

The Revelation of Grace

THE NATURE OF GRACE

We need to have a deeper apprehension of the grace unveiled to us in the New Testament. First we must understand what the nature of grace is. John 1:16 is very clear: “For out of His fullness we have all received, and grace *upon* grace.” Literally the preposition here means “grace *in exchange for* grace.” It is compounded grace. It is grace that multiplies (2 Pet. 1:2). The nature of grace is that it keeps multiplying. It is out of His fullness that we have all received this grace.

Grace is everything proceeding out of Christ

Grace proceeds from Christ. It is everything out of Him — everything that He has done in the past and everything that He is right now. Grace is what He is as our High Priest, the One indwelling our spirit, operating in us, energizing, inclining. He is working inside of us to break down barriers, hardness, resistance — to do everything that we cannot do. He is doing an inner work to soften our heart, to incline it, causing the love to flow, writing Himself into our mind, into our heart, into the way we are. Grace is He Himself operating and doing everything. This is not just in our initial justification, but it is also in everything after that.

In the book of Romans, we see that we are in a continuous receiving. We are in a position of receiving. Because of this, every experience we pass through can be something unique in this universe. As one of our brothers testified, even in having his bike stolen he

could stop and receive out of Christ’s fullness. By this receiving we can experientially know something beyond our natural reactions.

Everything proceeds from Christ, and this Christ is not afar off. He is a life-giving Spirit in resurrection who is actually joined to a part of us. A part of you is joined to Christ. You are not just thinking about Him, but you have His very life, nature, impulses, and reactions within you. Just that little inclination to stop and open to Him is the grace operating. That is Him. Grace comes in the form of an inclination. Philippians 2:13 tells us that it is God who is at work in us producing the willingness — the inclination — and the working for His good pleasure. So every little bit of rise and desire in us for God, even if it is a small amount, is God. It is God Himself in His inner dynamic of resurrection life who is able to do something within our being, causing us to even feel it within us. Then we obey and cooperate with this inner operating God. We say “Amen.” This is grace proceeding from Him.

Grace in its highest definition is Christ Himself proceeding out as He imparts His life and nature into us in a continuous way. Our part is to stay on the receiving end, to stay open. It is not to crank ourselves up, but to recognize our inability to do anything ourselves (John 15:5). And that sense of weakness is His wise way of getting more fellowship. He wants fellowship. He wants us to touch Him, to contact Him. He loves the fellowship. The fact that we could open up in the midst of whatever we are passing through is His heart’s delight. This is why Paul could testify, “When I am weak, then I am strong, because His power is actually being perfected

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in my weakness” (see 2 Cor. 12:9-10). His power can be perfected through weakness. What an operating Christ. Grace is just everything proceeding from Him.

The law was given, but grace came

John 1:17 says, “For the law was *given* through Moses; grace and reality *came* through Jesus Christ.” If I have a book of instructions about what brother Charlie should do, I come to him like Moses and give him the commandments. Now Charlie has some things in his hand that he has to read and follow. That is the law *given* by Moses. But grace and reality *came* through Jesus Christ. Grace and reality came through a Person! There is a big difference. When the law is given, *you* have to try to do something. And it is so impersonal. It is so hard. You have your self and you have the law. Then you come under so much condemnation. But grace and reality came through Jesus Christ.

He is in you. Just learn how to be filled in your spirit with Him. Call His name, “Jesus.” By calling that name, our spirit is filled and we interact with everything that is proceeding from Him. Ephesians 5:18-20 tells us that by opening our mouth we can be filled in spirit: “Be filled singing, speaking, giving thanks.” At your lowest moments, get down on your knees. When you want to complain the most, when you are so unhappy with your contrary environment — it is either your husband, your wife, your finances, or the anxiety about what is coming next — take it all, put it on the shelf, get on your knees, and start saying, “Thank You, Lord! Thank You for everything.” Grace and reality will come. When you touch the Spirit you will discover that reality is there.

