

**THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE**  
**(LESSON THREE)**  
**A DEFINITION OF GRACE (PART 2)**

**EPHESIANS 1**  
**NEW ENGLISH TRANSLATION**

*1 From Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints [in Ephesus], the faithful in Christ Jesus.*

*2 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!*

*3 Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms in Christ.*

*4 For he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world that we may be holy and unblemished in his sight in love.*

*5 He did this by predestining us to adoption as his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the pleasure of his will –*

*6 to the praise of the glory of his grace that he has freely bestowed on us in his dearly loved Son.*

*7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace*

*8 that he lavished on us in all wisdom and insight.*

*9 He did this when he revealed to us the secret of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ,*

*10 toward the administration of the fullness of the times, to head up all things in Christ – the things in heaven and the things on earth.*

*11 In Christ we too have been claimed as God's own possession, since we were predestined according to the one purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will*

*12 so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, would be to the praise of his glory.*

*13 And when you heard the word of truth (the gospel of your salvation) – when you believed in Christ – you were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit,*

*14 who is the down payment of our inheritance, until the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of his glory.*

*15 For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints,*

*16 I do not cease to give thanks for you when I remember you in my prayers.*

*17 I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you spiritual wisdom and revelation in your growing knowledge of him,*

*18 – since the eyes of your heart have been enlightened – so that you may know what is the hope of his calling, what is the wealth of his glorious inheritance in the saints,*

*19 and what is the incomparable greatness of his power toward us who believe, as displayed in the exercise of his immense strength.*

*20 This power he exercised in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms*

*21 far above every rule and authority and power and dominion and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.*

**22 And God put all things under Christ's feet, and he gave him to the church as head over all things.**

**23 Now the church is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.**

In Lesson Two we made an attempt to define grace and to consider some of its features. We will continue to explore this amazing, mind-blowing subject in this lesson and, as we do so, we hope to learn more about the awesome, majestic God whom we serve.

There are four characteristics of Divine grace which we do well to consider. Firstly, the grace of God is eternal. The saving grace of God was planned before it was exercised. God purposed it before He imparted it. In **2 Timothy 1:8-9** Paul writes, *"So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me, a prisoner for his sake, but by God's power accept your share of suffering for the gospel. He is the one who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not based on our works but on his own purpose and grace, granted to us in Christ Jesus before time began"* (**New English Translation**).

Secondly, the grace of God is free. Paul writes in **Romans 3:23-24**, *"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. But they are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus"* (**New English Translation**).

Thirdly, the grace of God is sovereign, because God exercises it toward whoever He chooses. In **Romans 5:20-21** we read, *"Now the law came in so that the transgression may increase, but where sin increased, grace multiplied all the more, so that just as sin reigned in death, so also grace will reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord"* (**New English Translation**). It is obvious that grace can only reign if it is on the throne and the occupant of the throne is sovereign. Indeed, **Hebrews 4:16** exhorts us to confidently approach *"the throne of grace."*

For the very reason that grace is unmerited favour, it must be exercised in a sovereign manner. That is why God emphatically declares, *"I will make all my goodness pass before your face, and I will proclaim the LORD by name before you; "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, I will show mercy to whom I will show mercy"* (**Exodus 33:19 New English Translation**).

Fourthly, the grace of God is abundant. In **Romans 5:20-21** we read the following: *"Now the law came in so that the transgression may increase, but where sin increased, grace multiplied all the more, so that just as sin reigned in death, so also grace will reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord"* (**New English Translation**).

Paul informs us that when the Law was introduced *"sin increased."* The word *"increased,"* is the translation of a Greek word which means "to exist in abundance." Paul is explaining that when the Law was introduced, the sins of human beings instead of decreasing actually increased as a result! We may say that "Sin will never out-sin grace. Grace will always out-grace sin."

