

Grace

by W.H. Griffith Thomas

God's grace is His favour and good will towards us, manifested without any regard to merit, and is spontaneous, free, generous, and abiding.

Scripture: Psalm 84:11, Luke 1:30, John 1:16, Acts 20:24, Romans 5:17, Romans 14:9, 2 Corinthians 6:1, Ephesians 2:8, Colossians 4:6, 1 Peter 1:13

Topics: "Gods Grace", "Christian Salvation"

Description

W.H. Griffith Thomas delves into the profound concept of 'Grace' in the Bible, emphasizing that it is the epitome of God's character and attitude towards humanity. Grace is defined as God's unmerited favor, freely given without conditions, generously bestowed, and continuously abiding. It encompasses forgiveness, joy, thanksgiving, and graciousness, ultimately leading to salvation and sanctification through Jesus Christ. The sermon explores the multifaceted nature of grace in God, in Christ, and in believers, highlighting its sovereign, satisfying, and sanctifying aspects, calling for a life that reflects God's grace and serves as a testimony to His love and mercy.

Transcript

Our Lord came that there might be a Gospel to preach. Then He sent His Apostles to preach it. The Gospel that He was in His Person, and that He provided by His Word, and the Gospel that they received and proclaimed, is best stated in the one word, Grace: "The Gospel of the Grace of God"; "the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ"; "the Word of His Grace". What do we mean by "Grace"? It is a large word, a great word, an all-inclusive word, perhaps the greatest word in the Bible, because it is the word most truly expressive of God's character and attitude in relation to man.

It comes from two or three roots in the Hebrew and Greek. In the Greek we find words and derivatives meaning "grace," "gift," to "give freely," to "forgive," to "bestow graciously," "joy," to "rejoice," "thanksgiving," to "give thanks," "thankful". In English (derived from the Latin) we have "grace," "gratis," "gratitude," "grateful," "gracious," "gratuity," "graceful," and such opposites as "ungrateful," "ungracious," "disgraceful". The subject is large, and has many aspects; the passages, too, are numerous and well worthy of the closest study.

What does the word mean? The root seems to mean "to give pleasure," and then it branches out comprehensively in two directions: one in relation to the Giver; the other in relation to the receiver of the pleasure. Grace is first, a quality of graciousness in the Giver, and then a quality of gratitude in the

recipient, which in turn makes him gracious to those around. But the idea has two distinct yet connected aspects even when applied only to God the Giver. It expresses the Divine attitude to man as guilty and condemned.

Grace means God's favour and good will towards us (Luke 1:30). So the Mother of our Lord is described as "permanently favoured" ("graced," Luke 1:28). This favour is manifested without any regard to merit; indeed, grace and merit are entire opposites. Grace is thus spontaneous (not prompted from outside); free (no conditions are required); generous (no stint is shown); and abiding (no cessation is experienced). It is also (as favour) opposed to "wrath" which means judicial displeasure against sin.

Further, it must be distinguished from mercy even though mercy is one of its methods of expression. Mercy is related to misery and to the (negatively) non-deserving. Grace is related to redemption and to the (positively) undeserving. It then expresses the Divine action to man as needy and helpless. Grace means not merely favour but also help; not only benevolence but also benefaction; not simply feeling but also force; not solely good will but also good work. It is Divine favour expressed in and proved by His gift; attitude shown by action.

Thus from grace comes gift, which invariably implies a gift of or by grace (Rom. 5:15; 1 Cor. 4:6; Rom. 12:6). These two ideas are thus connected and united as Cause and Effect. They tell of God's Heart and God's Hand. Etymologically, therefore, Grace is a term that refers to the beautiful which gives delight. Theologically, it means God's favour as seen in His gift. Practically, it implies God's presence and redemptive power in human life. Blending all these aspects we may think of grace as God's spontaneous gift which causes pleasure and produces blessing.

Hort defines grace as "free bounty" and, as such, it produces "joy" and is the cause of actual power in daily living. It includes the two ideas of God's attitude and God's action; His graciousness and His gift; His pleasure and His provision; His benediction and His benefaction. In a sentence, we may define God's grace as His favour to the sinner, that favour being shown and proved by His gift. St. Paul is preeminently the Apostle of Grace. Out of one hundred and fifty-five New Testament references to it, one hundred and thirty are his, directly or indirectly.

Grace opens and closes his Epistles. Grace is the keynote of his teaching. Grace was the secret of his life from conversion to close. "By the grace of God" he was what he was, suffered what he suffered, and accomplished what he accomplished. More, perhaps, than any other man, Grace was the characteristic of his Christianity. Grace is the predominant feature of the Bible. There is no grace in heathen religions. It is not a pre-Christian word or idea. Ugliness not grace, cruelty not grace, merit not grace mark other religions. It is therefore worthwhile to ponder this wonderful truth, and to look at it in the varied light provided by Holy Scripture.