Grace being brought to us in a sphere

Grace is everything proceeding from Christ. It comes by our gazing upon Him. It comes when our focus is on Him. First Peter 1:13 says, “Therefore girding up the loins of your mind and being sober, set your hope perfectly, or completely, on the grace being brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” This verse no doubt implies something of the Lord’s second coming in the future. But the participle “being brought” is in the present tense and passive voice. So it means grace right now is being brought to us. And this grace is being brought to us *at* the revelation of Jesus Christ. The preposition “at” comes from *ἐν* in Greek and is better translated “in.” Thus, it means *in* the sphere of the revelation of Jesus Christ.

The grace is being brought to us in the sphere of the revelation of Jesus Christ. This is not merely in the future, but also right now in the present. The grace is

brought the more we turn away from all other objects but Christ Himself. Sing to Him. Glory in His virtue, His merit, His worthiness, His righteousness. Enjoy what He is in His person, how He is the Father’s Beloved. Enjoy what He has accomplished in all His economy — from His love to us in eternity past, to His incarnation, to His human living. Let your spirit soak in everything that He has passed through and accomplished, and the grace will be brought to you in the sphere of the revelation of Jesus Christ. That is why the level of life rises in the church life whenever we are singing about Christ. If you focus too long, too much, on yourself, the level of life goes down. But the moment we turn to focus on Him, right away the grace is being brought to us.

Grace being multiplied

Second Peter 1:2 shows us something else about the nature of grace. It says, “Grace to you and peace be multiplied in the full knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.” Grace and peace are multiplied in a sphere — in the full knowledge of Him. Tell me more about Him, opening up what He accomplished for our salvation. Not only that, open up what He has planned in eternity past. Tell me about His purpose in the universe and what I have been made for and what God wants — a building, a corporate habitation for Himself. Tell me about His heart, what His good pleasure is, what His will is, what His purpose is, and what His economy is. This is the full knowledge of Him. Grace is multiplied in the sphere of the full knowledge of Him.

This is why we need to have not the full knowledge of the batting averages or the full knowledge of *The Wall Street Journal* — the full knowledge of so many earthly things. What we need to have is the full knowledge of God. That is why we love to be in the Word. You cannot help but have grace be multiplied to you when you open yourself up to Him to get the full knowledge of Him. Grace is everything proceeding from Christ as we behold Him. We need to focus our whole being on this person as the apostles did: “We beheld His glory, glory as of the only Begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth, or reality” (John 1:14). Grace comes as we behold Him: “But we all with unveiled face, beholding and reflecting like a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18). This is how grace comes and is multiplied to us.

Grace is the opposite of works

In its very nature grace is the opposite of works.

Unless we see this we have no way to properly proceed in the Christian life. Let us look at several passages that clearly reveal that grace is the opposite of works. Romans 4:4-5 says, ⁴ “Now to the one who works, his wages are not accounted according to grace, but according to what is due. ⁵ But to the one who does not work, but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted as righteousness.” Look at the way Paul talks about justification. Righteousness is accounted to the one who does not work.

We must understand the way God categorically calculates these two realms of works and grace. They are opposite. They are two different realms. If you are not saved, there is not one more thing you need to do this minute to be right with God. For you to try to do something to improve yourself is complicating the problem. Stop. God says “no works”; otherwise your salvation would be accounted as something owed to you due to what you did. But salvation is not in that realm. Salvation is in the realm of all that God has done. This is grace. We do not work. We enter into a relationship with a Person whereby we have one position, and that is to receive and to keep on receiving.

So we need to learn to stop ourselves — stop our own energy, stop this religious self that is ever trying to improve itself and ever trying to attain to certain levels. We need to learn to stop that realm. God has a wonderful design in making these two realms of grace and works opposite. In the realm of works, we do not need God. We are independent. We are the source. We are the doer, so the credit comes back to us. Then pride and self-righteousness set in, and we become creatures in whom the enemy, Satan, can roost with his nature of pride. But grace, in opposition to works, is a realm where you are dependent. Everything is from God. God is the source. God is the initiator. God is the doer. God is the One working all in all.

