

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

717 North Stapley Drive, Mesa, AZ 85203 Phone: (480) 833-7500

Series:	Scripture Memory	Pastor/Teacher
Number:	78	Gary L.W. Johnson
Text:	Galatians 5:2-8; 2:20-21	
Date:	January 3, 2021 (a.m.)	

THE GRACE OF GOD

Grace – what a glorious word! Think about all the hymns we sing that celebrate this theme. *Amazing Grace* surely deserves first mention. But there is also *Marvelous Grace*; *Grace Greater Than All Our Sin*; O, to grace how great a debtor, daily I'm constrained to be; Fountain of Never Ceasing Grace; Grace! 'Tis a charming sound, Harmonious to mine ear! A more recent hymn, *Grace Unmeasured*, captures the Biblical refrain:

Grace unmeasured, vast and free
That knew me from eternity,
That called me out before my birth
To bring You glory on this earth.
Grace amazing, pure and deep
That saw me in my misery,
That took my curse and owned my blame
So I could bear Your righteous name.
Grace paid for my sins
And brought me to life.
Grace leads me to heaven
Where I'll see Your Face
And never cease to thank you for Your grace.

(Bob Kauflin, 2005, Sovereign Grace Music)

The grace of God is an inexhaustible theme. Yet the Bible speaks of things like making void the grace of God or nullifying the grace of God (Gal. 2:21), of falling away from grace (Gal. 5:4), and even experiencing NO grace from God (Jeremiah 16:13)! Let's look at these texts in some detail, beginning with Gal. 5:1-8.

- I. **FALLEN FROM GRACE** (Gal. 5:1-8). Could the Galatians become unjustified? Paul's language will not allow this. He is simply saying that after having believed in Christ (as the Galatians did when Paul first preached the gospel to them), to turn away from Christ alone and faith alone is to turn to a legal method of gaining acceptance before God. Instead of relying on Christ, they were now relying on something else. Thus, they have fallen from grace. Any time we trust in our efforts (or feelings, or whatever) as the grounds for God's favor, we have fallen from grace, and this is exactly what characterizes the new spirituality. The late Leon Morris summarizes the Apostle's argument: "The apostle turns his attention to those who had accepted the Judaizers' teaching. He speaks of them as *you who are being justified by law*, which perhaps would more accurately reflect Paul's thinking if we understand it as *you who are trying to be justified by law*. To seek justification in this way was really to *have been alienated from Christ*. It is fundamental to Paul's position that justification can come about only because of what Christ has done. Therefore to seek it *by law* is to reject God's way of justification; it is to bring about alienation from Christ. A rejection of God's way of justification necessarily means alienation. *You cannot have it both ways. It is impossible to receive Christ, thereby acknowledging that you cannot save yourself, and then receive*

circumcision, thereby claiming that you can (Stott). The same spiritual disaster is put in the words *you have fallen from grace*. *Grace* is one of Paul's important words (he uses it 100 times out of 155 times in the whole New Testament). Over and over again he insists that salvation is due entirely to God's grace, so it is not surprising that he points out here that the position of the Judaizers meant falling away from the central truth of the Christian way. It was spiritual disaster."¹ An older work puts it this way: "*Ye are fallen away from grace*. Again the aorist or point tense is used, lit., *ye fell away*, for the apostle's mind is still upon the initial act which committed them to the works of the law. They had surrendered any hope based on the grace of God when they submitted to circumcision themselves or consented to its imposition upon others. The apostle is not here dealing with conduct or character, but solely with the ground on which justification is sought. Such defection is not primarily moral; a man may continue in the most rigorous obedience to law and in the cultivation of even the distinctive Christian virtues, striving earnestly to please God in his own strength and in accordance with his own ideas, when he has already fallen away from grace. The Christian position is described in language of striking contrast with this in Romans 5:2, *we have had our access by faith into this grace wherein we stand*."²

II. **MAKING VOID THE GRACE OF GOD** (Gal. 2:20-21). The NIV renders this: "I do not set aside the grace of God." "Set aside," *atheteō*, to make ineffective. This is a very strong word and has a legal overtone (nullify, which is how the ESV renders it).³ The "grace of God" here refers to the salvation message. Paul's opponents *also* used the word *grace*. The implication is that Paul is denying the charge that the Judaizers were making. They were telling the Galatians, "Paul's gospel denies the true grace of God by removing the law which God gave!" The Judaizers were attempting to add to the finished work of Christ the merit of their own obedience to the law, which they claimed was really the result of God's grace!