I. What Is Grace in God? Grace is God's Mercy pitying. We can never speak of grace without speaking of sin. It was sin that prompted grace. At first God "saw" everything that it was very good (Gen. 1). Then alas! He "saw" that every imagination of man's heart was only evil continually (Gen. 6). And then He "saw" that there was "no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor" (Isa. 58:16). This threefold "sight" led to the revelation and provision of grace, for "His own arm brought salvation."

Grace is God's Wisdom planning. To see was to ponder and plan, and the promise of Eden (Gen. 3:16) runs through the entire Old Testament. Indeed, we may go farther back and think of the Divine purpose of grace "before the world began." As we study what is said both of what God has done "from the foundation

of the world" ("from" Rev. 13:8), and also of what He purposed before it ("before" Eph. 1:4), we can see a little of the plan of grace in the eternal wisdom of God. Grace is God's Power preparing.

For four thousand years the grace of God was at work, and the Divine preparation went on. Among the Jews a Saviour was prepared for the world, and among the Gentiles the world was prepared for a Saviour. Dimly realized by patriarchs, the truth became gradually clearer through the ages by means of Moses and the prophets, until the end of the old Dispensation. At length in the fullness of time the preparations were complete, and Christ came. The primeval invitation had been given when first God "bade many," and then when the preparations were made, the second invitation was given: "Come, for all things are now ready."

Grace is God's Love providing. The pity, the plan, and the preparation were all prompted by love, for "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son"; and when Christ appeared, He was the revelation of the "grace of God that bringeth salvation." We note that it was bringing, not sending, for His character was "full of grace and truth". And so God is rightly revealed as "the God of all grace," and Christianity as the religion of grace. In Nature we see preeminently the wisdom, the majesty, and the power of God.

In Providence we see the law, the righteousness, the justice of God. In Heathenism we see ugliness, hardness, cruelty. But in Christianity we see grace, because it issues from the very heart of God Himself. The word "Grace" expresses more definitely than any other term the principle on which God deals with men in the Gospel. It is the very opposite of all human ideas and principles. Human life knows of justice, and accordingly of dealing out rewards and punishments. Man is aware of the meaning of law and its results to innocent and guilty.

Man is familiar with culture, education, progress, discipline, as processes in life. But by nature he knows nothing of grace. The idea of dealing with sinfulness and unworthiness as God has done in the Gospel by grace, and of making its iniquity the occasion for superabundant blessing is so utterly unlike all things human, that we can only speak of it in the words of God through the prophet: "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither My ways your ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts " (Isa. 55:8-9).

Grace means more, far more than we can put into words, because it means nothing less than the infinite character of God Himself. It includes mercy for the undeserving and unmerciful, help for the helpless and hopeless, redemption for the renegade and repulsive, love for the unloving and unlovely, kindness for the unkind and unthankful. And all this in full measure and overflowing abundance, because of nothing in the object, and because of everything in the Giver, God Himself. Grace is the character of God, including mercy and truth, righteousness and peace. Grace is the union of love and holiness, the very foundation of the nature of God in Christ.

II. What Is Grace in Christ?

It is Saving Grace. This is suggested by the Name "Jesus," which means Salvation (Matt. 1:21), and the Apostle rejoiced to say, and said it twice, "By grace are ye saved." The full statement calls for attention. "For God who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace are ye saved); and hath 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 towards us through Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:4-7). Divine inspiration seems to have endeavoured to exhaust itself in the effort to express the glory of grace. Not only mercy but "rich in mercy". Not only love but "His great love wherewith He loved us." Not only grace but "the

exceeding riches of His grace". And to make it still more beautifully human, the culminating point is "His kindness towards us through Christ Jesus". And then this is seen to be the source of our salvation. "For by grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8). It is grace, as we have seen, that purposed salvation, grace that purchased it, grace that proclaimed it, and it is grace that applies it to our souls. We did not deserve it, we could not provide it, we do not primarily seek it. From first to last, salvation is all of grace.

"O the love that sought me,

O the blood that bought me,

O the grace that brought me to the fold."

Whether, therefore, we think of the condemnation or of the guilt of sin, the only way of deliverance is "by grace". Grace is the gift purchased for us by the tribunal that found us guilty. No merit, no effort, no payment of man can effect salvation. "Not by works lest any man should boast." There are only two classes of men in this world: those who think they can win or earn God's favour; the others who are certain they cannot. The former approach God and say, "Something in my hand I bring." The latter say, "Nothing in my hand I bring, / Simply to Thy Cross I cling."

