

## CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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### THE GLORIFICATION OF GOD'S GRACE

**G**race – There is no greater word in the Bible, nor do I think there is a word so sorely misunderstood ... even by most Christians. Strange as this may sound, it is not all that surprising. People are by nature “merit-mongers.” It is ingrained in our thinking that we either deserve what we get or we earn it. We all labor under the illusion that we can achieve anything if we just apply ourselves or redouble our efforts. This may be the case in the ordinary things of life – but when it comes to the issue of finding favor with God, it is a different story. Regrettably, many Christians have agreed – at least in principle, that we actually *do* possess the innate ability to activate the Grace of God. Christians who read their Bible, will realize that salvation is not by works and will definitely say so. But they will turn right around and proclaim a Gospel of “free-will” that in essence makes faith a work. It is something that man *does* apart from God, and apart from His Grace, in order to receive Grace. That, my friends, is *not* the Gospel of the Apostle Paul. Salvation must be by Grace from the beginning to the end, or it is not Grace. Until Grace is seen in all of its glory and in *all* of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, it is not Grace, but a hybrid man-made substitution that robs God of His glory and gives the creature grounds for boasting before His Creator and Redeemer. In Romans 11, the Apostle Paul highlights once again the nature of God's Grace. Before unpacking all the particulars of this section of Romans, I wish to put into context Paul's understanding of *Grace* by examining Ephesians 2:1-10.

Paul has set forth in 2:1-3 the terrible situation that all men are in by nature, whether Jew or Gentile. Humanity is not on trial before God; the verdict is in, and the sentence has been passed – *guilty*, one and all. No one deserves salvation; all need it, but none deserves it, nor even seeks it! (cf. Rom. 3:11) Our condition is such that we surely cannot earn salvation. Sinners, living in sin and being controlled by “the ruler of the kingdom of this age” (and willing subjects at that), we are by nature (PHUSEI, lit. “innate disposition,” comp. Gal. 2:15; 4:8) “objects of God's wrath.” Sinners therefore need mercy. But if the standard by which mercy is given is merit, we are doomed.

#### I. GOD'S MOTIVE (v. 4)

This verse begins with the Greek particle DE, “*but*” (comp. w/Rom. 3:21). What men are and deserve is offset with God's abundant mercy. Notice the way God's love and mercy are described; *great love* and *rich mercy*. One cannot fail to notice, however, that God's love and mercy are selective. They are poured out on those who *are made alive with Christ*. All are dead in sin, but all are not “made alive.” This is due to God's electing love and mercy (cf. 1:4, 11).

#### II. GOD'S MEANS (vv. 5, 6)

When God's love is directed towards sinners, it is *mercy*. The love of God is made known

to the objects of His love (Rom. 5:5-8). It is a love that will not fail (Rom. 8:39). This text focuses the love of God upon the guilty and undeserving; as such, it is controlled by and issues from *Grace*. God's *love, mercy* and *Grace* act; for by these He *made us alive* (SUNEZŌOPOIĒSEN – “to make alive together with,” a synonym for the verb “to raise;” can also have the meaning “to keep or preserve alive”) *with Christ* when we were dead in sin. God does not sit back and wait for “dead men” to act or respond – they can't! Notice how Paul quickly adds, lest there be hiding in the hearts of those to whom he was writing the yeast of Arminianism, *it is by Grace you have been saved* (SESŌSMENOI, perfect passive; the perfect tense points to the completed action with on-going results stressing the continual state). God acted in *Grace*. The whole process of quickening the dead and raising them to life in Christ and seating them with Christ in the heavenly realm (note the parallel in 1:20) is the result of the power of God, a theme that Paul had begun in 1:19. Paul is still dealing with this theme, only now he is underscoring the motive and means for God's actions.

### III. GOD'S MONUMENT (v. 7)

Verse seven begins with what is called a HINA purpose clause, usually translated “*in order that*” and used to declare a purpose; that is, why something was done. Why did God do this? To *display* (ENDEIXĒTAI, aorist middle subjective, lit. “show for Himself”) *the exceeding* (Gk. HUPERBALLON, cf. 1:19) *riches of His Grace* (cf. 1:7) *as seen in His kindness* (CHRĒSTOTĒTI, goodness, kindness toward another, used only by Paul, cf. Rom. 2:4, 3:12, 11:22; Col. 3:12; Tit. 3:4) *to us in Christ*. Believers are quite literally “*trophies of sovereign Grace*.”

