

Of the Grace of God

by John Gill

The sermon explores the attribute of God's grace, which is His free favour and good will to men, exercising and communicating itself to them in a free and generous manner.

Scripture: Ephesians 1:4

Topics: "Grace Of God", "Sovereignty Of God"

Description

John Gill expounds on the grace of God, emphasizing that it is intrinsic to God's nature and essence, being the source of all goodness and favor towards humanity. He illustrates how grace is manifested in various acts, such as election, covenant, adoption, redemption, justification, and regeneration, all of which are unmerited gifts from God. Gill highlights that grace is independent of human merit and is exercised according to God's sovereign will, ultimately aiming to glorify Him. He also distinguishes between common and special grace, noting that while all experience some grace, only the elect receive the fullness of God's saving grace through Christ. The preacher concludes that the ultimate purpose of grace is to bring glory to God and to ensure the eternal happiness of His people.

Transcript

A Body of Doctrinal Divinity

Book 1--Chapter 13

OF THE GRACE OF GOD

This attribute may be considered, both as it is in God himself, and as displayed in acts towards his creatures; as in himself, it is himself; it is his nature and essence; he is "Grace" itself, most amiable and lovely; hence so often called "gracious" in Scripture: it is a character expressive of the amiableness and loveliness of his nature: and thus he was before he had, and would have been for ever the same if he never had displayed his grace towards any of his creatures. And this appears from the loveliness of Christ, the image of the Father, the express image of his person; who, to them that believe, is exceeding precious, and altogether lovely; when they behold his glory, as the only begotten of the Father; the fulness of grace in him, as Mediator; the purity, perfection, and beauty of his human nature, as in union with his divine person, in which he was in high favour with God and men.

Now if Christ, under these several considerations, is so graceful and amiable, he must needs be infinitely so, whose image he is, and who has all virtues, all excellencies, all perfections in him; he is said to be "glorious in holiness" (Ex. 15:11). And if he is so glorious and graceful, viewed in one perfection of his, what must he be when all put together, and he is viewed in them all, his goodness, wisdom, power, justice, truth, &c.? and therefore is to be loved above all, and with all the heart, soul, and strength; and hence it is that good men, as Moses, David, and others, desired to see the "face" of God, so far as could be admitted, and they were capable of, (Ex. 33:14, 15; Ps 27:7, 8, 105:4) and what a lovely sight had Moses of him in the clift of the rock, when he caused his goodness to pass, and proclaimed his name, a God gracious before him, (Ex. 33:19, 34:6) and to see the lovely face of God, so far as creatures are capable of, is the happiness of angels, will be the happiness of saints to all eternity (Matthew 18:10; 1 Cor. 13:12; 1 John 3:2; Rev. 22:4).

The grace of God may be considered as displayed in acts of goodness towards his creatures, especially men; and is no other than his free favour and good will to men; it is no other than love unmerited and undeserved, exercising and communicating itself to them in a free and generous manner; which they are altogether unworthy of. There are many things called grace, and the grace of God, because they flow from his grace, and are the effects of it; as the gospel, (2 Cor. 6:1; Gal. 5:4; Titus 2:11) gifts for preaching the gospel, (Rom. 12:6; Eph. 3:7, 8) the blessings of grace, as justification, adoption, &c. (Ps 84:11; 2 Tim. 1:9) in each of the graces of the Spirit in regeneration, as faith, hope, love, &c. (2 Cor. 9:8; Gal. 2:9) but then these are to be distinguished from grace in God; as the Giver and the gift, the Fountain and the streams, the Cause and the effect.

The grace of God arises from the goodness of his nature, and not from anything in the creature; and is exercised according to his sovereign will and pleasure; "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious" (Ex. 33:19). It is "independent" of all merit and worth in creatures, and of all works done by them, and is always opposed to them in scripture, (Rom. 11:6; 2 Tim. 1:9; Eph. 2:8, 9) it is quite entirely "free", as Austin[1] said long ago, grace is not grace, unless it is altogether free.

