

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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The God of all Grace

But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. (1 Peter 5:10, KJV 1900)

Much of the historical confusion and, at times, rancorous debate over Biblical doctrines, especially God's revealed way of saving sinners from their sins and giving them an eternal inheritance with Him, stems from a sadly myopic view of the Bible's teaching on the grace of God. In First Peter 4:10, Peter refers to God's grace as "manifold." That means that God's grace is not confined to one purpose, operation, or objective. At the heart of much confusion on this rich Bible topic is the failure of Bible students to distinguish between God's grace as it deals with our eternal inheritance and with our temporal (In time) faith walk. Paul teaches Titus that the same grace of God that brings salvation also teaches those whom it saves. (Titus 2:11-14. No, the text does not say that God's grace "offers" salvation. That is a corruption of modern commentary¹ "Bibles." God's grace doesn't offer the unregenerate person salvation. It brings it to him/her)

Behind this manifold, multi-purposed grace we discover the "...God of all grace." He is the God of the grace that enables us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in the here and now, "...this present world." He is no less the God of grace by which He gives us our eternal inheritance with Him.

A few years ago, I spoke at the memorial service for my sister-in-law. She was one of the most gentle, gracious women that I ever knew. Interestingly, on the flight back to the service, I pondered what I might say, and I always went back to the word "Grace" as the most fitting word I could find to describe her. Although I didn't discuss this thought with the family prior to the memorial service, I was quite pleased that every person who

spoke that day used the same word. We do God and His grace a sad disservice when we reduce His grace to a theological or philosophical principle or power. The graciousness that prompts us to describe noble, godly people such as my sister-in-law as characterized by "Grace" is the leading thought of the word when we see it in Scripture. And any framing of the doctrine of salvation by grace that fails to reveal a wholly "Gracious" God at the heart of the process misses the Bible point of salvation by grace.

At least since Andrew Fuller, advocates of eternal salvation, partly by God and partly by man's response to God, confuse God's manifold grace. While claiming that they believe in God's grace in the new birth, or eternal salvation, many advocates of this confused teaching emphasize their requirement that man must respond to God with compatible "Grace" or never experience the grace of God that saves. This idea is the equivalent of teaching that God's grace fails the true test of "Graciousness" and needs the supplement of man's grace to complete its work. And, at least beginning with Fuller, many advocates of this idea of blending God's and man's grace to effect their eternal inheritance display anything but "Grace" in their patently false misrepresentation of those who rely on God's grace alone for salvation by claiming that we are "Antinomian," or "Hyper-Calvinists." We do not believe that God's grace requires a gracious reaction from us to complete His saving purpose, for we do not believe this God/man cooperation is taught in Scripture. God's grace is sufficient to save His people with no need of any supplement from man, mental or physical. (Matthew 1:21) To believe that God either can't or will not complete the work of salvation unless we respond with some sort of active belief or acceptance is a bare step from saying, "**Your works** are filthy rags, but **your faith** is the only way for you to gain your eternal inheritance." If your works are filthy rags, how do you distinguish your faith from those filthy rags? Factually, this idea quite directly teaches that man's active faith in a fairly passive Jesus is the catalyst that finally effects man's eternal salvation. To falsely accuse those with whom you disagree, charging them with such terms as antinomian or hyper-Calvinist, hardly exemplifies the grace that these folks claim to respect. Does God ever falsely accuse His children?

¹ By "Commentary Bible," I mean that the publishers of these "Bibles" do not claim to have literally translated reliable original language texts into English. They form opinions of the meaning found in those texts and publish their opinion, or interpretation as if it were a translation. I often consult commentaries regarding the teaching of various Bible lessons, but I know that I'm consulting the commentary; when I read my Bible, I want the nearest to a literal translation that I can find. I am quite content that my King James Bible represents the best effort for a truly literal translation in the English language.

If you believe that God wholly saves His elect from their sins and conveys their eternal inheritance to them apart from their works, you do not in any way thereby teach sinful indulgence or antinomianism. Whenever I preach that God wholly saves His people by His grace, beginning to end, I also strive to include the Biblical balance that the same grace that saves teaches us how to live to the glory of God, and God commands us to so live. Never in Scripture nor in the teachings of grace that I've heard have I heard the heretical idea, "You're saved by grace. God doesn't care how you live. You're going to heaven anyway." The only time I've encountered this teaching was in relation to a few fatalistic predestinarian teachings. Example; a few years ago I was researching some of these fatalistic teachings on the internet, and I encountered an article written by a man of this persuasion who quoted only part of Romans 6:17. He quoted, "But God be thanked that ye were the servants of sin." He never mentioned the remainder of the verse or its context. The man then boldly wrote that Paul intended to teach that God was responsible for every sin that man commits, and He causes man's sin so that He can then cause man's salvation. Abominable! Paul's thankfulness related to the second part of the verse, "...ye have obeyed from the heart...." Never in Scripture do we read of God causing sin so that He can orchestrate a greater good. Paul confronts this precise heresy in the first eight verses of the third chapter of Romans and strongly refutes and rejects it. Paul rightly concludes that, if God is so involved in man's sin, God should stand trial for His sin right along with the puppets that He supposedly "Orchestrated" to sin for His alleged greater good. That error is held by very few people, thank the Lord! The responsible teachers of grace that I know and have heard or read consistently follow the teachings of Scripture. Saving grace is also teaching grace. God is the God of "...all grace."