Thankfully God found a way to counteract the awful increase of sinfulness that the addition of the Law caused. Paul advises us that *"grace multiplied all the more."* The phrase *"multiplied all the more"* is the translation of a Greek word which refers to an abundance which is more than enough." It speaks to excess, overflow. In addition to that, Paul prefixes a preposition to the word which means "to be over and above." Paul says literally, "Where sin existed in abundance, grace was in superabundance, and then some more added on top of that." Where sin increased, grace multiplied and multiplied and multiplied and multiplied again! No matter how great human sin becomes, God's grace overflows beyond it and abundantly exceeds it.

There is enough grace in God's heart to save and to keep saved for all of time and eternity, every sinner that ever has lived or that ever will live, and then enough grace left over after that to save a trillion more universes full of sinners, and then a trillion more on top of that! There is an oversize reservoir of love and grace in the heart of God that can never be exhausted!

Salvation is a gift from God, therefore it can neither be earned by good works, nor claimed as a right. Why then do we think that we have a right to tell God on whom He ought to bestow it? If God decides to exercise His sovereign right by choosing a limited number out of a world of hell-deserving sinners to be saved, which of them receives injustice?

Is God obliged to give His gift of salvation to every person? Brothers and sisters, there is absolutely nothing that is more repugnant to the natural human being; nothing that exposes their innate and pathological enmity against God than to inform them of the fact that the grace of God is eternal, free, sovereign and abundant. The thought that God's purpose relative to salvation was determined from everlasting without any consultation with them is too abasing for their proud hearts. The idea that grace cannot be earned or won by any effort of humanity is maddening for those who are self-righteous. Even persons in the church find it galling. They ask for an explanation from God as to why He should save those whom He chooses to save without any reference to anything other than His grace. The clay rises up against the Potter and asks, "Why hast Thou made me thus?"

The American clergyman George S. Bishop noted that "Grace is a provision for men who are so fallen that they cannot lift the axe of justice, so corrupt that they cannot change their own natures, so averse to God that they cannot turn to Him, so blind that they cannot see Him, so deaf that they cannot hear Him, and so dead that He Himself must open their graves and lift them into resurrection."

Saving grace is a gift from God to His elect. Grace is the source from which the salvation of God flows to His chosen people. As we noted in our last lesson the fullest exposition of the amazing grace of God is to be found in the Epistles of the apostle Paul. In his writings, grace stands in direct opposition to all works and merit, of whatever kind or degree. This is very clear from **Romans 11:1-6**:

*1 I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.*

*2 God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew. Wot ye not what the scripture saith of Elias? how he maketh intercession to God against Israel, saying,*

*3 Lord, they have killed thy prophets, and digged down thine altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life.*

*4 But what saith the answer of God unto him? I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal.*

*5 Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace.*

*6 And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.*

**The Amplified Bible** renders verses **5** and **6** of our text in the following way: "So too at the present time there is a remnant (a small believing minority), selected (chosen) by grace (by God's unmerited favor and graciousness). But if it is by grace (His unmerited favor and graciousness), it is no longer conditioned on works or anything men have done. Otherwise, grace would no longer be grace [it would be meaningless]."

The apostle Paul informs the Christians living in Rome that at the present time, there is a remnant of the children of Israel selected according to the election of grace. The time to which Paul had reference in our text, was a strategic one, one marked by the incorporation of the Gentiles together with the Jews in the one Body of Christ, a time at which, while the Gentiles gladly received the Word, Israel was apostate, a time at which in spite of Israel's apostasy, there was a remnant in Israel saved in the sovereign grace of God.

This remnant, Paul says is "according to the election of grace." The Greek word translated "election" means "to pick out, to choose out from a number." The motivating factor in this picking out or choice from a number was the sovereign grace of God. It is God who has preserved for Himself a remnant. What motivated God to choose certain ones from among the Israelites was the spontaneous overflowing of His love upon those who not only do not deserve that gift, but deserve punishment for their sins. There was no reason within the people themselves for God to have preserved any portion of them. All of them had come under the righteous judgment of God, but grace manifested itself because God is a faithful God.

In order to make his argument stronger, Paul adds that the remnant that was saved was not only saved through grace but that it was the elective grace of God. Paul carries us back into the heart of God and gives us insight into the fact that He has an eternal purpose. All who are being saved, whether from the world of Israel or from among the Gentiles, are being saved by the sovereign choice of God, purely on the grounds of His grace.