As an attribute, it wholly and only "resides" in God; and is only in men, as to the sense and perception of it, and the effects of it upon them and in them, (Rom. 5:5, 8:37) and it is only exhibited and displayed through Christ, in and through whom men are elected, adopted, redeemed, justified, pardoned, regenerated, and sanctified (Eph. 1:4-7; Rom. 3:24; Titus 3:5, 6). And though there are various gifts and blessings, and effects of it, it is but one in God: there is but one Fountain, from whence they all flow.

With respect to creatures, the objects of it, some distinctions are made concerning it, as of natural and "supernatural" grace. Natural grace seems to sound oddly, and unless guarded against, may tend to confound nature and grace together; but rightly applied and understood, may be admitted. What Adam enjoyed, in a state of integrity, above the rest of creatures, was all owing to the unmerited kindness and goodness of God, and so may be called grace; as the image of God, in which he was created; his holiness and righteousness; knowledge and understanding; the communion he had with God, and his dominion over the creatures; and yet it was all natural: so many things which his posterity in their fallen state enjoy, being altogether owing to the free favour and undeserved goodness of God, may be called grace: to have a being, and life, and the preservation of it, and the mercies of life, as food and raiment, which men are altogether unworthy of, are gifts and favours; and so may bear the name of grace, though only natural blessings.

"Supernatural" grace includes all the blessings of grace bestowed upon any of the sons of fallen Adam; and all the graces of the Spirit wrought in them; and which will easily be allowed to be supernatural. But that Adam had any such, in a state of innocence, for my own part, I cannot see; though some are of this opinion. Again, grace is, by some, distinguished into "common" or "general", and "special" or "particular". "Common" or "general" grace, if it may be so called, is what all men have; as the light of nature and reason, which every man that comes into the world is enlightened with; the temporal blessings of life, the bounties of providence, called the riches of God's goodness, or grace, (Rom. 2:4) which all partake of, more or less; and the continuance and preservation of life; for "God is the Saviour of all men" (1 Tim. 4:10).

"Special" or "particular" grace, is that which is peculiar to some persons only; such as electing, redeeming, justifying, pardoning, adopting, and sanctifying grace, (Rom. 8:30) and this special grace is, by some, distinguished into "imputed" and "inherent" grace: "imputed" grace is the holiness, obedience, and righteousness of Christ imputed to justification: "inherent" grace is what is wrought in the heart, by the Spirit of God, in regeneration. But these distinctions, with others, only concern the effects of the grace of God; that itself is but one in God; and is sure, firm, and immutable, as his nature is; and is the efficient cause, source, and spring, of all good things enjoyed by men; and should be acknowledged, as it was by the apostle, "By the grace of God I am what I am", (1 Cor. 15:10) whether as a man, or as a minister, or as a Christian; and this is the final cause, or ultimate end of all, that God does towards, upon, or in his elect, through Christ; all is "to the glory of his grace", (Eph. 1:6) and is what appears, shines forth, and is illustrious in every part and branch of their salvation; and therefore they are said to be "saved by grace", (Eph. 2:5, 8) as will be evident by an enumeration of them. 1.

The grace of God appears in the election of men to everlasting life; and is therefore called the election of grace; and is denied to be of works, (Rom. 11:5, 6) and, indeed, this act of the grace of God, passed in his eternal mind, before any works were done, good or evil, and without any consideration of them, (Rom. 9:11) nor can any works truly good be done, until men become the workmanship of God in regeneration; and then they are the fruits and effects of divine preordination, (Eph. 2:10) nor were men chosen in Christ because they were holy, but that they might be holy (Eph. 1:4).

And sanctification, both internal and external, is a means fixed in the decree of election; and is as absolute, unconditional, and certain, as the end, salvation, (2 Thess. 2:13) and all the true holiness that is, has been, or will be in the world, flows from electing grace; had it not been for this, the world had been as Sodom and Gomorrah (Rom. 9:29). Election is also irrespective of faith; that is likewise a means fixed in the decree, and most certainly follows upon it, and is therefore called the faith of God's elect (2 Thess. 2:13; Acts 13:17; Titus 1:1).

