

## **II. THE BIBLICAL TEACHINGS CONCERNING "GRACE"**

Someone has concisely defined grace as "the unmerited favor of God."

Vine's Expository Dictionary or N.T. Words defines grace as... "the friendly disposition from which the kindly act proceeds, graciousness, loving-kindness, goodwill generally" (170).

Another Bible scholar has defined grace in this way:

Grace refers to the essential character of God and tells us what kind of God He is. Graciousness or graces come to an individual because of what the One gracing is within Himself... We might define grace as that intrinsic quality of God's being or essence by which He is spontaneously favorable in His disposition and acting (Pentecost, 19).

Our God is a God of grace. He is kindly disposed within Himself and this disposition manifests itself by showering graces such as mercy and kindness upon others apart from any merit on their behalf.

A couple illustrations of God's grace will convey His essential character and also point out that His disposition and actions toward sinners has nothing to do with what they merit or deserve.

The dying thief on the cross surely did not merit the blessings of salvation but the Lord said, "today shalt thou be with me in paradise." Because God is kindly disposed there was mercy granted to this repentant sinner.

The sinful woman who came to Jesus in Simon's house didn't deserve forgiveness but she was forgiven because God is gracious toward those who turn in repentance.

Now let's look at what the Bible teaches about the grace of God. As we view God's dealings with sinful man we can see that salvation as well as every other blessing from God is by His grace and manifests itself apart from the merit of the one upon whom God's graciousnesses fall.

The Bible Teaches...

### **A. THAT GRACE IS BASED UPON THE VERY ESSENCE OF GOD'S CHARACTER**

1. This means God is gracious and merciful to all men because He is a God of grace. He is not just gracious therefore but grace is the manifestation of His essential being.

2. This means secondly that God has a disposition that manifests itself in being kind toward sinners apart from what they themselves deserve or what they might merit. The expression of this disposition of God's character to show kindness or be gracious is called "mercy".

3. This means God is then merciful to sinners because of who and what He is and not because of who and what they are.

## **B. THAT GRACE IS THE PRINCIPLE OF OPERATION BY WHICH GOD DEALS WITH ALL MEN**

1. This is a principle we see illustrated time and time again in the Old Testament

a. Notice first of all how God dealt with Adam in grace. God placed him in a garden paradise and allowed him to choose between obedience and life and disobedience and death. When Adam chose to disobey God and experienced spiritual death or separation from Him, God manifested His grace and showed mercy to Adam. For Adam's sin God provided a covering for him (Gen. 3:21). As a result of his sin God promised forever a redeemer (Gen. 3:15). God also prevented Adam from living in that fallen state

(Gen. 3:24). It is also apparent that God made a way of access to Himself for Adam (Gen. 4:3, 5). Now all of these things God did for Adam when he sinned were acts of grace. Adam did not deserve any of these things but God was gracious to him and showed mercy upon him.

b. Another example of God's grace is illustrated in how God dealt with Abraham. God called Abraham out of an idolatrous city and made a covenant with him ( Gen. 12:1-3). God counted his faith for righteousness (Gen. 15:6). God made a great nation from him (Gen. 12:2) and established His covenant with Abraham's seed (Gen. 17:7,8). Now all these things were not done to Abraham and to the nation Israel because they were faithful or because they deserved it but rather because God was gracious to them. Abraham was not only unfaithful to the Lord, but so was the whole nation springing out from him. But God was gracious when they sinned because He had established a covenant with Abraham and with his seed and so He was merciful to them because He Himself is faithful. Notice Abraham's unfaithfulness (Gen. 16,20) and the whole O.T. is a record in itself of Israel's unfaithfulness.

c. Some other examples of God's grace can be seen in Lot's deliverance from Sodom (Gen. 19). God's dealings with Cain concerning his offering (Gen., 4:6,7) and especially after he had killed his brother (Gen. 4:15) are other examples. Noah is another upon whom God showed mercy because He is a God of grace (Gen. 6:8).

2. This is a principle we see revealed in the New Testament.

a. Notice how God dealt in grace in the New Testament. It was in the Person of His Son

(Jn. 1:17). Hithertofore God had manifested His grace but it was never seen in His Person.

b. God's dealings with sinners in grace in the person of His Son is seen in the way Jesus showed mercy upon others during His earthly ministry.

(1) He was gracious and showed mercy to the sinful woman in Luke 7 and saved her.

(2) He was gracious to the Samaritan woman by the well in John 4 and gave her the water of life.

(3) Other examples are the woman taken in adultery (Jn. 8); the cleansing of the ten lepers in Lk 17; the call to Zacchaeus (Lk 19); and healing the Nobleman's son (Jn4). These are only a few but they illustrated God's grace in dealing with sinners. None of these deserved what they received but because God is a God of grace He was gracious and showed mercy upon them.

c. God's dealing with sinners in grace in the Person of His Son is seen also in His death upon the cross. He took the sinner's place and died in our stead. He paid the penalty for sin that we might have everlasting life (Gal. 3:13; Rom. 5:15).

(1) Notice this is what He did for those who had gone astray (Isa. 53:5,6).

