

# The Dispensation of Grace

**D**ispensations are periods of time in which God is related to man in a certain way to carry out His purpose. From Adam to Moses, God was related to man in a certain way — without law. From Moses to Christ, He was related to man under law, while His purpose was being reaffirmed and typified. Now, during the period from Christ’s first coming to His second coming, God is related to man under grace. We are in the dispensation of grace. This is the period when you can get *everything* from God — free.

*The period where God does it all*

The dispensation of grace is the period where you do not do one thing in yourself. It is not your works. It is not your keeping of the law, but it is opening to Him and out of His fullness continually getting loaded up. That means enjoy God. Draw from Him. Cry out to Him. Complain to Him. Even “shout” to Him. Tell Him He has to do it. Grace means God has done it all and is pouring it all out. I do not care who you are, what your situation is, what your problem is, what your hang-up is — there are no excuses. Grace is here. Out of His fullness there is grace in exchange for grace. You do not start with law. You start with grace. And then you get more and more grace. It is all grace. It is a whole dispensation of grace.

We are under grace (Rom. 6:14). This means God has provided everything to carry out His purpose of image and dominion. The dispensation of grace means

that everything needed for this purpose comes out of His fullness. Second Corinthians tells us that as we are beholding Him, we are being transformed into His very *image*. In Hebrews 2:8-9 we do not yet see everything under His feet, but we see Jesus. And then in verses 10-14 we see *dominion* coming in, and we see the church. Oh, this is marvelous! It is all grace — God does it all.

*God does not know how to relate to us apart from grace*

Grace is how we are related to God in this hour (2 Cor. 6:1-2). We are not in the dispensation of law. It is not a matter of our flesh being energized to make deals with God. This is the time of grace. It is the time to draw, to take, to let your spirit drink from His fullness. It is the time to expect Him to do everything in you. It is the time to put it all on Him. This is grace. We are now experiencing a foretaste of the next dispensation — the kingdom. The kingdom will be a compounded dispensation of grace. Ephesians 2:7 says, “That He might display in the ages to come the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” Since Christ has come, God does not know how to relate to His chosen ones apart from grace. It is grace in this dispensation of grace, and it will be multiplied grace in the coming dispensation of the kingdom (1 Pet. 1:13). This is how we are now related to God and how God is related to us — we are under grace. That means everything is freely given to us.

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### *The church life — a foretaste of the full taste*

In this dispensation of grace the kingdom has drawn near. Romans 14:17 says that the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. Here Paul is talking about the church life. That means the kingdom is right now. When the Spirit is here among us, when there is peace between us, when there is joy in the church, when righteousness is here, that is the sum and substance of the kingdom. The joy we have here will just be magnified in the coming age. And it will be more inclusive. We will sit down at the table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Matt. 8:11). We are going to say, “Abraham! I have wanted to fellowship with you for a long time.” Oh, we are going to enjoy the reality of the whole family of God. How wonderful! And we will not be ethereal spirits flying in the air. We will have actual resurrected bodies. So I am going to look like me, and you are going to look like you. And we will see all the saints who have ever lived throughout all the ages (Heb. 12:22-23).

In the kingdom age we will enjoy the full taste of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit; but now in the church we have a foretaste. The genuine church life is the present reality of the kingdom. But while there is a present reality of the kingdom, there is also an outward appearance of the kingdom that is false. Although this matter is not so widely understood by believers, the false appearance of the kingdom is revealed in the Lord’s parables in Matthew chapter 13 — the tares, the mustard seed becoming a great tree, and the leaven.