It remains, therefore, that election must be ascribed to the free favour, good will, and pleasure of God, to his unmerited grace and goodness, the true spring and cause of it; and to show forth which is the design of it (Rom. 9:18, 23; Eph. 1:4-6). 2. The grace of God is displayed in the covenant he has made with his elect in Christ; this, with great propriety, is commonly called by us, "the covenant of grace"; though the phrase is not in so many words to be met with in scripture; it is founded in the unmerited grace and mercy of God; and is made to establish and secure the glory of it (Ps 89:2, 3).

It was free grace that moved God to make one, to which he was not otherwise obliged: it was free grace that called, and that moved Christ to engage with his Father in it, and which "gave" him to be the covenant of the people, (Ps 40:6, 7; Isa. 42:6) it was free grace that stored it with all spiritual blessings; by which it

appears to be ordered in all things for the glory of God, and the good of his covenant people; and these are grants of grace, made in it to them in Christ, (2 Tim. 1:9) and it was free grace that filled it with exceeding great and precious promises; promises of grace and glory, made before the world began; and which made them sure by an oath to the heirs of them; and who become heirs of them, not through any merit of theirs, but through the undeserved favour of God towards them. 3.

The grace of God is very manifest in the adoption of the chosen ones; the cause of which is, the good pleasure of the will of God; and the end of it, the glory of his grace (Eph. 1:5, 6). God, the adopter, stood not in any need of sons; he had a Son, an only begotten Son, a beloved Son, the dear Son of his love, who always pleased him, his Son and Heir; the adopted are altogether unworthy of such a favour, being "by nature children of wrath, as others"; and these men, and not angels, who are only servants in the family, to wait upon the children, the heirs of salvation, and minister unto them: and not all the race of men, only some, and these no better in themselves than others; and therefore their adoption cannot be ascribed to anything else but the free and distinguishing grace of God; and into which relation they were taken before time, in the everlasting covenant; and Christ was sent to open the way, that they might receive this blessing of grace, and which they do by faith, the gift of God; for faith does not make them, only manifests them to be the sons of God; which relation is the ground of their having the Spirit, faith, and every other grace (Gal. 4:4-6). 4.

The grace of God shines very illustrious in redemption by Jesus Christ; free grace set infinite wisdom to work, to find out a proper person to be the redeemer and saviour; and it found out Christ to be the ransom, and provided him to be the sacrifice, (Job 33:24) his incarnation was owing to God's good will to men, (Luke 2:14) and his mission to his unmerited love, (1 John 4:10) and it was by the grace of God he tasted death for men, (Heb. 2:9) and this for sinners, the chief of sinners, ungodly men, enemies in their minds by wicked works.

In short, all that are redeemed and saved, whether Old or New Testament saints, are saved by the grace of God and Christ (Acts 15:11). 5. The grace of God is very conspicuous in the justification of men before God, and acceptance with him; which, in the strongest terms, is said to be of grace, to be by "his grace", the grace of God, and "freely" by his grace, and that through the redemption that is in Christ (Titus 3:7; Rom. 3:24). Free grace, by infinite wisdom, found out the way whereby sinful men might be just with God; which otherwise never could have been; namely, by not imputing their trespasses to them, but to Christ, the Surety free grace provided, whereby "God is just, and yet the justifier of him that believes in Jesus", (2 Cor. 5:19; Rom. 3:25, 26) free grace appears in appointing Christ to work out, and bring in everlasting righteousness; and in sending him in the likeness of sinful flesh to do it, (Dan. 9:24; Rom. 8:3, 4) and it was free grace moved Christ to come to do this will of God, and "become the end of the law for righteousness"; and it was free grace in God the Father to accept of this righteousness, in the room and stead of sinners, and to impute it, without works, unto them, as their justifying righteousness; and in appointing faith to be the recipient of it, that so it might clearly appear to be of grace; as the persons who are justified by it, being in themselves ungodly, more clearly shows it, (Rom. 4:5, 6, 16).