(2) Notice this was done for us while we were yet sinners (Rom. 5:7,8).

(3) Note also it was for the ungodly who had no strength or means to save themselves (Rom. 5:6).

(4) Note the reason for His death (II Cor. 5:21, Jn. 3:16; II Cor. 8,9).

d. God's dealings with sinners in grace in the Person of His Son is based upon a covenant that He has made with His blood (Heb. 9:11-15). Now just as God was gracious and showed mercy upon Abraham and upon his seed because He had made a covenant with them and was faithful to keep it, so does He manifest grace and show mercy upon those who are under this covenant by faith in Christ. This principle then of grace by which God deals with man shows that He is truly a God of grace.

### **C. THAT GRACE IS THE ONLY MEANS BY WHICH MAN CAN BE SAVED (Titus 2:11)**

1. This means that man neither deserves to be saved because of who he is nor can he merit salvation by what he does. In God's sight there is none that doeth good (Rom. 3:12) and God, in dealing with men, is no respecter of persons (Rom. 2:11).

2. This means that salvation is not something that man can work for, but rather it is something that God has provided because He is a God of grace and expresses Himself in showing mercy to all

(Eph. 2:8,9; Eom. 4:4,5; Titus 3:5; Rom. 3:19).

3. This means that man can only be saved by responding in faith to what God has done in grace when Jesus shed His blood on the cross for our sins (Rom. 3:24,25; 27,28). Someone has defined grace as God's riches at Christ's expense. It is certainly this and it is something none of us deserve nor merit.

#### **D. THAT GRACE IS SOMETHING THAT CANNOT BE MIXED OR MINGLED WITH MAN'S WORK (Rom. 11:6)**

1. This means that a man is saved by grace alone or he is not saved at all (Rom. 4:13-16; Gal. 2:21). Some folks think God must do His part and they must do their part in order to be saved. This is the error the Galatians were involved in and it is another gospel of a different kind (Gal. 1:6).

2. This means that a man is saved by what the Lord has done alone and it is not something that is secured by keeping of the law (Eph. 1:7; Heb. 1:3; Gal. 4:21; 5:6).

#### **E. THAT GRACE IS THE STATE OR SPHERE IN WHICH BELIEVERS NOW RESIDE**

1. This means that believers are no longer under the law with its condemnation and curse but they are under grace (Rom. 5:2; 6:14). They are now free to be led by the Spirit of God to do the will of God.

2. This means secondly that believers are abiding in the promise of redemption in Christ and it rests upon His faithfulness to keep His covenant.

3. This means that God now provides for believers as His children and gives us all kinds of spiritual and material blessings (Eph. 1:3; Phil. 4:19). We don't deserve His many provisions for us but He bestows them upon us because He is a God of grace.

#### **F. THAT GRACE IS THE BASIS UPON WHICH MEN ARE CALLED UPON TO SERVE**

1. This means what we are in the Lord is solely by His grace toward us (I Cor. 15:10; Eph. 3:7).

2. Finally this means what we do for the Lord is done only by His grace in our lives (Eph. 3:8; II Cor. 1:12).

A final illustration of the grace of God is seen in the life of John Newton:

He had been raised in a Christian home in England and in his earliest years had been taught the truths of a gracious God who bringeth salvation to all men. But he was orphaned at six years of

age and he became, even as a small lad, a wanderer. He was raised by a non-Christian relative who scoffed at all he had been taught by godly parents. He became an apprentice seaman in order to get away from the conditions of the home of the relative and he joined the Royal Navy after he had served his apprenticeship. While he was enlisted in the Royal Navy he deserted and went to Africa, and he testified that he went for one purpose - to sin to his fill.

After he came into Africa, he joined himself to a Portuguese slave trader in whose home he was cruelly treated by the black woman who had become the chief of the harem. She took out her hatred for her Portuguese husband against this white lad and treated him like a dog. She exercised such authority over him that she threw his food on the floor and he was compelled to eat off the floor or be lashed. He fled from this cruelty and after escaping made his way to the coast where he attracted a ship by building a fire.

The ship's master was disappointed, for he thought that the fire meant that someone had either slaves or ivory to sell, but the young man was picked up, nevertheless. Because he was a skilled navigator he was made a mate on the trading vessel which was making its way up the coast of Africa to England. On one occasion, he opened the casks of rum and distributed to the crew so that the entire crew got drunk. The ship's master was so incensed that he had the mate thrown into chains. When he was brought up from below to be punished the captain treated him so brutally that he was knocked overboard and he was saved from death by drowning by the captain who threw a harpoon and speared him. He carried the scar of that deep wound, into which he could put his fist, until the time of his death.

As the ship made its way to Great Britain it was blown off course. When the ship began to flounder the young man was sent down into the hold to man the pumps along with the slaves who were being transported. He cried to God out of the hold of that ship. The truth he had been taught as a child came home to him and he came to know Christ as Saviour while he struggled over the bilge pump. It was this same John Newton who wrote the words:

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound,  
That saved a wretch like me!  
I once was lost, but now am found,  
Was blind, but now I see.

(Pentecost, 28,29)