### *The appearance of the kingdom*

The Lord prophesied that there would be a false appearance of the kingdom under the name of Christianity. So we need to see the difference between the reality of the kingdom and the outward appearance of the kingdom. The outward appearance of the kingdom is in the form of a professing Christianity (2 Tim. 3:5). It is a Christian world that often causes great offense even to the unbelieving world because of abominable things that are coming out under the name of Christ. The Lord and the apostles foretold that this would happen. In Matthew 13:24-30 and 36-43 the Lord talked about tares among the wheat, that is, false

believers under the banner of Christianity. This is exposed at the judgment seat of Christ when some come and say, “Lord, Lord, was it not in Your name that we prophesied, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name did many works of power?” This describes something of a charismatic nature. Yet the Lord said, “I never knew you. Depart from Me, you workers of lawlessness” (Matt. 7:21-23). This speaking comes following Matthew 5—7, where the Lord talked about a believer’s inward life. He talked about our disposition. He talked about lust. He talked about anger and hatred. He talked about having a capacity to be inconvenienced — to go the second mile. He talked about relationships, about forgiving. This is all about an inner life, which constitutes the reality of the kingdom.

So what we see in Matthew 5—7 is the burden of the Lord for an inner life where He Himself is lived out. That is His image. That is where the kingdom is and where His authority is. This does not mean that today there is no casting out of demons and that there are no miracles or prophecy. But we must realize it is possible to be in the appearance of the kingdom without the reality of it. So in this dispensation of grace may we be reduced to the fullness of Christ, enjoying all that He is to us and getting constituted and filled up with His life in our being.

As we are handling Him as our all-sufficient grace in every environment, we experience the grace of life and are responsible stewards of the manifold grace of God (1 Pet. 3:7; 4:10). A measure of the grace of God has been given to every one of us (Eph. 4:7). We are responsible to multiply this grace, trade with it, and make a gain for the Lord’s interest (Luke 16:1-10). As stewards we will be accountable to the Lord at His coming, and we do not want to hear, “Evil and slothful servant,” but rather, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

### *Enjoy grace and then employ it*

We have to see that this is the age and dispensation of grace. In everything in our lives we can enjoy grace and then employ it. And in the next dispensation, the kingdom, the Lord will reward the overcoming believers who have employed grace and enjoyed grace in this dispensation. The reward in the next age will be based upon how we used grace in this age. Regardless of

whether you are weak, whether you failed, whether you had this problem or that problem — regardless of who you are, if you feel like you are near your end, about ready to fall apart, let me ask you, did you open your mouth and call “Jesus!” and get the grace He has so freely given?

In our weakest moments, in our severest temptations, God is saying, “Use My grace. Employ My grace.” Then at the judgment seat of Christ, the Lord will say to us, “Well done. You used what I gave you.” He gave us His possessions — His grace. He did not leave us without anything. He did not just say, “Make it on your own. Try it. When I come back, we will see how you did.” The Lord did not do that. He left His possessions, His grace, with us. Now trade with that grace. To one He gave five talents, to another He gave two, and to another He gave one. So serve, multiply and extend the grace given to you. Even our getting into the Word is an enjoyment of the grace of God. It is trading with what we have. Do not let your mind lie dormant. Do not let your time be wasted. Employ grace to get the Word of God into you. Amen!

#### *Grace and the kingdom reward*

Hebrews 12:28-29 says, <sup>28</sup> “Therefore receiving an unshakable kingdom, let us have grace, through which we may serve God well-pleasingly with piety and fear; <sup>29</sup> for our God is also a consuming fire.” Here the one word to us about the kingdom is, let us have grace. Let us enjoy grace. As we enjoy this grace, God’s purpose of image and dominion will be fully manifested. The reward to us at the judgment seat of Christ will be to bear responsibility in the kingdom.

Our participation in grace is something related to the kingdom reward. One day we will stand before the Lord. If we have enjoyed His grace He will say, “Well done, good and faithful servant — not that you worked out of your own energy and your flesh, but that you took My possessions, you took My grace, and you traded with it. You exchanged the grace.” Then the Lord will say, “Enter into My joy” (cf. Matt. 25:14-30). This joy is responsibility to rule and to reign with Christ over this earth in His kingdom. So our enjoyment and participation in grace today has an effect upon our responsibility with Him in the coming age (cf. Rev. 2:26-27).