A. **How is this done?** You will note that making void or nullifying the grace of God is done *doctrinally*. There are doctrines that *darken* the gospel of God's grace. There are doctrines that *mix* the gospel of God's grace with error. There are doctrines that *blaspheme* the gospel of God's grace. Paul's specific point here is that *any* attempt to make ourselves acceptable to God by something we do (or don't do) sets aside the grace of God.⁴

III. **MAKING THE CROSS MEANINGLESS**. If it were possible for righteousness to be obtained in *any* shape, form or fashion by human merit, then *Christ died for nothing*. "The context forms part of that reproof addressed to Peter for his vacillation and timidity. Peter did not as an apostle teach amiss: but his concessions to the zealots in ceasing to eat with the Gentiles encouraged them. Paul accordingly exposed the dangerous principle. He shows that its real meaning implied that a Christian was not complete in the atoning death of Christ but needed something more; that, according to the Judaizing party, men in Christ and depending on nothing beyond His finished work had so imperfect a ground of acceptance that they could be viewed only as sinners, or such as were without a full title (ver. 17); that they made Christ only what Moses had been – a minister of sin and condemnation (ver. 17); in a word, that all who sought righteousness by something supplementary to Christ avowed that He was not a perfect Saviour. He adds that in the first instance, they had sought to be accepted in Christ without the works of the law, believing on Christ as all their title; but that now they built again what they had destroyed. By seeking a title through works, they did not stand on the atonement as the sole ground of acceptance, but viewed themselves as imperfect and guilty if they had not something in addition to the work of Christ."⁵ The word in the NIV translated "died for nothing" is *dōrean apethanen*. The adverb *dōrean* basically means "freely, for nothing" (cf. John 15:25; Romans 3:24). Here it has the meaning "to no purpose (as in the ESV)." The Judaizers did NOT think they were nullifying the cross of Christ and would probably protest and claim otherwise. But as Luther declared, "For whosoever seeketh righteousness apart from faith in Christ, whether by works, by satisfaction

or afflictions, or by the law, rejecteth the grace of God and despiseth the death of Christ, whatsoever he protesteth with his mouth to the contrary.”⁶ “This verse,” argues Machen, “is the key verse of the Epistle to the Galatians; it expresses the central thought of the Epistle. The Judaizers attempted to supplement the saving work of Christ by merit of their own obedience to the law. *That, says Paul, is impossible; Christ will do everything or nothing: earn your salvation if your obedience to the law is perfect, or else trust wholly to Christ’s completed work; you cannot do both; you cannot combine merit and grace; if justification even in slightest measure is through human merit, then Christ died in vain.*”⁷ This is Paul’s assessment of those who would redefine “grace” to make room for some kind of human effort – it renders Christ’s death null and void. There are people today claiming that faith should be understood as covenantal faithfulness or faithful obedience. Would that fall under the Apostle’s censure? Listen to the wisdom of the Puritan great, Thomas Goodwin, “We are not to rest in graces or duties; they all cannot satisfy our own consciences, much less God’s justice. If *righteousness could have come* by these, then *Christ had died in vain*, as Gal. 2:1. What a dishonour were it to Christ, that they should share any of the glory of his righteousness! Were any of your duties crucified for you? Graces and duties are the daughters of faith, the offspring of Christ; and they may in time of need indeed nourish their mother, but not at first beget her.”⁸ Think about it – All of His suffering and agony of soul is made meaningless if we seek in any way to add something to it by our own faithfulness. By so doing we obtain nothing. We only empty the gospel of its real meaning and instead of amazing grace we are left with appalling disgrace.

- IV. **NO GRACE** (Jer. 16:13). The ESV reads, “Therefore I will hurl you out of this land into a land that neither you nor your fathers have known, and there you shall serve other gods day and night, *for I will show you no favor*. The NET Bible renders that last phrase *for I will show you no mercy*, while the Christian Standard Bible reads *for I will not grant you grace*. The Hebrew word *chēn* has as its root meaning “to favor someone, or to be gracious.” It is the same word used in Gen. 6:8, “But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.” But what kind of grace is the verse referring to? Listen to the words of Abraham Kuyper: “Note carefully that we are not talking here about saving, regenerating grace. We’re dealing much more with that restraining, curbing, and restricting grace that God applies to human life in general. If people were turned loose without it, they would attack each other like tigers and other wild animals. But because they are held back and restrained by it, human society is still made possible for them. Because of it their lives are also sometimes adorned with civic virtues. This is a grace shown to you in your unconverted state. As such, it is a divine power that protects you from the force of your own sinning that would otherwise sweep you away and suck you into complete ruin. It assures that you remain a good citizen, however much the world, the Devil, and your own heart attempt to make you throw that all overboard by giving in to sin and injustice. And although on the inside you stand guilty before God, you are not overwhelmed by the destructive, hellish power of sin over you. But sometimes – and this is what’s truly horrible! – the Lord God ultimately withdraws this restraining, curbing, and restricting grace from a group of people or from an individual.”⁹