In the realm of grace, something marvelous opens up to us in this universe. We see what God deigned to do in the beginning. He wanted to be the source, to be all in all to every man. This is the deepest understanding of why God operates not on the basis of works, but of grace. He Himself wants to be all. He wants to be your all. He wants not just a part of your life, like a “glove-compartment” Jesus — where you put Him away, live your own life, and once in a while you pull Him out and use Him in distressful situations. Something in your life is needy. You need God for this. You have a problem, so you need God. You are just using the Lord, but He is not satisfied with that. He wants everything, and He wants to be everything. So He has a wonderful system — grace, not works. We must see the distinction between these two systems or realms.

Works cancel out grace

Now look at Romans 11:5-6. Paul says, ⁵ “In the same way then at the present time also there has come into being a remnant according to the selection of grace. ⁶ But if by grace, it is no longer out of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace.” You cancel out grace if you come “out of works.” This shows us how clear the Word is concerning the opposite realms of grace and works. Grace cannot exist if it is mixed with the slightest degree of works. These two realms must ever remain mutually exclusive.

By grace, not of works

We may all be able to quote Ephesians 2:8-9 from memory: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not of yourselves;” literally in Greek it means “not *out of* yourselves.” This shows the source of our salvation in a more graphic way. It is not out of us. Then Paul continues, “it is the gift of God; not of works that no one should boast.” This means that we have no ground to do anything out of our own energy in any way. For example, you may be passing through some kind of depression and thinking all the while about how you are going to get out of it, how you could change your environment to alleviate it, or how you could get on top of it. All this inward cogitation is nothing but works. You are working rather than simply contacting the Lord, like a dependent child, with His name on your lips — “Jesus, I need You. Jesus.”

When you open to Him, something proceeds from Him, and that is His grace and energy operating in you. Then when I come to talk with you, yes, you have your problems, you have your weaknesses, but you taste like Christ. There is a taste of Christ. There is an essence of Christ about you (cf. 2 Cor. 2:15-16). You are not just a good person. You are not just a disciplined person. You are someone who has an active inner life with a Person, Jesus Christ, and you emanate that. His grace is operating.

Many times all we do is rearrange our thoughts. We replace bad thoughts with good thoughts. I did this for years in my marriage life. I tried to look at things from a different angle. When things did not agree with me from one angle, I tried to look at them from another angle. This was the power of positive thinking. Although I would not have admitted it at the time, that is what I did. The point is this — it is not a matter of rearranging your thoughts. It is a matter of contacting a Person. It is knowing Him. It is not out of works in the realm of our mind, so that no man can boast. It is grace. It is another realm. It is the realm of contacting and receiving this Person.

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HOW TO SERVE IN GOD'S HOUSE

(This is a continuation of an article in the September Christian in which we saw two examples of serving in God's house from Isaiah 22:15-25: the example of Shebna and the example of Eliakim. Now let us consider more closely the example of Eliakim.)

Eliakim: An Example of How to Serve in God's House

Eliakim, we have to realize, is a type of Christ. We know this by putting two passages together. Isaiah 22:22 says, "The key of the house of David I will lay on his shoulder." And Revelation 3:7 says, "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, These things says He who is holy, He who is true, He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens." This is Christ! The Lord Jesus identifies Himself to the church in Philadelphia as the real Eliakim. Thus, in Eliakim we have a picture of how Christ serves in God's house. Shebna shows us how the self, the flesh, and the natural life serve. But now we can see how Christ serves. Not only so — we can see how Christ's indwelling life in us serves in God's house. That is, we have a serving life within our spirit. And Eliakim is a wonderful picture of how that life serves.

Now let us look at Isaiah 22:20-21, where Isaiah is still talking to Shebna: "Then it shall be in that day, that I will call My servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah; I will clothe him with your robe and strengthen him with your belt; I will commit your responsibility into his hand. He shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah." Here Isaiah is telling Shebna that God is not only going to roll him out but He is going to replace him with "My servant Eliakim." Shebna's robe, belt, and responsibility will be transferred to Eliakim. God is going to establish Eliakim in Shebna's place. In fact, the name Eliakim means "whom God establishes" or "whom God raises up."