Justification is always denied to be of works; and the righteousness by which men are justified, is represented as a gift, a free gift, a gift by grace, as faith that receives it also is (Rom. 3:20, 28, 5:15-17; Eph. 2:8). 6. Pardon of sin is according to the riches, fulness, and freeness of the grace of God, (Eph. 1:7) the promise of it in the covenant is free, absolute, and unconditional, (Heb. 8:12) the proclamation of it in the gospel, bore witness to by all the prophets, is the same, (Ex. 34:6; Acts 10:43, 13:38) the blood of Christ was shed freely for it; and though it cost him dear, it is all of free grace to sinners, without money

and without price.

Christ is exalted as a prince to "give" it; and God, for Christ's sake, frankly forgives all trespasses, (Acts 5:31; Luke 7:41, 42; Col. 2:13) and it is vouchsafed to the worst and chief of sinners, (1 Tim. 1:13) and to great backsliders, ungrateful persons, guilty of sins of omission and commission, (Hosea 14:4; Isa. 43:22-25). 7. The grace of God is abundantly evident in regeneration, calling, and sanctification; God regenerates men by his grace, and of his own good will and pleasure, (James 1:18) and he calls them by his grace, and according to it, (Gal. 1:15; 2 Tim. 1:9) and which always becomes effectual.

There are some things which bear the name of grace, which fall short of true sanctifying grace, at least what men call so, as "restraining grace"; whereby some of God's people, before conversion, and some others, are kept from the commission of gross sins others fall into; and external "gifts" of grace, as a rational knowledge of the gospel, historical faith, and even gifts for the public ministry; which persons may have, and yet be unknown by Christ, and be castaways. And also what some call "sufficient grace", though wrongly; rather it should be called, insufficient; for that can never be sufficient which is ineffectual; as the means of grace often are.

There are other distinctions of grace, which are not very material, yet, if rightly explained and understood, may be allowed, as grace "preparing, anticipating, operating", and "co-operating", and "subsequent". "Preparing" grace must be understood not of preparations, and previous dispositions in men, and of them, to the grace of God; but what is of God himself, who prepares the heart, and makes it, by his grace, good ground, fit to receive the seed of the word cast into it, where it becomes the ingrafted word (Prov. 16:1; Matthew 13:23).

"Anticipating" grace is that in which God goes beforehand with men, and enlightens their minds, teaches and instructs them in the knowledge of themselves, and of Christ, and guides, directs, and draws them to him, (John 6:44, 45) "Operating" grace is that by which God works in men, both to will and to do, of his good pleasure (Phil. 2:13). "Co-operating" grace is that by which men act, being acted or wrought upon, and by which they run, being drawn (Song 1:4). And "subsequent" grace is that by which the work of grace is carried on, and performed until the day of Christ (Phil. 1:6).

Though there seems to be no great need of these distinctions; the most proper epithet of the grace of God, as displayed in regeneration, calling, and conversion, is, that it is "efficacious"; it never fails of its effects: and it is always "persevering" grace, and is never lost or comes to nothing; but issues in everlasting salvation; and all is owing to unmerited goodness. Every grace implanted in regeneration, flows from the free favour and good will of God. Faith is a gift, a free grace gift, a distinguishing gift; not given to all men, only to whom the Lord pleases (Eph. 2:8 2; Thess. 3:2).

Repentance is a grant of God's grace, a gift of Christ, and a blessing of the covenant (Acts 5:31, 11:18; Ezek. 36:26). Hope is a good hope through grace; what men, in a state of nature, are without; and which God, of his free grace, gives (2 Thess. 2:16). The same may be said of every other grace, love, humility, patience, &c. 8. Lastly, Eternal life is the free gift of God, through Christ, a free grace gift through him (Rom. 6:23). The introduction of all the Lord's people into the enjoyment of it, will be attended with shouts and acclamations, crying "grace, grace, unto it!" (Zech. 4:7) and which will be the employment of saints to all eternity; and so the great and ultimate end of God in their salvation, will be answered, namely, "the glory of his grace" (Eph. 1:6). ENDNOTES:

[1] "Non enim Dei gratia, gratia erit ullo modo, nisi gratuita fuerit omnimodo", Aug. contra Pelag. de Peccat. Original. l. 2. p. 338.

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