

## BY GRACE ALONE

By

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When John recorded that “Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ,” he was summarizing the work of Christ and the entire scope of human need. Grace and truth are essential for man to fulfill the purpose of God. (John 1:16, 17)

The main object of revealed truth, which includes the inspired scriptures and all that Jesus said and did is to show how, by God’s grace, a race of man can be salvaged from sin and destruction, justified before the God of absolute righteousness, assured of eternal life, and then guided and sustained in the present pilgrimage through this world. God did not reveal truth in order to relieve man of the burden of seeking out for himself answers that can be found in the natural world. The truth Christ reveals concerns the eternal purpose of God which in turn, involves His grace.

For all who measure themselves in the light of God’s truth, it is evident that grace is essential. “There is not a just man upon earth” (Eccl. 7:20). An honest man, upon learning the truth of God and His purpose, is compelled to say, like Isaiah “Woe is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips,” or to say with Paul, “I know that in me, that is in my flesh, dwells no good thing.” (Isa. 6:5, Rom. 7:18) God is holy and righteous and just. How then can any man stand before Him who said, “You shall be holy as I am holy’?

Justice is something that can be executed only once for capital crime. When such justice falls upon man there is no appeal, no reprieve, and no hope; such justice is final. “The wages of sin is death.” The glory of grace is in the fact that this execution of justice fell upon Jesus and the death imposed upon him will never be imposed the second time upon any who belong to him through faith. It is not a death that I died, but a death that he died for my sins; therefore, it is not by works that I have done or can ever do, but by the one act of God through Christ on the cross that my death sentence is carried out in him, so that I am saved by grace, “Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:24).

Eternal life is not bestowed upon one as a reward for his good works. It is a gift. By grace God covenants to save us through the death of His son. It is by grace that He allows us to enter into that covenant through faith repentance, and baptism. Paul wrote of grace, and asked, “Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. We who died to sin, how shall we any longer live therein? Or are you ignorant that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?” (Rom. 6:2, 3) Even so, the believer’s identification with him does not add one ounce to the weight of Christ’s death for us. “For by grace have you been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God” (Eph. 2:8).

Neither does one's experiences or emotions, which follow upon the knowledge of truth, add any value or any power to the work of grace. Salvation is not something that one can work up through religious exercises, no matter how much they are packed with emotion and rich experiences. To hear the voice of God through the gospel and see the light of truth that declares that one's sins are forgiven through the blood of Christ is, indeed a great experience with overtones of joy and peace. It is an experience that grows and is enhanced day to day by the renewing of the mind by growth in the grace and knowledge of Christ, and by sharing it with others through personal testimony. To know that one is saved by grace is the climax of all experiences.

Nevertheless, it is not the experience that saves, nor does it make any contribution whatsoever toward our justification God does not save me because I experience joy and peace in Christ: rather I have the joy and peace because God has saved me by grace through Christ. Grace means that through Christ God has done for us what we could never do for ourselves — freed us from the guilt and penalty of sin.

This amazing grace is grossly corrupted today in two ways. First by what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called "cheap grace." This is in the popular doctrine that grace alone takes care of everything so that no contrition, repentance, nor discipline is required. It is grace without self-denial, without humble submission, grace that covers one's sins without his departing from them.

Real grace is costly. It costs God the life of His son. "Ye were bought with a price." (I Cor. 6:20). It required of Jesus perfect obedience, obedience "even unto death." It calls for one to forsake the world, to take up his cross and follow Jesus. Bonhoeffer wrote, "Grace is costly because it compels a man to submit to the yoke of Christ and follow him." (See Matt.11:30).

Churches that teach a cheap grace are deceptive and rob people of the real joy that comes from the discipline of obedience and the assurance of salvation.

Grace is also corrupted by the concept that one's good works are a part of the price by which we are saved. Many look upon their lives as a balance sheet where the good works are weighed against the bad with the hope that their good deeds and church involvement will tip the scales to the side of good works and thus increase their chances of salvation on the Day of Judgment. The emphasis is upon what man has done rather than upon what Christ has done. In the assembly one is likely to hear a great deal about what men and organizations are doing rather than praise for the work of Christ. He is relegated to a position as a spectator of man's works.

It is a serious mistake for one to think that he contributes to his salvation covenant by his works. To do so is to discount the value and power of the death of Christ, which alone can save. "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; you are fallen from grace." (Gal. 5:4. Also Rom- 4:4-16.)

There is no assurance when one makes his works a part of his hope of salvation. If our works, including obedience to God's law, are part of the price by which we are saved,

there is no way of having confidence that we have worked enough and in the right manner to assure our standing before God. The result of this thinking is a vast number of church people with no peace and no joy of salvation because they cannot be sure of it, having trusted partly in Christ and partly in themselves. As one man put it, when asked if he were a Christian, "Well, I hope so. I'm working at it." It is true that faith without works is dead in itself (James 2:17), but the works do not help purchase salvation. The one who is truly saved by grace is the one in whom "faith works through love" (Gal. 5:6).

Obedience is the fruit of faith, but it adds nothing to the grace of God in & forgiveness of sin. Only by perfect compliance with its demands could one be justified by law. Grace makes it possible to be forgiven for breaking the law.

Does grace remove our own responsibilities? By no means. Receiving this grace is my own personal response. It is my decision to believe, to repent and receive baptism into Christ's death. Nevertheless, each step is open to me by God's grace.

One who does a work or obeys God out of love is far happier than the one who must do it out of necessity or duty. Paul says, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service" (Rom.12:1). Good works, for us, serve the purpose of expressing our gratitude for God's grace.

God's grace is not limited to the forgiveness of our sins. The daily provision of our needs is also granted by God's marvelous grace. The classic example of this is the case of the apostle Paul who prayed for God to remove his "thorn in the flesh," and received this answer: "My grace is sufficient for thee." (2 Cor. 12:9). By this the Lord explained to His apostle that He would supply him with that which He, in His own infinite wisdom, desired him to have, whether health, material needs, wisdom, or strength to bear his infirmities.

The example of God's continuing grace, as given by Jesus, is in the birds of the air and the grass of the field. They "toil not, neither do they spin" - they do no work - yet God provides food for the birds and clothes the grass with lilies. By the same grace He gives that which is needed by His children. This does not negate the duty to labor diligently as we have talent and opportunity. The lesson is that, after having done what we can, we rest solely on His grace, then when we are in circumstances of need or disability, by His grace our Father will provide what is needed. God's grace is always sufficient, not only for the forgiveness of our sins, but also for all the circumstances of our daily lives.

"Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb.4:16).

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