Eliakim's Genuine Care for God's House

What is it about Eliakim that causes God to call him "My servant"? What is it about him and his service that so pleases God? First, the name of Eliakim's father, Hilkiah, means "God is his portion." This indicates that Eliakim was a man who enjoyed God as his portion. He was not just a talented man. Of course, he was very talented and very gifted. But because Eliakim was a man who also enjoyed God as his portion, he knew the Spirit. He knew life. He was not a man that just devised plans but not of "My Spirit" (Isa. 30:1). He was a man that knew the Lord. Because he had such an enjoyment of God as his life, God raised him up to be established.

And because Eliakim enjoyed God as his portion, he had a genuine care for God's interests. The end of Isaiah 22:21 says, "He shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem." This means that Eliakim was a person who had within him a genuine feeling about the people of God. By enjoying God as his portion, he had a spontaneous care for God's house, God's kingdom. He really felt within his heart like a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Thus, Eliakim's service in the house was not a duty. It came out of a genuine care. This

is just like Paul who told the Thessalonians that when he came to their city and began to establish the church, he was among them like a nursing mother and an exhorting father. He was willing to be spent, to impart even his own soul, for their sake (1 Thess. 2:7-11). This is how a father is. He naturally cares for his children. Brothers and sisters, this is the kind of life that we have within us!

What a contrast! Shebna was occupied with his grave, but Eliakim was occupied with the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Shebna had no genuine feeling for God's interests. But Eliakim did. With Eliakim it was deep. It was genuine. It wasn't like pulling teeth. But with Shebna, you would be pulling teeth. The desire was simply not there. The interest was not there. He was not interested in looking out for God's people. What was the difference between these two men? Eliakim enjoyed God as his portion. As a result, there was within him spontaneously a life that was like a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. He was occupied spontaneously with them. And we must realize that this is the life we are joined to! Christ loves the things of God. He is zealous for God's house. His life is a serving life. It is a life that has a father's concern. It has a father's care. It has a father's feel for the things of God's house. That's the Eliakim-Christ life that is within each one of us. It's a life that does not serve out of duty or out of obligation. It does not serve with a little bit of a grudge that we are being inconvenienced. This life within us is a serving life that is spontaneous, like a father's concern for his children. That's the kind of life that is within us.

Exercising the Authority of the Kingdom

Then it says in Isaiah 22:22, "The key of the house of David I will lay on his shoulder; so he shall open, and no one shall shut; and he shall shut, and no one shall open." This means that in Eliakim's service, there was the exercise of kingdom authority. In his service, he was using the key of the house of David. The key represents authority (Matt. 16:19). And a key to the house of David means he had the master key to the whole house of King Hezekiah. In other words, he had in his hands the full authority of the king. He had the power of the king. And as he served in the king's house, he was exercising that authority for the king's work. This means, brothers and sisters, that in our service there is the exercise of the kingdom of God.

Hence, these two matters are not divorced in God's eyes — service in this age and the exercise of authority in the coming kingdom. In God's eyes there is a direct relationship between our service and the kingdom. As Eliakim served, he had in his hands the key of the house of David. He was exercising the authority of the king, the Messiah, the Christ. This was not mere human authority. It was not even the authority of one of the kings of Judah. This was God's authority. Why? Because it says, "Whatever you open, no man can shut. Whatever you shut, no man can open." No human intervention can override this authority. No man can shut what this authority has opened, and no man can open what this authority has shut. This can only be God's authority. So when Eliakim was serving in the king's house, he was exercising God's kingdom authority on this earth.

