

"THE GRACE OF GOD"

**"...by grace are ye saved through faith; and that
not of yourselves: it is the gift of God. "**

-Ephesians 2:8

CONSIDER AFRESH the often asked question on the above text: "What is referred to by the last phrase, "it is the gift of God?" Does the apostle teach that grace is the gift of God, or does he say it is salvation, or perhaps that faith is the gift of God?

Look first at the word 'grace.' Aside from the Apostle James' reference to a flower's vanished glory, both 'grace' and 'favor' in the New Testament King James Version are always a translation of the same Greek word, *charis* (*khar'ece*). Its first definition in Strong's Greek Lexicon is "graciousness,...of manner or act." And it is of interest to note that Webster's Ninth Collegiate Dictionary puts as its first definition of grace, "unmerited divine assistance given man for his regeneration or sanctification." So grace is favor, "unmerited favor."

Salvation by Grace

Grace is, therefore, God's unmerited favor - His goodness toward those who have no claim on, nor reason to expect, divine favor. The principal manifestation of God's grace has been in the form of a gift. We think the apostle meant that salvation is "the gift of God," or, as emphatically put in the Greek, "of God is it the gift." Salvation is not our achievement, but it is a gift from God. That truth is made stronger by contrast. It is 'not of ourselves and "not of works." Salvation is indeed the most extraordinary expression of God's grace.

Salvation is of divine origin. But it is not anything that God was bound to arrange by the necessity of His nature. It is the result of His gracious will. Had it not been for His good pleasure, salvation would never have come. "By grace are ye saved." The Greek grammar denotes not the act of being saved, but the fact of having been saved. God's grace rather than human merit is the source of the whole arrangement. We are saved gratuitously. Salvation is a gift; it is not earned.

Faith

But what about faith? We inquire into this because, other than the clearly stated gift of miraculously-conferred faith (1Cor. 12:9), some suggest that it is faith which "is the gift of God." Certainly, faith is a received quality. It is among blessings that answer Paul's rhetorical question, "what has thou that thou didst not receive?" (1 Cor.4:7) But the elements of character which please God, among which is faith, as well as the temporal possessions and necessities held by Jesus' disciples, are generally attained through conscious effort. They are 'received' through our cooperation amidst God's overruling providences.

Faith, wherever present, exists in the mind, and it is generated by the holy spirit's influence of light and peace. Faith, in common with every other Christian virtue, exists in the heart that has responded to spiritual influences. Paul wrote that "all [men] have not faith." (2 Thes. 3:2) That does not suggest, however, that those who have faith received it as "the gift of God" as though an answer to our question. It is one's mind and being that believes. It is not possible for God to believe in man, and convey that

belief as a gift. The apostle wrote, rather, that "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. "-Rom. 10:17

Paul understood that faith is built and constructed; it grows and enlarges. He encouraged believers to increase in faith: "We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth." (2 Thes. 1:3) 'Soundness of faith' comes through hearing, thinking, learning and trusting, and sometimes by victory following rebuke.-Titus 1:13

Salvation through Faith

Salvation is not of ourselves (as seen foregoing). We are saved by grace. Salvation comes through faith in God's revealed purpose in His Son who died for all. Nothing aside from faith would enable our receiving of the gift of salvation. We of the human family were justly condemned to death for sin and disobedience. Those who break God's righteous law have no standing before Him in their righteousness. Since "there is none righteous, no, not one," all need God's grace and favor.

None in the human family has a vantage point or place of approach from which to require or demand God's blessing. God Himself needed to make the first move in the rescue of man. And He did. After the first human pair entered the broad road leading into death, the LORD God made a promise intimating the eventual recovery of mankind from Satan's influence. And God is especially pleased with those who believe, even though few respond to His promises. Those who do respond to God's revealed will are greatly blessed. One of those was Noah. The word 'grace' is first used in Scripture regarding him. "But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD."(Gen. 6:8) The faith of Noah in God's promises saved him and his family from death in the flood.