We need to be dispensationally significant in this hour. How? By enjoying grace for our experience and

grace for the church. Then in the next age, at the judgment seat, what the Lord will want to know is, “How much did you draw from Me? How much did you use Me? How much did you receive from Me? I am not asking whether you were weak or strong, whether you could make it or not, whether you had this or that problem. No. How much did you use Me? I gave Myself to you. I made Myself a life-giving Spirit. I put My very life into your spirit. I am that close. I am in your mouth. I am in your heart. I am in your spirit. Did you use Me? That is all I want to know.”

#### *Grace-works*

Now let us look at some examples of using grace. Second Corinthians 9:8 says, “And God is able to make all *grace* abound unto you, that, in everything always having all sufficiency, you may abound unto every *good work*.” Paul connects grace with good works. God is able to make all grace abound. And this grace is extensive: “in everything always having all sufficiency, you may abound unto every good work.” This means there should be good works in you. Here the good work was to give an offering to the saints in Judea. Paul was fellowshiping with the saints in Corinth about giving financially to them, and he connects this giving with the words “grace” and “good work.” What you find here are grace-works.

The Corinthians had been willing to give a year ago. But one year passed by and they had not given. So Paul gives them a little push. He says, “The brothers are coming, and I do not want us to be ashamed when they come. I told them that you were going to give, and now I want to make sure that you do it.” Paul is encouraging them. Yet we can see that the grace was already working. They had a willingness. There was a desire. But they needed someone to remind them to actually give their offerings to the saints (2 Cor. 8:10-11). Their *actual obedience* was the working out of grace, and it was a manifestation of grace to the churches.

In 1 Peter 2:18 grace is again very practical: “Household servants, be subject in all fear to your masters, not only to the good and forbearing but also to the crooked.” Be subject to the crooked boss. Of course, everyone could be happy with a good boss. You do not even need to be saved. You do not need grace. Your boss just treats you nicely. But what about being in a situation that is not so pleasant?

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## What Kind of Person Is God?

Who is God? What is He like? What kind of Person is He? These are the kinds of questions and matters that the Bible talks about. The Bible is first and foremost a revelation of God. Its sixty-six books reveal to us who He is and what He is like. However, the Bible's depiction of God has always evoked a wide range of responses. Millions upon millions have responded positively to the Bible's message, and have found through it a relationship with the living God. But conversely, great numbers have responded negatively to the Bible. They have felt its depiction of God to be unattractive, even distasteful. To them, the Bible's revelation of God is incongruous with their conception of how God should be.

### *Three Common Objections*

Much of what people find objectionable about the biblical revelation of God can be summarized in three general arguments. First, many object to the fact that God sends people to hell. This is an insurmountable hurdle in the minds of those who view Him as a loving God, a forgiving God, a God who is "big enough" to overlook our mistakes and sins. And because the Bible reveals a God who conflicts with their conception of how God should be, the God of the Bible is rejected.

Second, people object to the thought that God allows such horrible misery to exist on the earth. The reasoning goes something like this: "If God exists and if God has the power to change anything He wants to (i.e. He is Almighty God), then how can He passively sit back and permit such sorrow and pain in this world to continue year after year, century after century? How can He stand by while unnumbered children die of starvation and disease every year, while horrific wars rage on, and atrocities on a mass scale occur with astonishing regularity in various parts of the globe?" The same line of reasoning is often applied on an individual level and is based on personal, bitter experiences. People ask such questions as, "Why did God allow my child or brother or father to prematurely die? Why did He permit me to go through a divorce or financial ruin or a debilitating accident?" Variations of this kind of question are endless. And because it seems that there is no good answer to such emotionally charged questions, the God of the Bible is dismissed.

