

Doctrinal Study #2

Grace

John 1:6-17

Grace is God's response to man's need. Born into this world with a sin-nature, under a curse, spiritually dead, in the satanic world system and under control of its head, man's need was greater than man could meet. But to those who were in sin, God has manifest grace. **In the second of our studies of the great doctrinal words of our faith I want to direct your attention to the doctrine of grace.** The subject of *grace* is much larger than we could possibly consider in one brief study. For, from Genesis through the Book of Revelation, you find manifestations of the grace of God. In Jeremiah 3:12 the prophet is told, "Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, you backsliding Israel, says the Lord; and I will not cause my anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful..." The word "merciful" in Jeremiah 3:12 is the counterpart of the word that is found in the New Testament translated "grace." God affirmed the fact that He is a *God of grace.*

There is a vast difference between being a God of grace and being gracious. *Grace* refers to the essential character of God tells us what kind of God He is. Graciousness or graces come to an individual because of what the One gracing is within himself. **God is, first of all, a God of grace, and from a God of grace come multitudes of graces that meet our need.** We might define grace as that **"intrinsic quality of God's being or essence"** by which He is spontaneously favorable in His *disposition* and *actions.* God is kindly disposed toward the sinner. **This is the quality of the being of our God.** All that comes to us *from* a God of grace, comes to us because He *is* a God of grace. God is kindly disposed within Himself, and this kind of disposition spontaneously manifests itself apart from the desert of the one upon whom this grace is showered. **God is a God whose disposition is such toward a sinner that, spontaneously, mercy flows out from Him to meet man's miseries.** And because God *is* a God of grace, what He *is* causes Him to be favorable in His disposition and His works. God is a God from whom grace pours forth upon the sinner and the *graces* or the *graciousness* that comes to us from God, because of what He *is,* are called "mercies" in Scripture. **There is mercy for our misery.**

When the Apostle says in Hebrews 4:16, "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need," he is presenting three concepts within the word "grace." **First of all, when we come to the throne of grace, we encounter the sovereignty of God.** Which, simply put, means that **He is total control of every circumstance.** **Second, in spite of the sovereignty of God, because of His grace, we have the right to come boldly to obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.** That

simply means that *Who* God is outweighs *what* God is. And His grace is the very essence of His being. Third, because God is gracious, when we come to Him with our need, God responds, not because of our merit, not because of the persistence with which we plead, not because of anything other than the need presented. Simply put, God responds to our need because of His *amazing grace*.

From the opening chapters of the Old Testament we find revelations and manifestations of the grace of God. God created Adam and put him in a perfect environment. Adam was placed there with an untried innocence. Adam graciously was given the privilege of confirming himself through his obedience in the realm of grace. But Adam, by an act of disobedience, refused to be confirmed in a state of righteousness and became a lost sinner. At the fall of Adam we have the manifested mercies of God manifested as He demonstrated that He is a gracious God who pours out grace upon the sinner. In Adam's experience we see the manifold grace of God. In Genesis 2:17 God in grace postponed judgment on Adam. In Genesis 3:15 God in grace promised One who would crush the tempter's head. In Genesis 3:16 God continued Adam as head of the race and as head of the family, even though he had sinned. This was an act of grace. In Genesis 3:19 God provided work for Adam, and this was an act of grace. God continued the usability and usefulness of the earth, even though it had been cursed by Adam's sin, and this was a manifestation of grace. In Genesis 3:21 God provided a covering for Adam's sin, an act of God's grace. In Genesis 3:24 God opened to Adam the prospect of access into His presence. Then we read that God drove man out of the Garden and placed at the east of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword which turned every way to keep the way of the tree of life.

The usual interpretation is to view these cherubim as policemen who were stationed at the entrance of the Garden of Eden to prevent Adam and Eve from coming back into the Garden again. But I want to offer another suggestion. What if these cherubim with the flaming swords were not policemen to prevent the sinners from coming back, but were guardians to keep the way of access open? You see, God, in the Garden, had set up a place of sacrifice where the lamb had been slain whose blood covered Adam's sin, and whose skin covered Adam's nakedness. That place of sacrifice was the divinely instituted place of meeting. Satan would have delighted to have closed that gate so that the way of access into the presence of God was barred to Adam. But God saw to it that the place of access was kept so that Adam, through sacrifice, could come into the presence of God. God graciously kept the way open by which sinners could come into His presence. Thus Adam experienced the grace and mercy that came from God, the God of all grace.

We could point out that Abel received of the grace of God, for God had respect to Abel and his offering, as it is recorded in Genesis 4:4. God was not obligated to receive the sacrifice, but graciously did so. Or again, in Genesis 5:24 we see the grace of God to Enoch, for God walked with Enoch and Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him. This was an act of grace. We turn to Genesis 6:8 and we read that Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. This is the first specific mention of God's grace poured out on man, although God had been gracious *before* the days of Noah.