The hand clings to the Cross, and this alone fills it with "something". The reason why trust is so emphasized is that it expresses at once the cessation of dependence on self and the commencement of dependence on someone else. And this explains how St. Paul can ring out the Gospel, "By grace are ye saved, through faith." It is not because of "our tears of repentance or prayers" that He saves us; it is not even because of the strength of the faith by which we accept Him that He accepts us; it is not because of any pledge of future faithfulness that He receives us; it is not because of His foresight of our subsequent obedience that He is willing to take us back. It is solely of His unmerited mercy, His undeserved grace, and unrequited love that He welcomes us to Himself.

"That Thou should'st love a wretch like me,

And be the God Thou art,

Is darkness to my intellect,

But sunshine to my heart."

It is Sanctifying Grace. This is suggested by the word "Christ," which means "Anointed". Jesus the Saviour was anointed of the Holy Ghost, and this anointing was given to Him for His people (Acts 2:33). He is "Christ," the Anointed One, and they are "Christians," the anointed ones (Acts 11:26). This anointing of Christ by the Spirit is for holiness. Grace not only brings salvation, but sanctification. A very usual conception of the Christian life is that of salvation by grace, but sanctification by our own effort; justification by faith, but sanctification by fighting; salvation by acceptance, but sanctification by struggle.

But God does not rescue and redeem from the horrible pit and miry clay, and set our feet upon a rock, and then expect us to go on alone. This way disappointment lies, and often backsliding. No, "He orders our goings." The grace that saves is the grace that sanctifies. "As ye received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him." We received Him by grace through faith; we must continue by the same way, and walk the same step. There is grace "wherein we stand" as well as grace whereby we have been saved, and this grace

sanctifies, fills and keeps.

Goodness is not a matter of temperament with grace merely supplementing nature. Goodness is not culture and education, as though grace means only the introduction of high ideals, powerful motives, and splendid models by which to face the old sinful nature. The seventh of Romans with its deadly warfare of two natures does not represent the normal Christian life of sanctification. There is no Divine grace in that chapter; only man's nature struggling to be good and holy by law.

The processes of penance and self-mortification are only examples of this endeavour to be holy by effort, struggle, and law. God's way is all of grace, the gift of Christ by the Holy Spirit entering in to abide, to cleanse, to keep, to guide, to overcome, to transform. Grace does not improve the old nature; it overcomes it. Grace does not educate the natural heart; it promises hereafter to extirpate it, and meanwhile it counteracts its tendencies, and enables the believer to "reign in life".

Grace means a new life, a Divine life, which lifts us above the natural, and is nothing else than the life of Christ Himself in His people. This is what St. John meant when he said, "Of His fullness have all we received, and grace for grace" (John 1:16). Grace provides and produces what we require for holiness. Everything that we need - love, patience, holiness, meekness, in a word, Christlikeness - becomes ours as grace controls, and because it is "not I, but Christ liveth in me."

Let no one say that grace is insufficient for holiness or that it excuses sin. Far from it, and quite the contrary. It teaches us to deny worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, and then it gives the power to do all this. The Gospel is for life here and now, and not merely for death. It provides not a hearse but a chariot. It is intended to give a good soul, a sound mind, a healthy body, a strong nerve. It does not subtract from anything right or bright; it "adds" (2 Peter 1:5), it "multiplies" (2 Peter 1:2), and provides "abundance of grace" (Rom. 5:17). So far from dispensing with morality, it insists on it as essential, and not only so, but grace and grace alone secures morality in quality and quantity.

"Talk we of morals! O Thou bleeding Lamb,

The best morality is love of Thee."

It is Sovereign Grace. This is suggested by the word "Lord," which implies the rule and mastership of Christ Jesus. St. Paul tells us that "Grace reigns" (Rom. 5:17), and this is so because "Jesus Christ is Lord." From the very outset to the very end He is and must be Lord.

"To this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that He might be Lord" (Rom. 14:9). And as this is realized His grace is seen to be sovereign, and the soul is called on to be humble. There is nothing so humbling as grace because we know it can only be ours in proportion as Jesus Christ is our Lord. "What hast thou that thou didst not receive?" This is the constant and grateful language of the soul. "By the grace of God I am what I am."

It is Satisfying Grace. This is suggested by the full title, "Jesus Christ our Lord." Grace satisfies at every step. It meets the claim of law with justification; it meets the breach of love with forgiveness; it meets the consciousness of solitariness by fellowship; it meets the sense of misery by love; it meets the hideousness of defilement by holiness; it meets the realization of weakness by power; it meets the haunting of fear by hope. We can therefore look back and praise the grace that made us Christ's; we can look round and trust

the grace that keeps us His; and we can look forward and hope perfectly for the grace that is to be brought to us in the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:13).