The last objection that is commonly raised has to do with the exclusivity of the biblical revelation of God. The Bible categorically declares that there is only one God. There are not many gods. There is only one God. Not only so, the Bible clearly states that there is only one way for man to reach and know God — through His Son, Jesus Christ. To many, this seems far too narrow, exclusive, and intolerant. They reason, "There are many religions on the earth today. There are millions of people who are sincerely seeking God in their own way. How then can anyone claim with any

certainty that he or she has found the only way to God? This is a narrow-mindedness of the highest order." Moreover, it seems to these people that God would allow Himself to be found through various channels — for example, through Buddha, Muhammad, or the various gods of Hinduism — and not just through Christ. To them, Jesus Christ is only one of the many ways to God. This seems much more fair and tolerant. Again, because the Bible does not reveal such a "tolerant" God, the biblical revelation of God is rejected.

Objections such as these deserve a proper response. And they deserve a proper response from the Bible itself. Often people surmise that such matters are purposely ignored by the Bible or are simply not addressed. But it must be understood that such objections are not new. Indeed, they were raised centuries ago when both the Old and New Testaments were written. And the writers of the Bible did not ignore them, but rather addressed them head on. Although extensively detailed responses based on the Bible could be given, our purpose here is to present a more concise and summarized response.

### *Getting Some Perspective*

The most important thing in addressing matters such as these is perspective. Often we do not understand or perceive matters properly because we do not have the right overall perspective. A wrong perspective will distort all subsidiary and sequential lines of reasoning. Let us then acquire some "biblical perspective." The Bible tells us that God is almighty (Gen. 17:1; Job 42:2; Jer. 32:17; Matt. 19:26), infinite (1 Kings 8:27; Psa. 139:7-10; Jer. 23:24; Acts 17:24-28; Eph. 4:10), and eternal (Psa. 90:2; 102:27; Isa. 57:15; 1 Tim. 6:16). That is, He is all powerful — there is nothing that He cannot do. He is without limit in size — He has no spatial boundaries and cannot be contained by the heavens or the earth. He is without beginning or end — He exists as the eternal Creator.

Consider for a moment yourself in relation to God. Perhaps for the sake of brevity, we should limit ourselves to only one of the aspects above — His size. How big is God and more importantly how big are we as compared to God? Assuming that God, as the Creator of the universe, is bigger than the universe itself (a fair assumption), how do we size up to God? Scientists tell us that the universe is approximately 15 billion light years big (and expanding). This is difficult for us to grasp, so let us break it down in more comprehensible terms. In linear dimensions, man is approximately one millionth (1/1,000,000,000) the size of the earth. And the earth is approximately one millionth the size of our solar system. And our solar system is approximately one millionth the size of the Milky Way galaxy. And the Milky Way galaxy is approximately one millionth the size of the universe (of course, these are very rough approximations). Add it all up and man is 1 to 10<sup>25</sup> in size relative to the universe.

To bring this home a bit, let us consider how big an ant

is relative to the size of a man. In linear dimensions, an ant is approximately one thousandth (1/1,000) the size of a man. Thus, an ant is much, much closer in size to a man than a man is to God. What does this all mean? Remember we are talking about perspective. When the apostle Paul was confronted with objections similar to those we are discussing, he responded this way:

*But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, 'Why have you made me like this?' Does not the potter have authority over the clay?"* (Rom. 9:20-21).

In other words, before we dictate to God how He should be or what He should do differently, we had better consider Who it is we are addressing. We had better consider Who it is we are replying against. Men tell God that it is unfair for people to go to hell. They tell Him that He is culpable for allowing pain and misery to continue on earth. They inform Him that they do not like the narrow way He has ordained for man to approach Him. The Bible's response is, "Who are you, O man, to reply against God?"

Now consider the fact that we think nothing of killing an ant. We step on them, we spray insecticides to exterminate them, we casually and indiscriminately squash them with our fingers. And we do it without any compunction! We don't feel guilty for it. Why is this? It is because ants are so small. Relative to a man, they are as nothing. They are so insignificant. They hold little value. They are expendable. If an ant were to shake its fist at a man and complain about the unfair treatment, the man would laugh and reply, "Who are you, O ant, to reply against me?"