So often in the Gospels when the Lord talked about our serving, He connected it to the coming kingdom. For instance, in the parable of the talents the Lord connected the servants' faithfulness in their service to their ruling in the coming kingdom (Matt. 25:14-30). In our natural thought, these two matters are not related. How is cutting the lawn, trimming the hedges, transcribing the messages, printing the books, painting the walls, related to the kingdom of God? We must realize that to serve in the church life is to be engaged in the Lord's work, the Lord's enterprise, the Lord's kingdom. We are not here just keeping busy! This is not busy work we are doing to merely keep ourselves occupied. To say that this is busy work is like saying the Lord is not doing anything on the earth today. We must realize that the service today is the King's business. We are engaged in the business of the King. And that business, that enterprise which the Lord Jesus is conducting on this earth, is absolutely related to the kingdom of God. He is working today to usher in the kingdom. That is the goal of His work. So our service today in the church life is pushing forward the kingdom. Our service is advancing His work that will usher in the kingdom. Regardless of how big or how small our service is, regardless of whether you're five-talented or one-talented, regardless of whether you're the apostle Paul or that little sister Dorcas in the book of Acts (9:36-42), it doesn't matter. It is all one work. It is the work of the King. It is exercising the key of David. Dorcas' service and Paul's service were both in the King's work. Dorcas' sewing and Paul's preaching were both in one work — the work of the King to bring in the kingdom.

So we must realize that our serving in the church life, whether it is mowing the lawn or cleaning the meeting place, is advancing His kingdom. We are turning the key of His kingdom. When God gets a group of people who are living in the service of the King with hearts like the heart of a father, enjoying Christ as their portion, then His kingdom is advanced. The church life today is the kingdom of God in reality on this earth (Rom. 14:17; Col. 1:13). We are not in the manifestation of the kingdom yet, but we are in its reality. And as we live in the reality of the kingdom, as the church in Philadelphia was, the Lord will open doors that no man can shut (Rev. 3:7-8). Amen! It is when all the saints rise up to function, to serve in whatever measure the Lord has given, that the reality of the kingdom is there. God looks down from the throne and sees His work progressing. He sees saints on Saturday morning serving in so many areas, in so many ways. And there is the definite sense of kingdom authority being exercised. So we must realize that our service is not a light thing. Handling the house of God is not a light thing. And in that service — hallelujah! — we are actually advancing and propelling forward the kingdom of God. Isn't that wonderful? What an uplifted vision of the service!

Eliakim as a Peg on Which Everything Hangs

Then finally, Isaiah 22:23-24 says, "I will fasten him as a peg in a secure place, and he will become a glorious throne to his father's house. They will hang on him all the glory of his father's house, the offspring and the issue, all vessels of

small quantity, from the cups to all the pitchers." Here Eliakim is likened to a peg. In those days, they would fasten pegs into the walls of their homes, upon which they would hang many different things. In this passage, Eliakim is presented as a peg upon which all the glory of his father's house would hang. And the glory of his father's house consisted of Eliakim's descendants — "the offspring and the issue." In other words, all of his descendants would hang on him as a peg. And Eliakim's descendants are likened to vessels, from cups to pitchers.

What does this all mean? It means that in God's house, we are all hanging on Christ. Christ is a peg in God's house upon which everyone hangs. We are His descendants, His offspring. And all of our weight hangs on Him. You are hanging on Him and I am hanging on Him. And thank God that He is able to bear on His shoulder all the weight (Isa. 9:6). So in the church life, everything hangs on Christ. This means that all of our practical needs hang on Him. It is not only our spiritual needs, but also all of our practical, "mundane" needs. All the practical matters in God's house, all the practical affairs, hang on Christ, our peg. Christ bears all the weight. He bears the practical affairs. We take everything to Him in prayer in a spirit of utter dependency. Isn't that wonderful?

We must realize that we have a peg life in us! Amen! There is a life within us that is a peg life. And that life within us bears weight. As we have said, in the church there are needs — spiritual needs, practical needs, mundane needs. This means that in the church life there is the need for pegs. There must be pegs for things to hang on, to depend on. This is absolutely true in the church service. For instance, let's take the area of landscaping and trimming the shrubs and trees around the meeting place. This is an area of practical need. But there must be some pegs for these needs to hang on. The weight of this service must hang on some pegs in God's house. And this is the case in all the areas of service. Now, let me ask you, is there anything hanging on your peg? Are things hanging on that peg life within you?