But now that Jesus has laid down his human life in sacrifice as an atonement for sin, those who follow on in faith in the steps of their heaven-sent Redeemer receive eternal-life salvation. Such faith makes all things new: those far off are brought nigh, they pass from death to life, from disobedience to sonship, from evil conduct to good works, from fleshly desires to spiritual fellowship, from children of wrath to sitting in the heavenly. Those improved relationships are described by the Apostle Paul:

'And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches in His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. Therefore remember, that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh,...were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers in the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

But now in Christ Jesus, you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. "-Eph. 2:1-13

The Way of Salvation

Sin, death, and accompanying sorrows have through the ages, as today, prompted many to inquire into God's saving grace. Our recognition of God's blessing leads to confession of sins and shortcomings, and true heart belief. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved. " (Acts 16:31) That answer of Paul to the fearful prison keeper is still true. None need fears to put trust in Jesus. He purchased all mankind with His precious blood. He has received all power in heaven and earth. Salvation is free to all who trust in Him and continue following on in faith. All devoted believers have the authority to speak on behalf of Christ. We say in Christ's stead to the sincere and honest-hearted, "be ye reconciled to God." (2 Cor. 5:20) Our commission is to direct the sin-weary and heavy-laden to the Savior of all men!

Jesus taught that salvation comes through faith. "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life." (John 5:24 NASB) Faith is taking God at His word, as Paul wrote: "Faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ. "-Rom. 10:17

This is true beyond doubting! We are saved by grace, through faith, through believing the Word of truth. The gospel promises salvation, full and free. God's loving mercy is the "good news" message to the sin-sick and weary-salvation offered freely to all, without money and price.-Isa. 55:1-3

A living and active love for God expands with one's enlarging appreciation of His unmerited favor in the great salvation. "We love Him because He first loved us." (1 John 4:19) And when we come to love God and our Lord Jesus, we come to love those who agree. We grow in loving sympathy for our brethren in their fight for faith. And we come to love all mankind, so loved by God as to send His only begotten Son to suffer cruel death, the price of human redemption.

Gifts from God

Jesus was sent to "save his people from their sins. " (Mat. 1:21) He came to save from death, which is caused by sin. The saved thus have eternal life. "And this is the record that God hath given to us eternal life and this life is in His Son. He that hath [belief in] the Son hath life; and he that hath not [belief in] the Son of God hath not life."(1 John 5:11,12) By God's grace, salvation life is free as a gift through faith.

Again and again, God's gift was affirmed. By Jesus to Nicodemus: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life." - John 3 16

Again by Jesus to the woman: "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." - John 4:14

By Paul to the Corinthians: "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift." - 2 Cor 9:15

Again by Paul to the Romans: "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." - Rom.6.23

"The Grace of God"

What a nice expression - "the grace of God." It prompts pleasant and peaceful thoughts about our Father, the great Creator But Paul's use of "the

grace of God" phrase in Titus 2:11 appears to be with a specific purpose. There the expression refers to the Savior of mankind. That four-word phrase "the grace of God is a synonym for Jesus: "For the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men." How beautiful! The sequence of phrases puts in good perspective the reality of His manifestation. He is the gift of God's grace by which all men may be saved. How wonderful to know it! "The grace of God has appeared!"

Paul wrote a similarly identifying phrase. Its words are specific too - "the goodness and loving-kindness of God." The context shows that those words refer to Jesus. "But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared "God our Savior" - a reference to the Father, of which more to be said later, he God saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but virtue of his mercy by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the holy spirit which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savio." (Titus 3:4-6 "The goodness and loving kindness of God" is another synonym for Jesus, a companion phrase to that in Titus 2:11 - "the grace of God."