Keep in mind that an ant is much closer in size to a man than a man is to God. Compared to God, we are but an infinitesimally small speck of dust living on a slightly larger speck of dust that happens to be spinning through space. Apart from His purpose over us, we are nothing; we are so insignificant; we are of no value (Psa. 39:4-6; 62:9; Isa. 40:12-26). So if we can do what we please with an ant, cannot God, the Creator, do what He pleases with us? If we have authority over an ant, does not God have authority over us? We might defiantly shake our fist at God, but it is to no avail. He can do whatever He wants to do. He is the Potter and we are the clay. Whatever He says is the final word. He alone has the ultimate authority. The Bible puts it all into proper perspective: "Who are you, O man, to reply against God?"

#### *What Is God Really Like?*

Having gained some perspective, let us now go on to see what kind of Person God really is. This is important because underlying every objection to the biblical revelation of God is an accusation against God's character (Rom. 3:4-5; 9:14, 19). People say that God is unfair and unloving to allow men to go to hell. God is cold and uncaring to permit misery to

be prolonged on the earth. God is narrow and intolerant to prescribe Christ as the only way. But again, let us give the Bible an opportunity to speak for itself. Let the Bible tell us what kind of Person God is and describe what He is really like.

Two of the greatest attributes of God are His righteousness and His love. If we desire to know what kind of Person He is, we must lay hold of these two attributes. God is a God of righteousness. God is a God of love. Often we divorce these two characteristics in our conception of God. We either think of God as righteous (which means to us that He is very stern, judgmental, and lacking in love), or as loving (which means to us that He never judges or condemns anyone, but rather lets everything go by the board — I'm O.K., you're O.K.). But the Bible reveals that He is both righteous and loving. Indeed, both are intrinsic to His nature. These are not transient features that come and go. God is righteous by nature. He is just, faithful, holy, and true. There is no trace of unrighteousness or deceit in Him. And simultaneously, He is a God of love. In fact, the Bible tells us that God *is* love (1 John 4:7-8). Love is not merely a characteristic of God. Love is the intrinsic nature of God. So God is righteous and God is love. He is both. And both find their perfect balance in Him.

However, we must see that there came a time when these two characteristics produced a great dilemma within God. How did this happen? The Bible tells us that God created the heavens, the earth, and man — all according to His eternal purpose. His purpose was to have man as the object of His love and fellowship. Man was not created to merely be a servant of God or a worshipper of God. God created man to enter into a wonderful relationship of love and fellowship. To accomplish this purpose, He created man in His image with two indispensable ingredients. First, He created him with a free will so that he could reciprocate in this relationship of love. God could not have a relationship with a robot or an automaton. Man needed to have a free will to choose or refuse God. Second, God created man sinless. Man in his original, created condition was pure, innocent, and without sin. This was crucial because of God's righteousness. God cannot enter into a relationship with an unrighteous man. He cannot touch or be involved with anything sinful. To do so would violate His own righteousness and holiness.

So God created man with a free will and without sin. And immediately after man was created, God did one more thing — He clearly warned the man of the consequences of his choices. He made it very clear to the man that if he exercised his free will to reject God, the consequences of his action would be utterly devastating. In other words, God made it known that this is a moral universe. It is not a universe of relativism, where anything goes and where there are no consequences to sin. Consequences accompany the freedom to choose, and God clearly laid out the consequences of sin. It would mean death (both spiritual and