Of course, to be a peg is not very glorious or conspicuous! A peg is just there attached to the wall for things to be hung on. People rarely notice or comment about your pegs when they come into your house. But for the house to function, it must have pegs! Also, to be a peg means that you lose your independence. A peg is securely fastened and is not going anywhere! To be a peg in God's house implies that we are faithful in our serving the Lord. We are not in and out. We are not "come when I feel like it, won't come when I don't feel like it." We are not preserving our freedom and independence. Rather, we are always there, faithful in serving Him. Practical needs can hang on us. The Lord promised the church in Philadelphia, "He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore" (Rev. 3:12). A pillar is even more securely fastened than a peg. Pillars don't come and go. If you move those pillars, entire structures are going to collapse. The Lord needs pillars in His house (cf. Gal. 2:9). He needs pegs that are securely fastened.

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Nullifying grace by works

In Galatians 2:21 Paul says, “I do not nullify the grace of God.” What do you mean, Paul? How could you nullify grace? Well, we can. If we kick into the works mode and do something out of our self, we nullify grace. This is what the Galatian believers were doing. They were being circumcised in order to have another standing with God or a better feeling in their conscience or to try to find some kind of favor with God. So Paul says, “I do not nullify the grace of God; for if righteousness is through law, then Christ has died for nothing.” This means it is a real insult to the cross to exercise my own energy rather than have an absolute relationship with my Jesus whereby He is my everything all day long. In this relationship whatever surfaces in me is only raw material for me to call on His name and ask Him to live in me.

Many years ago, I would find notes around the house. They were my wife’s goals. Her goals were wonderful goals — to be patient with the children and to be a proper wife to me. She wanted to be a Bible wife, like the one described in Proverbs 31. So she made all these goals. I noticed for many months she felt forlorn because she was not accomplishing them. She was in a realm of wanting to be a certain kind of person but not knowing how, until she entered into the life of grace. The Lord became everything to her. I discovered her going around the house calling on the Lord, even over the baby’s diapers. All of a sudden Christ was everywhere in the house. This is grace.

There is a big difference between attempting to be something or striving to attain, and interacting with a Person constantly. When you interact with Him, you find out about Him. You get to know Him. You get to know how He feels, what He loves, what His desires are. You are not just a superficial Christian waiting to go to heaven. You are finding out the divine nature right now — how God is as a mother, how God is as a father, how God is as an employee. You find out His feeling because you are contacting this Person. This is grace. This is the operation of grace in our being.

Falling from grace

Let us look at Galatians 5:2. “Behold, I Paul say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing.” You can actually cause Christ in your being not to profit you. Do you relate to the law, to a standard, to your self? Or do you relate to Christ Himself as a Person? What is your system? How do you tick? You may have received Christ. He may actually be in you. But by what you relate to, you may put Him out of operation and cause His benefit to your inner being to be nullified. You can actually nullify

Christ. If you get on the track of works in your self, not remaining open to Him, you will nullify grace and He will not profit you. This is what Paul was saying: “O Galatians, you started out wonderfully. But then all of a sudden you switched tracks. Someone fed you something about circumcision and now you are going back to the law. You are on another track. And there, Christ will profit you nothing.”

Verse 3 says, “And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to do the whole law.” If you want to obey the law, you must obey all of it. Put the ten commandments and all the interpretation of them before you. Then Paul continues in verse 4, “You have been brought to nought, separated from Christ, you who are being justified by law; you have fallen from grace.” This means you have nullified Him. It does not mean you lose your salvation. There is a misinterpretation in the Christian world that to fall from grace means you lose your salvation. Paul does not mean that. He means that if as a believer you relate to things out of your self, out of your works, out of the law, you have fallen out of the realm of grace. As a result, Christ does not profit you. But if you will open your mouth like a little child to this Person and receive and receive and receive, then Christ will profit you. Stop this energy. Stop yourself and open up to Him. He is the Savior. You are not the Savior. I am not the Savior. We must let Him save us.

Falling short of the grace of God

Now let us go to Hebrews 12:15 which says, “Looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and through this many be defiled.” Here Paul is speaking in the context of being disciplined by the Lord, being chastened, even scourged. This means that our feathers are ruffled, so to speak, by our environment. You are passing through something right now that does not look like God’s love to you. You know those moments. It seems like He has forsaken you: “If the Lord really loved me and He really cared for me, why is this happening to me?” So this is what can happen in our environments.