CONCLUSION: The great Aaronic Blessing found in Numbers 6:24-26. The priestly blessing consists of three parts, “three” being the basic form of harmonious development, the number of inner perfection (cf. 1 Sam. 3:8; Isa. 6:3). Each of these parts consists again of two halves, like the up-and-down movement of a wave, and in all three cases the first segment is longer than the second.¹⁰

6:24 – The LORD bless you and keep you . . .

6:25 – The LORD make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you . . .

6:26 – The LORD turn His face toward you and give you peace . . .

This blessing expresses the nature of God's grace. Wenham declared that: "Many branches of the church have adopted this blessing for use at the close of Christian worship. And this is entirely appropriate, for not only are its petitions of abiding relevance, but in the threefold repetition of the divine name theologians have traditionally seen an adumbration of the Trinity. The New Testament affirms that Jesus is Lord, and that the Holy Spirit is Lord (Rom. 10:9; 2 Cor. 3:17). In Jesus the full meaning of peace is revealed: he gave peace, made peace and is our peace (Jn. 14:27; Eph. 2:14f). This new covenant dimension gives an added depth to a prayer that in its Old Testament setting is already extraordinarily meaningful."¹¹ I close by directing your attention to one of my favorite hymns that celebrates God's grace, John Kent's (1766-1843), *O Blessed God, How Kind*:

O blessed God! how kind Are all Thy ways to me,
Whose dark benighted mind Was enmity with Thee.
Yet now, subdued by *sov'reign grace*,
My spirit longs for Thine embrace.

How precious are Thy thoughts That o'er my spirit roll!
They swell beyond my faults, And captivate my soul:
How great the sum, how high they rise,
Can ne'er be known beneath the skies.

Preserved by Jesus, when My feet made haste to hell!
And there should I have gone, But Thou dost all things well:
Thy love was great, Thy mercy fee,
Which from the pit delivered me.

A monument of grace, A sinner saved by blood,
The streams of love I trace Up to the Fountain, God,
And in His *sov'reign* counsels see
Eternal tho'ts of love to me.

ENDNOTES

¹L. Morris, *Galatians: Paul's Charter of Christian Freedom* (IVP, 1996), p. 156.

²W. E. Vine, *Expository Commentary on Galatians* (rpt. Nelson, 1997), p. 153.

³In ancient Greece this word was used of loans which were repaid and cancelled. It was also used for rejection of certain officials who were described as inefficient and incapable of doing their jobs. It was likewise used of grain that had been rejected because of spoilage. Cf. J. H. Moulton & G. Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament: Illustrated from the Papyri and other Non-Literary Sources* (rpt. Eerdmans, 1972), p. 12.

⁴"Grace always shines most brightly where man appears least; every thing that tends to advance the power and efficacy of man's working, always hinders the shining forth of the glory of the grace of God; but in this way of justifying us through the righteousness of Christ, grace shines forth most gloriously, because it is all of God: we do nothing for it." *The Works of Robert Traill IV* (rpt. Banner of Truth Trust, 1975), p. 164.

⁵George Smeaton, *The Doctrine of The Atonement According To The Apostles* (rpt. Alpha Publications, 1979), p. 236.

⁶Martin Luther, *A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (rpt. James Clark, 1972), p. 185.

⁷*Machen's Notes On Galatians*, ed. J. Skilton (P&R, 1973), p. 99.

⁸*The Works of Thomas Goodwin IV* (rpt. Tanski Publications, 1996), p. 13.

⁹A. Kuyper, *Honey From The Rock: Daily Devotions From Young Kuyper* (Lexham Press, 2018), p. 644.

¹⁰A. Noordtzijs, *Numbers: Bible Student Commentary* (Zondervan, 1983), p. 67.

¹¹G. J. Wenham, *Numbers: Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (IVP, 1981), p. 91.