of God, as Paul himself denotes that term *grace*.

Furthermore, we must understand that Paul was a chosen instrument of God to be the scholar who had the academic background to set forth the fine points of the theology of the Christian faith. Now to the liberal critics we say, you either believe that God commissioned Paul or you don’t.

But before you pull out your scissors to excise Paul’s writings from the New Testament, just remember that Paul was accepted as a genuine apostle by the other eleven, so that those criticisms of Paul being some sort of usurper who hijacked the new religion and bent it to his own purposes, that type of criticism is engaging in the most ludicrous folly.

After all, in speaking of Jesus using *charis* only in the secular Greek sense of gratitude, that is only logical because He could not have used it in the sense that Paul later came to attach to it, because it was Jesus’ very own death and resurrection which gave the special Pauline meaning to the word grace. Let me present one passage where Jesus uses the word *charis*.

Luke 6:31 And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.

We all recognize that verse as the Golden Rule.

32 For if ye love them which love you, what thank [*charis* – reward, benefit] have ye? for sinners also love those that love them.

33 And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same

It is clear that Jesus’ use of the word *charis* there is far removed from meaning the unmerited favor of God, but now to repeat the point for emphasis: That is only logical because Jesus could not have used it in the sense that Paul later came to attach to it, because it was Jesus’ very own death and resurrection which gave the special Pauline meaning to the word grace.

Grace, in the Pauline sense, is virtually a summary

of the Christian gospel. As Paul says in Acts 20:24, it is “a gospel of grace.” Grace is practically a synonym for salvation. Therefore, the death and resurrection of Jesus are the *sine qua non* [Latin phrase (pronounced *see-nay kwah non*); literally, *that not without which*] of the gospel and of salvation. In other words, without the death and resurrection of Jesus, there is no gospel and there is no salvation. Jesus is the embodiment of God’s grace.

Before we zero in on the Pauline theology of grace, however, let us look at the other meanings of grace in the Bible. In the Old Testament (OT), the Hebrew word is usually *khane* and in the Greek, as we have seen, it is *charis*, (pronounced *chareece*); and it can refer to physical beauty. It is a rare usage, but it is there. In that sense, it is used several times in the Book of Proverbs as “an ornament of grace for thy head.”—meaning simply, an ornament of beauty. Even in a figurative sense, it still has that meaning of beauty.

A second meaning of grace—and this is by far the most common meaning in the OT—is that it is an idiomatic equivalent of the way we often use the words, to like, or to love. As in, “Because I like you, I am going to give you such and such.” Or “If you really love me, brother, then you won’t treat me like that.” Except that in the Bible, we find it stated like these examples: The first is when Jacob died in Egypt.

Gen. 50:4 And when the days of his mourning were past, Joseph spake unto the house of Pharaoh, saying, If now I have found grace in your eyes, speak, I pray you, in the ears of Pharaoh, saying,

And then Joseph requests permission to go back to Canaan to bury his father Jacob. In virtually all of these cases in the OT, the word grace is synonymous with favor. “If I have found favor in your eyes.....” “If you really like me, if you think of me highly, etc.”

Another example is when the tribes of Reuben and Gad came to Moses and asked him if they could have the land on the east side of the Jordan river. They said:

Numbers 32:5 Wherefore, said they, if we have found grace in thy sight, let this land be given unto thy servants for a possession, and bring us not over Jordan.

If you recall the rest of that exchange, they cut a

deal. Moses approved these tribes possessing the land on the east of Jordan if they would agree to go to war with the rest of the tribes to drive the Canaanites out of the land on the west side of Jordan. So in a sense, the grace they sought from Moses was contingent on their agreeing to the selective service system.

Then there is the case of Ruth. When Ruth was treated so kindly by Boaz, she wondered why and so she asked Boaz.

Ruth 2:10 Then she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said unto him, Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldst take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?

Was this a case of unmerited favor? Not really. As we read Boaz’s answer, he basically says: Well, I saw how you behaved. I liked your character. It reads:

11 And Boaz answered and said unto her, It hath fully been shewed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother in law since the death of thine husband: and *how* thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore.