It is critical for us to bear in mind that when Paul speaks of an election of grace, he is implying the entire exclusion of all human work from the question. If the remnant be reserved by grace, then it cannot be as a reward for works. Paul uses this occasion to combat a favourite notion of the Jews. This was the belief that they were justified by obedience to the Law. He reminds them that in the time of Elijah it was only because of grace why God had reserved a remnant of them. He also informs them that the fact that there was at the present time a remnant of them was entirely because of the same grace of God.

If we are justified by our works, then it is no longer a matter of favour, but a matter of debt. If the doctrine of justification by grace could be held and at the same time the doctrine of works was true, then it would follow that grace had changed its nature, or was a different thing from what the word properly signified. The idea of being saved by works contradicts the very idea of grace. If a man owes a debt, and pays it, there is no grace involved. There is no favour in the man paying his just dues.

Salvation cannot be partly by grace and partly by works. The person, who is not willing to obtain eternal life entirely by the grace of God, cannot obtain it at all.

This text is the simplest expression of elementary mathematics. If a debt has been entirely paid, there is nothing left to be paid. If you owe a debt of one hundred dollars and somebody pays the debt for you and presents you with a receipt for the full amount, you are no more obligated to the person to whom you owed the debt. The debt has been fully satisfied. No part of it can be charged against you ever again. If the Lord Jesus Christ paid for the full guilt of our sin, there is no guilt left to be paid for in any other fashion.

There is nothing that you or I can do to make God love us more. There is no reason that we may advance, that makes any sense to explain why God loves us. He loves us because he loves us! We find evidence of this amazing truth in **Deuteronomy 7:6-8**: *“For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.”*

We must never think that it is easier for God to love us when we are good. If there is anyone in the building who secretly supposes that God loved you and chose you because you deserved it, you do not understand the grace of God. If you think that some people's behaviour is so bad that God could not possibly save them, your knowledge of God is very limited.

In verse **6** of **Romans 11** Paul writes, *“And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. If it be of works, then is it no more grace, otherwise work is no more work.”* Grace and works will no more unite than an acid and an alkali. The absolute favour of God can no more consist with human merit than oil and water will fuse into one.

Because salvation is by grace, works have no part in it. The reason that works cannot be allowed by God to have any part in salvation is because works have originated within the heart of man. Works have their motivation in the heart of that which has come from Adam. The whole idea of works is that man can provide a basis to force God to give him some blessings as a just reward for the works. The whole idea of grace is that God acts toward man entirely according to that which is to be found within His own divine nature of love. We say again that the two ideas are mutually exclusive and destroy each other when placed together.

The remnant was chosen on a principle of election by grace. Who was chosen and how many were chosen was determined by reasons that lie in the mind and counsels of God alone. If the choice is based on works, no sovereign freedom is possible in the divine action.

There is nothing in such a choice that will produce in the saved remnant an adoring confession of unspeakable and mysterious mercy.

We close this lesson with what we believe is an important observation. The reservation of the seven thousand men cannot possibly be explained adequately by making it an election of mere masses of men, as for instance of a nation, considered apart from its individuals. In the reservation by God of these men we have to deal with the obvious inference of seven thousand individual experiences, and the ultimate secret of every one of them which is found only in the divine Will affecting each individual. The seven thousand men were so isolated, so little grouped together, that even Elijah did not know of their existence. They were individual men, each one of whom, by the sovereign grace of God, found power to stand personally firm against the wickedness of that evil time. Paul refers to them as an example and illustration of the Lord's way and will with the believing of all time. In the case of these seven thousand men, Paul is stressing not merely national election but individual election, and he does so as a permanent spiritual mystery. The reason for their refusal to bow their knees to the image of Baal was the fact that the Lord had reserved them for Himself! Each of them was individually enabled to remain steadfast and unmoveable by a sovereign and special grace. While it is true that each of them was a true human personality, freely choosing not to yield, behind their freedom was the higher freedom of the Will of God, saving them from themselves that they might be free to stand for Him.