"Grace, fathomless as the sea,

Grace flowing from Calvary.

Grace enough for eternity,

Grace for you and for me."

III. What Is Grace in Us? Our Life is to be a Monument of Grace. All that we are, have, do, and become is of grace, and we are so to live that our lives are to be to the "glory of His grace". Our Lips are to be Mouthpieces of Grace. We are to "testify the Gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24). Our speech is to "be with grace" (Col. 4:6), and we are to "sing with grace in our hearts to the Lord" (Col. 3:16). Our Love is to be a Means of Grace. God's love is only made available for others through His children, and for this reason believers are to be "means of grace".

The truth needed for salvation, the comfort needed for cheer, the holiness needed for living are mediated by us to others, and in proportion as they see the love of God in us will our lives be means of grace to them. Grace will make us gracious in our dealings and enable us to avoid the spirit of hardness, hatred, severity, and manifest the spirit of love, patience, mildness, forgiveness, and tenderness. The love of God in our hearts will lead to the love of others, and all our relationships will be sweetened, hallowed, purified, uplifted, and transfigured.

And all this will be so powerful in its influence that those around will see God in us, and will find our lives true means of desiring to come into contact with Him. There is no means of grace to compare with a Christlike spirit. Our Labour is to be a Messenger of Grace. The works of grace are to be carried out by God's people, and if they do not do this, they will thereby prove that they know nothing of grace. What we receive from God as "gratia" comes to us "gratis," and is intended to make us "gratum," grateful.

His grace is intended to elicit gratitude, and gratitude is to be shown in graciousness to others. And yet all along it will be "Not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (1 Cor. 15:10). The Holy Spirit endows us with gifts of grace, and we minister according to the ability that God giveth. Our sufficiency is not of self, but of grace, and our service is the outflow of the grace of God in the heart. From Him we receive the love, the power, the blessing we endeavour to pass on to others; from Him comes the grace which enables us to serve God acceptably.

And thus we indeed "testify" to the "grace of God," and reveal something of "the exceeding riches of His grace". As we review the marvelous record of Grace in God, in Christ, and in us, we see very plainly two things. It is a Gospel for the Sinner. It excludes all human merit, renounces all human claim, and centers in God alone. If anyone should say, "It is too cheap," let him look at Calvary and see the cost to God. If anyone should say, "It is too easy," let him again look at Calvary and realize what was needed to put sin away.

It is as if God were saying, "If you want to know what sin is, look at My Son." It is cheap, it is easy for us because it is gratuitous; and if it were not gratuitous, there would be no salvation at all. But to God it was unspeakably costly, because sin was so hideous and awful as to necessitate it. But the "precious" blood of Christ is the glory of grace, and now to us who believe He is indeed "precious," and will be to all eternity. It

is also a Gospel for the Saint. It not only provides redemption, but it humbles pride, guarantees holiness, inspires to service, incites to hope, pledges heaven, and glorifies God.

No wonder, therefore, that we are invited to receive this grace and warned against receiving it in vain (2 Cor. 6:1). It calls for appropriation and application. Grace does not work apart from our responsibility. We must use it, believe it, respond to it, reproduce it. We can have little or much, we can be rich or poor, we can rejoice in the Divine wealth or exist in miserable poverty. But those who accept the Divine invitation know by experience what St. Paul meant when he said, "They which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Christ Jesus" (Rom. 5:17).

And so, "the Lord will give grace and glory" (Ps. 84:11). First grace, then glory. No grace, no glory. Much grace, much glory. If grace, then glory. Be it ours to say Amen. "Amen" as a prayer. May it be so! "Amen" as a purpose. It shall be so! "Amen" as a prospect. It will be so! "Amen" as a persuasion. It can be so! "Amen" as a possession. It is so!

"Grace! 'tis a charming sound,

Harmonious to the ear;

Heav'n with the echo shall resound

And all the earth shall hear.

"Grace first contrived a way

To save rebellious man;

And all the steps that grace display,

Which drew the wondrous plan.

"'Twas grace that wrote my name

In life's eternal book;

'Twas grace that gave me to the Lamb

Who all my sorrows took.

"Grace taught my wandering feet

To tread the heav'nly road;

And new supplies each hour I meet

While pressing on to God.

"Grace taught my soul to pray,

And made my eyes o'erflow;

'Twas grace which kept me to this day

And will not let me go.

"Grace all the work shall crown

Through everlasting days;

It lays in heav'n the topmost stone,

And well deserves the praise.

"Oh, let Thy grace inspire

My soul with strength divine!

May all my powers to Thee aspire,

And all my days be Thine."

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