At this point Paul says, “Looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God.” If you fall short of that grace, eventually bitterness is going to spring up in you. If you do not enjoy grace and the supply of God when everything has gone the wrong way — if God does not become your sufficiency in your depleted state — then that environment will pry up bitterness inside of you. Trace your bitterness. Where is its source? Why are you bitter? It is because you have gone to your thinking. You have allowed the devil to think in your mind, to charge God and accuse Him that if He really

loved you He would not let this happen to you.

Yet the Lord says, “Whom the Lord loves, He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives” (Heb. 12:6). This indicates that in those difficult experiences, we need to stay with the grace of God. Do not fall away from grace. Paul was on the verge of it (see 2 Cor. 12:7-10). He prayed three times, “Lord, remove this thorn from me.” The Lord did not answer Paul’s prayer the way he expected. He told Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you.” Then Paul saw that the inward supply of God Himself was enough even while coexisting with this problem facing him. He could still feel it — “It is a thorn in my flesh.” But in the presence of that thorn, in the presence of that discomfort, he was enjoying a supply of grace. As a result he turned his whole attitude: “Most gladly therefore I will rather boast in my weaknesses.” So he did not depart from the grace.

All these passages show us that we need to stay with the grace. It is not *our* life overcoming. It is not our own energy making it through. We need to learn how to cultivate a constant relationship with the Lord where we are drawing off of His life. This is because the deepest meaning of grace is that God wants to be our all. He does not want anything of our self. That is why these verses draw a line. There are two opposite categories: grace and works.

Not out of works which we did

Titus 3:5-7 shows us how we are saved. Verse 5 says, “Not out of works in righteousness which we did but according to His *mercy* He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit.” Then verse 7 says, “in order that having been justified by His *grace*, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” Here we see that “works which we did” is in contrast to mercy and grace. It is clear that grace is the opposite of works. Works is a different realm from grace.

Ceasing from our own works and entering into His rest

Hebrews 4 reveals the mutual exclusivity of grace and works. First we see God Himself resting from His own works. Verse 4 says, “For He has spoken somewhere concerning the seventh day thus, And God rested on the seventh day from all His works.” Then verses 10-11 say, ¹⁰ “For he who has entered into His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His own. ¹¹ Let us therefore be diligent to enter into that rest lest anyone fall after the same example of disobedience.” Here the rest is an entering into the total grace of God proceeding from Christ. By this grace Christ is to be everything to us. We cease from our own

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works and enter into that rest. This is the rest of the Christian life. We are not authorized to handle ourselves, to change ourselves. We are not qualified to change our mind, to change our emotions, to change our will. That is all full of labor and works. We have one obligation, and that is to enter into His rest. And that rest is the rest flowing in our spirit. It is the rest of grace in exchange for grace. It is the rest of trusting and casting our whole being upon Him. This rest is in our coming boldly to the throne of grace.

These verses fully confirm that grace is the opposite of works. There are two realms we can live in. We can live in the realm of works or in the realm of grace. If you are in the realm of works — in the realm of your self and your own energy — you are doing the living. In Galatians 2:18-20 Paul said, ¹⁸ “For if I build again the things [the legal system] which I have destroyed, I prove myself to be a transgressor. ¹⁹ For I through law have died to law that I might live to God. ²⁰ I am crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live.” This working “I,” this law-keeping “I,” this “I” that wants to make it, has been crucified. This is what God thought of us — He did not even give us a chance. He just eliminated us out of the picture: “I am crucified with Christ.” This verse is in the context of the law-keeping “I” wanting to please God out from its own source. Paul is saying, “It is no longer I, but Christ as grace coming to me at the revelation of Him” (cf. 1 Pet. 1:13).

So widen and increase your gaze on Jesus. Learn how to inwardly make transfers during the day, unloading this working self by using His name instantly, “Jesus.” When you catch yourself striving, when the record has already started to play and you are listening to that same old record again, break the record with His name, “Jesus! Live in me. You be everything.” What an insult that I would change myself. What an insult that I would be the source of my salvation. What an affront to God when God wants to be all. This is the deep significance of grace — God wants to be all.