When Scripture refers to God's grace as wholly, irresistibly producing an outcome in man, it refers to God's work in our eternal salvation. These passages teach that God's grace, by the direct and immediate work of the Holy Spirit, with no requirement of action by us, either divinely orchestrated or accomplished by the individual's will, accomplishes our new birth and carries that initial experience to its completion at the Second Coming and our resurrection. Scripture always identifies this work as wholly of God and His grace; to be accurate, His graciousness.

We read in other Scriptures of God's grace as an assisting or enabling influence in those whom He has already saved in new birth in their pursuit of godliness, the "Faith walk" that Paul describes in Romans as "...the righteousness of faith." We may receive that grace "...in vain" (2 Corinthians 6:1-2; followed by Paul's extensive list of his own personal godliness through manifold afflictions and trials) Through all of these trials, Paul received the grace

of God and faithfully used that grace to endure those afflictions. It is precisely by these actions that Paul sets himself forth as the example of not receiving the grace of God in vain. No doubt, Paul experienced the new birth long before writing this letter to the Corinthians. He does not here refer to new birth grace, but to serving grace. Grace taught Paul these truths, and Paul was a faithful student of God's grace.

Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; (Ephesians 3:8 KJV)

But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. (Ephesians 4:7 KJV)

Both of these passages explain the Biblical dynamics of what we might describe as "Serving grace" in contrast to "Saving grace." No lost, dead-in-his-sins sinner ever resisted God's eternally saving grace—none. However, the regenerated child of God may not always learn the lessons that grace teaches, and he may not practice what grace has taught. (2 Corinthians 6:1-2; Hebrews 2:1; 4:1) Many years ago, I was talking with a person whom I had known since childhood. This young person had gone to church and heard preaching from infancy. However, in late adolescence the appeals of sin blurred the conviction of the Holy Spirit's "Grace teaching," and this person for a time fell into open sin. As we talked, I was surprised to hear, "Joe, why didn't you ever tell me that this was wrong?" I tried to ask gently, "Are you telling me that you really didn't know that what you were doing was wrong?" Immediately, this person looked down to the floor and spoke the words that I knew were an honest acknowledgement that the Holy Spirit had convicted him/her fully of the character of this sin, though in fact I also had often preached on the moral character of the sin involved. The answer confirmed my belief in Scripture regarding "Grace's" role to teach a regenerated person to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world. "Yes, Joe, I did know."

Whether we read in Scripture of God's eternally saving grace or of His enabling grace by which we serve Him now, we should keep in mind that we serve the "...God of all grace." His "Graciousness" first appears in His exclusive, irresistible grace that imparts the new birth and **gives** His sheep eternal life. (John 10:10, 11, 15-18) Not only does He give eternal life to His sheep, but He also leads them with love and protective grace to the abundant life of which He speaks in this lesson. No first century shepherd would have remotely imagined that Jesus intended to teach that He, as the good Shepherd, intended to teach that He put an irresistible chain around every sheep's neck and forced the sheep to

do what it did, good or bad. A shepherd builds a familiar relationship with his sheep. And the longer the sheep follow him and get to know him, the more they will sense his love and the safety of staying close to him. Despite this fact, there are always some sheep that prefer to ignore their shepherd and go their own way. In keeping with the "Shepherd" analogy of Scripture, their choosing to go their way in sinful rebellion against their shepherd does not cause them to evolve (or "Devolve") into goats, but it definitely exposes them to frightening dangers.

Another errant explanation of Biblical grace that occasionally surfaces in our day describes salvation and related grace as so many "Phases" of one salvation and of one grace. Why do I reject this idea? Take a look at the wholly contrasting character of God's effectual, irresistible grace that Scripture describes related to the ultimate or eternal salvation of God's elect versus the winsome teaching grace that relates to the Holy Spirit's writing of God's law in our hearts, and His "Grace" conviction regarding how we should deny sinful attitudes and actions, living "...soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world." One is effectual and irresistible; the other is convicting and parental in its operation. It is altogether grace for God to irresistibly and effectual bring a dead-in-sins person to life in Christ. It is likewise grace for God to display winsome tenderness as our heavenly Father to convict us toward godliness, and, yes, to chasten us when we refuse to learn the lessons that His grace teaches us. But the powerful contrast of grace in these two areas does not represent a continuum of one salvation or of one grace. God's grace is manifold, not various manifestations or phases of one grace or one salvation.

He is the God of all grace!

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church
16434 Woodruff
Bellflower, California

Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor