

Qualities of God - Grace

(χάρις, charis)

Three qualities function together, and when we try to separate them and define them independently, their true meaning and operation become distorted. Love, Grace, and Mercy are a part of God's character, righteousness, and care for His creation. With love as the driving force, discussed in last week's blog, grace and mercy operate to provide providential care and justice for all creation. A study of (Ephesians 2:4-9) will show the interdependence of these three qualities.

Many have a problem understanding John 1:16-17, which says, "And of His fullness, we have all received, and grace for grace. For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." They ignore verse 16 and interpret verse 17 to say there was no grace in the law but there is grace now since Christ came. But the "grace for grace" is like the statement in Mathew 5:38, "eye for eye" or "tooth for tooth." The meaning is "this for that" as an exchange of one for something better. There was grace in the Old Testament, but it was limited. Sinners did not receive the death blow deserved but were covered by the atonement sacrifice for a time, and the guilt of sin remained. When the time came, Christ came with the perfect grace, removing the guilt of sin and destroying the power of sin. "For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace" (Romans 6:14).

One dominant feature of God's grace is that, like His love, it is given to everyone equally. That means grace does not equal salvation, which is given only to the faithful. "For by grace you have been saved through faith..." (Ephesians 2:8). God's grace, freely offered to all, has an effect on the faithful who return God's love through their obedience. Ephesians 2:4-6, which has the statement "(by grace you have been saved)," includes the "raised us together" reference to baptism.

Notice Paul's words, "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age..." (Titus 2:11-12). W. E. Vine says of the word "should" that "This is frequently part of the translation of the tense of a verb." The Greek word for should is not in the text. The better translation is found in the ESV, "training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age" (Titus 2:12). This is not something we should do but something we must do!

In the first mention of grace in the Bible, "But Noah found grace (favor) in the eyes of the LORD" (Genesis 6:8), we see the people of earth about to be destroyed. God's grace; sunshine, rain, food, etc. freely given to everyone, was not respected by everyone. Only Noah was righteous among humanity. For nearly 100 years Noah prepared an ark at God's command. Peter says Noah was a preacher of righteousness during that time (2 Peter 2:5). God's saving power was given to people in the form of a large boat. The only people rescued from the flood waters were those who "got on the boat." God's grace offered to all, only saved through faithful obedience to his command.

Referring to God the Father, Jesus said, "He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust," (Matthew 5:45). All earthly gifts from God are spread over the globe for the physical health and benefit of all. In the same way, His spiritual gift of His word, the gospel, and the sacrifice of His Son are offered to all. People who use physical gifts properly will prosper physically. Those who misuse or despise physical gifts will suffer the consequences of that abuse. Water is needed for life, but it will drown us quickly. The sun warms us but will burn and cause cancer easily. The same is true of His word.

God through Moses commanded Israel, "I am the LORD your God. You shall, therefore, consecrate yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy. Neither shall you defile yourselves with any creeping

thing that creeps on the earth" (Leviticus 11:44). The Law of Moses was given to them so that they could comply with that command in all respects. Today, God has given us a similar command. To grow into His children, and to be like our Father, He has given us the gospel through His son.

"Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, 'BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY'" (1 Peter 1:13-16).