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Peter continues in verse 19, “For this is grace.” What is grace? <sup>19</sup> “This is grace, if anyone, because of a consciousness of God, bears sorrows by suffering unjustly. <sup>20</sup> For what glory is it if, while sinning and being buffeted, you endure? But if, while doing good and suffering, you endure, this is grace with God.” This means there is a supply of grace coming, because if it were up to you, you would walk out. You would lose your temper. You are in a situation at work where you are tested beyond your ability, and that is as it should be. Thank Him that He did not leave you to yourself, but He let you come to the end of your energy by putting someone in your life that bothers you to the uttermost. Do you realize this is God’s mercy? He is not leaving us to ourselves. He is allowing us to feel weak, needy, dependent. This is meant to drive us to Him. This is grace. What happens is that inwardly you are telling the Lord, “Lord, I cannot make it with this person. Lord, I cannot do it. If it is left up to me, my temper is going to come out. I am going to lose my job. Jesus, You have to live in me. You have to be everything in me. Lord, I am needy. I have to have You right now!” You have to call on His name to endure. And Peter says, “This is grace.”

*Multiplying grace in our disposition for  
an abundant entrance into the kingdom*

As you open to the Lord in your environments, He begins to oil your personality with Himself. He begins to coat you. You are just coated. Your disposition is different. The main manifestation of the kingdom is the multiplication of grace in our disposition. How much grace have you and I enjoyed for the Lord to transform us into His image, for us to have a dispositional change? This change in our disposition is what supplies us a rich and bountiful entrance into the kingdom (2 Pet. 1:1-11). When the Lord spoke of the kingdom in Matthew 5—7, He started with disposition: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom . . . Blessed are they that mourn . . . Blessed are the meek . . . Blessed are the peacemakers . . . Blessed are you when men say all manner of evil and revile you because of Me.” This is all directly related to disposition. Kingdom life is a life with a dispositional transformation.

Second Peter chapter 1 describes the process of this dispositional transformation. Verse 2 says, “Grace

to you and peace be multiplied in the full knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.” Here the burden is for the multiplication of grace. Then verse 3 says, “Seeing that His divine power has granted to us all things which relate to life and godliness, through the full knowledge of Him who has called us by His own glory and virtue.” We have some capital. God has granted to us divine power. There is “atomic energy” from the Godhead in your spirit. This divine power is resident in us for life and godliness — for everything. Life is the inward content, and godliness is the outward expression. So everything is there.

Then in verse 4 Peter says, “Through which He has granted to us precious and exceedingly great promises that through these you might become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption which is in the world by lust.” We not only have the divine power, but we also have precious promises. We have something within us and we have something without. We have God’s power in us, and we have His promises in our hand. Now by these promises you and I actually participate in the divine nature, which is God’s disposition. Everything that is in the divine nature can be imparted into us by handling the Word, praying with it, letting it indwell in us richly. This is how we partake of the divine nature. We have the Word.

Then Peter says in verses 5-7, <sup>5</sup> “And for this very reason also, adding all diligence, supply bountifully in your faith virtue; and in virtue, knowledge; <sup>6</sup> and in knowledge, self-control; and in self-control, endurance; and in endurance, godliness; <sup>7</sup> and in godliness, brotherly love; and in brotherly love, love.” Faith is in you in verse 1. Grace is coming to you in verse 2. Divine power is in you in verse 3. The Word is with you in verse 4. Now cooperate with these things. Exercise yourself. Add diligence to work with what you already have. Make some decisions. Instead of spending so much time in the newspaper, instead of spending your time in front of the TV, instead of looking at that magazine that you are always looking at — instead of that, make a few decisions that will change your intake. Go to another source. Open yourself to some reading that will supply your spirit. Feed that part. In the past you fed the other part, the flesh. Now feed your spirit. Simply cooperate with what is resident within you.

In us we have divine power. This means there is potential energy. Potential energy is like a bow pulled back with an arrow. When it is pulled back, that is

called potential energy. When I let it go, that is kinetic energy. That is energy in motion. You do not know how much energy is in you. You have a heavenly time bomb inside. Now just let that potential energy be translated into kinetic energy. Pick up the Word. Pray. Sing. Fellowship. Serve. Share the gospel. Release the potential energy inside of you by cooperating with that divine nature and power. Then by your cooperating there is more self-control in your life. There is more patience. There is more gentleness. Christ grows in us. Grace multiplies in our disposition.

Now listen to what Peter says in verse 8: “For these things,” the things in verses 5 through 7, “existing in you and abounding, constitute you neither idle nor unfruitful unto the full knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Whether these things are in you in a fully developed way or are still growing in you, the seeds are there. Christ is operating. There is a difference in your disposition. Then Peter continues in verses 9-11: <sup>9</sup> “For he in whom these things are not present” — you are always angry, you are always up in arms about this or that — “he is blind, being shortsighted, having forgotten the cleansing of his past sins. <sup>10</sup> Therefore, brothers, be the more diligent to make your calling and selection firm, for doing these things you shall by no means ever stumble.” Then in verse 11 we come to the issue of all these things: “For in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be richly and bountifully supplied to you.”

When Peter says, “You shall by no means ever stumble,” he indicates that when multiplied grace is manifesting itself in our disposition, we can be sure there will be no intimidation or fear at the judgment seat of Christ (1 John 2:28). Today if you can drop your complaint and say, “Forgive me. I am sorry I said that” — if you are entreatable, if you are not swelled up with your pride, if God has cracked you, if you are broken, if there is something of Christ in your disposition because you are drawing from His grace — if this kind of inner activity is in you today, the Lord will say, “I feel comfortable with your disposition. Well done, good and faithful servant. Have an abundant entrance into the eternal kingdom. My kingdom is a kingdom of peace. It is a kingdom of meekness. It is a kingdom of mercy. It is a kingdom of Myself, embodied in My people’s dispositions, ruling this earth.”

Today with every little turn to experience Christ, we are enjoying the grace in all our relationships. Our

relationships are not perfect. The church life is not perfect in the sense that we think of perfection. In some ways it is a mishmash. But in the mishmash, grace is coming to us. Yes, things get overlooked. Yes, things are forgotten. You may get neglected. No one pays attention to you. In the Christian world we may have had programs to take care of that. We formed committees to take care of all the ones who had self-pity. But in the church life it is not that way. So you just die to yourself. It is a matter of slaughter. This is what Paul was saying in Romans chapter 8: “We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors” (vv. 36-37). This is because we have Another life. Grace is the portion in our spirit (Gal. 6:18), and this grace brings us straight into the kingdom.

In Revelation 3:11 the Lord says to the Philadelphian church, “Hold fast what you have that no one take your crown.” This means they already had a crown *before* they entered the kingdom. A crown cannot be taken away unless you have it. And the crown is the crown of glory (1 Pet. 5:4). It is the crown of life (James 1:12; Rev. 2:10). It is the crown of righteousness (2 Tim. 4:8). It is an incorruptible crown (1 Cor. 9:25). It is a crown of rejoicing (1 Thess. 2:19). So when there is life in you, when there is glory, when there is rejoicing, when you are not living a corruptible life but an incorruptible one, you have been crowned already because you are participating in the grace proceeding from this Person.

We will see the outcome of all this participation in grace at the judgment seat. Paul says that in that day there will be praise to each from God (1 Cor. 4:5). Doesn’t this make you want to go for grace? Take the grace (Heb. 12:28). Enjoy the grace. Stop yourself. Do not live out of your own works. Do not look at yourself. Do not expect anything from yourself. Keep your gaze upon Him. Enjoy Him. Let Him supply. Let Him funnel His life into you. Then we will all be like Paul: “I labored more abundantly than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God which is with me.” There will be more giving. There will be more serving. There will be more care for one another. There will be more of the gospel of the kingdom. There will be more willingness to go to the ends of the earth for the Lord’s testimony (Matt. 24:14). And then the kingdom will come. That is what will happen because grace is with us. Amen.