### IV. GOD'S MESSAGE (vv. 8, 9)

“For it is by *the Grace* that you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.” Now some have contended that the gift of God refers only to *Grace* and not to faith, which they say is our own doing and something that is the result of our free-will. What does the, *and this is not from yourselves*, refer to? Many good theologians say it refers to the complete salvation being spoken of in the text. This is admissible, and is surely correct. But I am inclined to agree with Abraham Kuyper, who writes regarding the grammar of the Greek text, “The general rule is that the demonstrative agrees with its substantive in gender and number – but not always. The antecedent should be looked for in the immediate vicinity of the pronoun or adjective that refers to it.” Kuyper then cites a noted grammarian who says, “Very common is the use of a neuter demonstrative pronoun to indicate an antecedent substantive of masculine or of feminine gender, when the idea conveyed by that substantive is referred to in a general sense.”<sup>1</sup> Now what this somewhat technical definition means is that *faith* (genitive, feminine, singular) is the antecedent of *this* (demonstrative, nominative, neuter) and that the Apostle is declaring that even faith is not from yourselves – something he expressly declares elsewhere as well (cf. Phil. 1:29). This is so *no* one will boast or have any grounds for boasting. I do not see, if free-will is maintained, how men will not have grounds for boasting. *They* responded; all had an equal chance, but some used their free-will and others did not. The ultimate reason they will be saved is not sovereign Grace, but sovereign free-will – with which Paul will have no part. It is all of Grace – faith included.

### V. God's Maxim (V. 10)

*For His workmanship* (POIĒMA – only here and in Rom. 1:20) *are we*, so the Greek text reads. The pronoun *His* is emphatic. We are not saved *by* good works, but *unto* good works. God has *created* us in Christ Jesus (cf. II Cor. 5:17). If Paul has not sufficiently dealt a death blow to all “*merit-mongers*,” he does so now with this “*coup de Grace*.”

Believers have been *created* – they did not create themselves – *for* (EPI, aorist subjective, used in purpose clauses) *good works*, which are the fruits and evidences of faith. Believers are enabled to do good works not only by the power of God (Phil. 2:13) but also by the example of the Lord Jesus Christ (Jn. 13:14, 15). These have been *prepared beforehand* by God, in order that we should *walk* (PERIPATĒSŌMEN, cf. v. 3) in them. Note the contrast with v. 3. The doctrine of sovereign Grace certainly does not encourage sloth; on the contrary, it is the great motivation for diligence in the Christian life and evidence of election (cf. II Pet. 1:3-10).<sup>2</sup>

**CONCLUSION:** Paul had earlier made reference to “the riches of God’s Grace” (1:7) and this was directly linked to *redemption*. Sadly, this great Biblical term has suffered the same fate as the word *Grace*. The great work of redemption which the Apostle glories in is little understood and even less appreciated in many churches today. Until we take seriously the Bible’s teaching on sin and God’s holiness, we will never be captivated the way Paul was with Christ the Redeemer. Bavinck, writing about a hundred years ago, said, “True, there are many who try to banish these serious thoughts from their minds and plunge into life as though there were no God and no commandment. They deceive themselves with the hope that there is no God (Ps. 14:1), that He does not bother about the sins of men, so that whoever does evil is good in His sight (Mal. 2:17), that He does not remember evil nor see it (Ps. 10:11 and 94:7), or else that, as perfect Love, He may not seek out and punish the wrong (Ps. 10:14). And whoever holds to the demand of the moral law and lets the ethical ideal stand in its loftiness, can only agree that God must punish the wrong. God is love, indeed, but this glorious confession comes into its own only when love in the Divine being is understood as being a holy love in perfect harmony with justice. There is room for the Grace of God only if the justice of God is first fully established.”<sup>3</sup>

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> A. Kuyper, The Work of the Holy Spirit (rpt. Eerdmans 1973), p. 412.

<sup>2</sup> “The most absurd conclusion that can ever be drawn from this truth is that it gives you the right to sit still. The opposite is true. In its deepest grounding this truth comes down to the fact that you are completely powerless, that you are wholly dependent upon God, that in yourself you are irretrievably lost. To what must such an awesome thought lead you? To continue sleeping calmly on the dregs of idleness? Or, with holy trembling, to call upon that God from whom alone your help can come?” G. Vos, Grace and Glory (rpt. Banner of Truth, 1994) p. 231.

<sup>3</sup> H. Bavinck, Our Reasonable Faith (rpt. Baker, 1977), p. 260.