The Apostle in Hebrews 2:9 attributes salvation from death to God's grace: "...we see Jesus who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death... that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man." The thought is that Jesus experienced death so that every man who dies need not stay dead forever. Indeed what grace...from "the God of all grace." -1 Pet. 5:10

Paul also shows that "the grace of that one man Jesus Christ" in conjunction with or united with "the grace of God" provided the gift. This is Rom. 5:15,16 "But the gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the gift in the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. And the gift is not like the effect of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the gift following many trespasses brings justification." The twin thoughts which attach to the words "the gift" relate as cause and effect. The first thought is of Jesus - given in death as man's ransom. The second thought is the benefit of that ransom conferred upon all who believe in Jesus - justification with its accompanying salvation.

"God Our Savior"

It is generally acknowledged by commentators that the words "God our Savior" noted above in "the kindness of God our Savior" refer to God himself, not to His Son Jesus. The same three-word phrase was spoken in prayer by Mary of the almighty God and heavenly Father (Luke 1:46-48) and written by Jude in verse 25 of his epistle, and three times by Paul (Titus 2:10, 3:4, 1 Tim: 1:1, 2:3). Aware that God is the architect and all-wise planner of salvation and its process, they all acknowledge the Father as "God our Savior." He is the one God Who has been from everlasting and Who shall be unto everlasting, and Who enlisted the faithful service of His beloved Son.

Grace for Grace

Jesus' disciples perceived that He who walked among them was indeed "full of grace and truth." (John 1:14) He always reflected in God's favor. Fellowship with His Father was never interrupted. Being now perfected in the heavenly, completed by the things which he suffered, having demonstrated faultless obedience despite temptation and accusations of

blasphemy, Jesus sends forth of His fulness as His blessing upon believers. The Apostle John affirmed himself as one of those so greatly blessed.

"For of His fulness we have all received, and grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ." - John 1:16,17, NASB

"Grace for grace"(KJV)...just what does that mean? Surely not that the grace of the old covenant is replaced by that of the new administration. Grace interchanging with grace is meant; grace replaced by fuller grace; greater depths to our spiritual relationship and fellowship; greater measures of spiritual understanding, sustenance, and strength; continual impressions of received favor, new grace coming upon and superseding that formerly received. This becomes true in our individual experiences. Grace is enjoyed in proportion to our growth in appreciation for God's favor channeled through our Redeemer. And that all comes because of and out of His fulness.

"For out of His fulness (abundance) we all received - all had a share and we were all supplied with - one grace after another and spiritual blessing upon spiritual blessing, and even favor upon favor and gift [heaped! upon gift. For while the Law was given through Moses, grace - unearned, undeserved favor and spiritual blessing - and truth came through Jesus Christ. " - John 1:16,17

God's Riches

It is God's richness in the grace that provided the plan for deliverance from disobedience, sin, and death. Paul gave that truth a prominent place in Ephesians for our close consideration.

'He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His God's grace. " - Eph. 1:5-7

Without God's grace, death would mean extinction for all members of the condemned intelligent creation. God has freely wrought His grace to our forgiveness and our inheritance of eternal life. It was all in the view from an early time. God predestined sonship for all repentant trespassers who will avail themselves of His gracious provision of salvation.

Paul emphasized again to the Ephesians God's promised riches of grace to the redeemed. "So that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." - Eph. 2:7

Paul also used the delightful phrase, "the grace of God" early in Colossians. And again it seems to be another direct reference to Jesus. "You previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel, which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth." - Col. 1:5,6

There was a time with each of us, as with the Colossians, when we did not know "the grace of God in truth." They, perhaps as we, may have only heard of Jesus, knowing little about Him, His origin, His purpose, and the hope of the life that centers on Him. But a time came when we did know about God's great grace. Such was the happy experience of those Colossians. Paul took their minds back to the time - when they heard, knew, and believed as truth the words about "the grace of God." "In the word of truth, the gospel" ... "since the day ye heard and knew the grace of God in truth." He mixed, merged, and repeated words that pertain to

salvation...truth, gospel, the grace of God, hearing. Again Paul intentionally put in focus the important aspects of salvation which are supplied through God's riches by Christ Jesus our Lord, the living example of divine grace.