— Bill Freeman

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physical), corruption, misery, condemnation, hell, and separation from God. However, man did not listen. The Bible tells us that shortly after man was created he chose to rebel against God, to live independent of Him (Gen. 3). He did not want to be subject to God's authority, to live dependent on Him, or to live for the purpose for which he was created. This is the essence of sin — to live in rebellion to God and to live for one's own will and selfish desires. It is to choose on our own, to think on our own — in short, to be our own little god (Eph. 2:1-3).

### *God's Dilemma*

Once he had sinned and rebelled, man became unrighteous in God's sight. He became sinful and unclean. And such rebellion generates in God a holy wrath. The Bible tells us, "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" (Rom. 1:18). This is not the selfish anger or the fitful burst of rage that we are accustomed to among ourselves. This is a holy and righteous indignation toward sin. Wrath is the spontaneous response of God's righteous nature to unrighteousness. This is not so difficult to understand. Whenever we hear of some hideous crime inflicted upon an innocent victim, we become indignant. We react against the unrighteousness of the crime committed. God is no different except that His standard of righteousness exceeds ours by an immeasurable span. His wrath is fierce because His righteousness is so pure. What a righteous God He is!

And yet simultaneously, God is love. Though man has rejected Him and rebelled against Him, God's love is ever toward man. Even though man has become God's enemy, God still loves him. So God has two things going on within Him — wrath and love. And both are toward the same object — man. What a dilemma! He wanted to reach out to man, to bring him back to Himself, to enter into a relationship of love and fellowship. But His righteous nature prevented Him from doing so. He could not and would not compromise His righteousness. The question then is, how did God solve this dilemma?

### *The Cross*

The answer is the cross. The cross is where God did it all! It is where He solved this great dilemma. And in the process, God demonstrated to the universe the immensity of His righteousness and the depths of His love. The universe had never witnessed this before. But Paul tells us that at Calvary, God made a stunning demonstration of both His righteousness (Rom. 1:17; 3:21-22, 25-26) and His love (Rom. 5:8).

The cross strongly demonstrates God's righteousness because He refused to let sin "slide by." God hates sin. And He is morally obligated to judge it. His righteousness demands it. And judge it He did! God righteously judged the sins of the world — of all mankind. But look at how He did it — He did it in Christ! God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to

die on the cross for our sins. It was a substitutionary death. In other words, when Christ died on the cross, He stood in our condemned place and He bore the punishment that we deserved. Never think that our sins have gone unpunished. No! They were punished in Christ. But, suppose God had just casually pardoned our sins. To do so would have demonstrated that His righteousness was not that significant, that His hatred of sin not that intense, and that His requirement for an absolutely moral universe not that serious.

But God could not do that. And the lengths that God went to to satisfy His righteousness show how important His righteousness is. God paid a dear price to maintain the integrity of His righteousness. He gave up His Son, Jesus Christ. If righteousness meant little, such an immensely high price would have never been paid. But God had to satisfy His perfect and absolute righteousness.

And this brings us to the other matter demonstrated at the cross — God's love. Bear in mind that God was by no means obligated to pay such a high price. He did not have to do it. Indeed, it would have been much simpler to let us perish. Yet, love prevailed. And herein is the demonstration of the love of God! God sent His Beloved Son — His only Begotten — to reconcile us back to Himself. Why? The only answer is love. Just consider what God did — He gave His highest, that is, the highest possession He had to offer, for the lowest. We were weak, ungodly, sinful. Worse, we were His enemies. We were utterly rebellious and defiant. We were so low! Yet, *while* we were ungodly, *while* we were His enemies, God's great love was manifested in that He gave His Son to die on our behalf. God gave the highest He had for the lowest. What a marvelous demonstration of His love.

So at the cross God's dilemma was solved. Moreover, His righteousness and love were demonstrated. Do you want to know what kind of Person God is? Just look at the cross. It speaks infinite volumes! It manifests God's infinite righteousness. And it demonstrates His fathomless love.

— To be continued —

— Kirk Eland

## *the Christian*

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