GRACE PRODUCES WORKS

The relationship between grace and the kingdom

The brothers during the Reformation time emphasized that grace and works are opposite. In terms of initial salvation, the gospel has become very clear concerning these opposite realms. But not much stress is put upon the nature of grace in relation to works following justification. After we are saved by grace, then grace operates in us to produce works. We need to care for this balance of truth in the Word. On the one hand, you have to be clear in your inner life that it is not *you* as the source, but it is *Christ*. Yet when He operates

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in you, something happens in you and issues out of you.

This operation of grace is related to His purpose to usher in the kingdom age at His second coming. Thus, there is a relationship between grace and the kingdom. Our experience of grace today in the church is a foretaste of our full enjoyment of the kingdom in the future. The church life is a kind of mini-kingdom. Romans 14:17 indicates that the kingdom of God is our relationships with one another, where we are not bickering and making issues over eating and drinking. We are not asking, "What should I eat? What should I not eat?" That is not the kingdom. In this passage Paul is talking about the church. He is talking about relationships between one another. He says, "The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." Whenever we enjoy that righteousness, peace, and joy between us, the kingdom is here. This is His grace among us.

Our participation in this kind of life, keeping ourselves in the realm of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, is a subjective proof to us that we are living in the kingdom now. And the coming kingdom is not going to be different from this. It will be more intense and it will be purified from every other element, but it is going to be of the same nature. So we are enjoying the kingdom life today in the church for the full manifestation of that kingdom in the future.

Working out of the realm of grace

Now let us look at Paul's testimony in 1 Corinthians 15:10: "But by the grace of God I am what I am; and His grace unto me did not turn out to be in vain, but, on the contrary, I labored more abundantly than all of them, yet not I but the grace of God which is with me." We have seen that Paul was the one who made a clear demarcation between works and grace. But in this verse he says that he labored, he worked, more than they all. Yet he had to qualify this statement so there would be no misunderstanding, so no one would think he was holding himself up by his own energy. So he says, "Yet not I, but the grace of God that is with me." This means Paul was not working out of the source of himself. He was drawing from the grace. He was calling on the Lord. He was dependent upon that grace supply.

That means, brothers and sisters, on the one hand, stop yourself. But on the other hand, when grace flows in, you will be very active. You will serve. You will give. You will preach the gospel. You will labor in the Word. You will find yourself in the stream of grace, which causes you to live like a soldier, like an athlete, and like a farmer (2 Tim. 2:1-6). You will deny yourself. You will take up your cross. You will keep your body under. You will be taught to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts. You will discover there is an

energy in you that is limiting you to walk a narrow path and not the broad road (Matt. 7:13-14). Someone else can walk the broad road, but you can't because you are inwardly energized and restrained by Another life. Now Christ lives in you.

A genuine experience of grace will issue in works and good fruit. Grace will be manifested in the life. We are different persons when grace operates in us. No one could read Paul's life and say that he did not work and labor abundantly. And he was the man who said that works cancel out grace (Rom. 11:6). Yet at the same time he could equally confess that his laboring was totally out of the grace working with him (1 Cor. 15:10).

— *To be continued*

— *Bill Freeman*

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The Glory of His Father's House

What a wonderful picture God has given us in the Old Testament related to our serving. There is no question that we are all qualified as priests to serve in God's house. But it is good to know *how* one ought to conduct himself in the house of God. On the one hand, we all have Shebna in our flesh. Our flesh has no genuine interest in the house of God. It has impure motives for serving. But thank God that He is dealing with us to "roll out" the Shebna in each of us. On the other hand, we have Eliakim in our spirit. We are organically joined to the life that spontaneously serves God in a pure way. It is a life that has a genuine concern like a father for the inhabitants of Jerusalem. It is a life that exercises kingdom authority in its service. And it is a life that is securely fastened as a peg, upon which so many practical needs in the church life may hang. When God has such a church life on this earth, there is a real glory there. As verse 24 says, we become "the glory of his father's house." What an expression of God. What a testimony of Christ.

— *Kirk Eland*

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