So Ruth, in effect, *earned* the grace of Boaz. This is typical usage of the term grace/favor in the OT. This Hebrew word *khane* is found almost 70 times and it is close to being evenly split between being translated as grace and as favor. The vast majority of its occurrences are this idiomatic phrase “to find grace or favor” in someone’s sight.

In almost every use of the word grace or favor, it seems that a person is shown favor *because of their own merits or who they are*. In other words, it appears to not match at all the New Testament (NT) Pauline conception of grace as *unmerited* favor.

For example, in Genesis 39:1-6, Joseph found grace in the eyes of Potiphar. From our human perspective, you could say Joseph earned Potiphar’s favor. Evidently, Joseph’s behavior, mannerisms, character and work ethic, and so forth were pleasing to Potiphar and for that reason, Potiphar favored Joseph. From God’s perspective, though, the reason Joseph found grace from Potiphar was because of God’s grace upon Joseph. It says in...

Genesis 38:3 And his master saw that the LORD *was* with him, and that the LORD made all that he did to prosper in his hand.

So in reality—and this is important—it was God working through Joseph. *Therefore*, even though Paul is credited with creating much of the theology of the New Testament, what Paul was actually doing was revealing truths that were in the OT all along, but which were somewhat hidden from our understanding.

Let's look at another example. In Genesis 32, recall that it concerns the time when Jacob is returning to Canaanland after spending over 21 years up in Haran with Laban his father-in-law? And ever since the little fracas over the birthright blessing 21 years earlier, Jacob's twin brother, Esau, had vowed to kill Jacob. So Jacob is quite naturally concerned for the safety of himself and his family. So to try to assuage the anger of Esau, Jacob sends a wide array of gifts to Esau. Thereby, he hopes he will "find grace" in Esau's eyes.

Genesis 32:3 And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother unto the land of Seir, the country of Edom.

4 And he commanded them, saying, Thus shall ye speak unto my lord Esau; Thy servant Jacob saith thus, I have sojourned with Laban, and stayed there until now:

5 And I have oxen, and asses, flocks, and menservants, and womenservants: and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find grace in thy sight.

6 And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, We came to thy brother Esau, and also he cometh to meet thee, and four hundred men with him.

7 Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed: and he divided the people that *was* with him, and the flocks, and herds, and the camels, into two bands;

And then when Esau and Jacob finally meet after Jake had sent ahead to Esau a huge number of animals as a gift, Esau says to Jacob:

Genesis 33:8 And he said, What *meanest* thou by all this drove which I met? And he said, These are to find grace in the sight of my lord.

This is clearly grace sought for on the basis of merit and works, isn't it? It is a legitimate usage of the

word grace, but it is not the same meaning of grace of the kind which flows from God to us. Jacob gave presents to merit favor with Esau. But all our works are as filthy rags in the sight of YHWH and they merit us nothing (Compare Isaiah 64:6).

As we look at a passage in Deuteronomy 24, we will find the same Hebrew word *khane*, this time translated as "favor." It is part of God's laws on divorce and remarriage. That is a topic about which there is much confusion among Christians. Some say, that according to the NT, no one is allowed to divorce, and if they do, it is certainly a sin. Others say that you can divorce, but if you remarry, that's a sin. Both are wrong. The Bible does allow both divorce and remarriage and neither is a sin.

Deuteronomy 24:1 When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house.

Here again, this is man's usual nature—to find favor or not find favor; to give grace or withhold grace, *based on the actions of the other person*. The husband did not like the wife's behavior; hence, this is described as she finds no favor (grace) in his eyes. This is totally different from God's grace to us.

We would be remiss if we did not mention Noah where it tells how men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and it mentions the cross-breeding going on and how that really angered God, and then it simply says, as if in contrast with those specific sins...

Genesis 6:8 But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD.

We will continue next time to explain the case of "Noah's grace."

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