Abraham knew much of the grace of God, for God's call issued to Abraham when he was in Ur of the Chaldees was a gracious call, because Abraham was born in the home of an idolater. And Joshua 24:2 tells us that Terah, the father of Abraham, continued in his idolatry until his death. Therefore, it was not because Abraham was righteous that he was called, but because God was gracious. We find that Abraham was constituted righteous by the grace of God. Paul points out in Galatians 3:6 that Abraham believed the promise and was counted as righteous because he believed. Paul also reminded us in Romans 4:5 that "to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness," Abraham was called by grace; he was counted as righteous by grace; and Abraham was given a covenant from God that promised him the land, and the seed, and the great blessing. This was a gracious covenant promise from God to Abraham. The covenant was not given because Abraham was faithful – he wasn't. It was not given because Abraham's children would be faithful – they weren't. It was not given because Israel, the nation coming from Abraham, would be faithful and obedient – they never were. The covenant was given because God was gracious. And all through the Old Testament, from the time of Abraham to the time of our Lord, God dealt in grace with the nation of Israel, not because they deserved the grace of God, not because they were obedient, not because they were righteous, not because they were faithful, but because God was gracious. Because He had a covenant with them, as a faithful God, He would fulfill His promise even in spite of their unfaithfulness. God in grace responded to their *disobedience* by *faithfulness*. God responded to their sin by graciousness. God responded to their *need* in *mercy*. That is why the prophet Jeremiah could write in Jeremiah 3:12, "I am merciful, says the Lord, and I will not keep my anger for ever."

When we come into the New Testament we find the apostle John emphasizing this theme of the grace of God. God's grace had been manifested from the time of the fall of man to the time of the fulfillment of the first promise to the sinner that God would send a Satan-bruiser. But God's manifestation has been apart from a Person. God multiplied His mercies to men's miseries, and heaped up grace upon grace. Adam and Abel and Enoch and

Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Joseph and Job and David and Isaiah and Zechariah could testify to the grace of God. But the grace had never been manifest from God is the Person of the Son. After the coming of Christ, John could say in John 1:16-17, "...of his fullness have we all received, and grace for grace. For the law was given by Moses, but *grace* and *truth* came by Jesus Christ." John does not mean to infer here no grace manifested under the old economy, for God has always been *gracious* and *merciful*; but now *grace is personified* and is paraded before men in the person of Jesus Christ.

When the Lord manifested His grace to the miseries of men during His life, as recorded in the Gospels, we have multiplied witnesses to the grace of God in the Lord Jesus Christ. I think, for instance, of the *publican* who prayed (Luke 18:10) and would not lift up his eyes to heaven but said, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Our Lord says he went down to his house *justified*. Why? There was *grace* and *mercy* for the sinner. I think of the *sinful woman* whose life is laid before us in Luke 7, and who came to anoint the feet of the Lord Jesus when the self-righteous Pharisees would give Him no water for ceremonial cleansing. She washed our Lord's feet with her tears. Christ said, "Your faith has saved you..." (verse 50). There was grace for the sinner. I think of the Lord's teaching in the parables of the *lost sheep*, the *lost coin*, and the *lost son* in Luke 15. He shows us the grace of a Father who seeks that which was lost so that He might bring it to Himself. A *gracious* God responds to the lostness and misery of the sinner by seeking that which was lost. I think of the *great supper* in Luke 14, where those who were bidden would not come. The Lord said to go out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in. There was *grace* for the sinner. I think of the *laborers in the vineyard* in Matthew 20. He sent some out early in the morning, and some at noon, and some in the evening, but He *graciously* bestowed His bounty upon all of them. I think of the *thief on the cross* to whom our Lord said, "Today you shall be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). Our Lord's life was characterized by the manifestation of mercy for the misery of men; by the display of the grace of God to those who stood under condemnation and judgment. In John 10 Christ pictured Himself as the *good shepherd* who gives His life for His sheep. Luke testified in Luke 19:10, "... the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." He came because He is *gracious*, and He came to bring *grace* to those who stood in need of manifestations of His mercy. I don't care what passage you turn to in the Gospels, you will see *grace* heaped on *grace* as the Son of God, the *gracious One*, met the needs of men with whom He came in contact. The grace of God is revealed in Jesus Christ. God is the Fountainhead, but Christ is the channel through which it flows to men.

As in the Old Testament God had a basis for His manifestation of grace through His covenant, which He established with Abraham, so in the New

Testament God has a basis upon which He may manifest grace to men – the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. God's grace is not manifested principally through creation. God's grace is not manifested principally in other areas, although it is there. **But God manifests His grace through that salvation which has been provided for us in Jesus Christ.** Paul writes in Romans 3:24, "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus." He unites redemption, justification, and grace together. Or again, in Romans 5:20, Paul says, "...where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." The superabundance of God's grace is seen in the provision which God has made for those who were under the condemnation of the law, where we have been told in Ephesians 2:5-8, "Even when we were dead in sins (God) has made us alive together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And has raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace you are saved through faith..." Here the Word of God points out once more that when God would manifest His grace, it is not by healing physical infirmities (which He certainly does) but by providing salvation from sin.

When Paul speaks of the grace of God that has brought salvation, he includes within it all the spiritual blessings that are ours in Christ. We are *called* by grace; we are *justified* by grace; we are *sanctified* by grace; we are *sustained* and *kept* by grace; we are *equipped* by grace; we are *liberated* from bondage, from sin, and from the law by grace; we are *conformed to Christ* by grace; and we are *reconciled* by grace. God, in grace, has made propitiation, a covering for our sins; God has provided redemption. List all that God has done and you find it is all the spontaneous outflow of grace as God bestows graces and mercies upon us in response to our need.