

EXPENSIVE GRACE¹

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A veterinarian can learn a lot about a dog owner he has never met just by observing the dog. What does the world learn about God by watching us his followers on earth? Trace the roots of *grace*, and you will find a verb that means “I rejoice, I am glad.” Rejoicing and gladness are not the first images that come to mind when people think of church. They think of holier-than-thous. They think of church as a place to go after you have cleaned up your act, not before. They think of morality, not grace. “Church!” said the prostitute, “Why would I ever go there? I was already feeling terrible about myself. They’d just make me feel worse.”

Most emotional problems among Christians are the failure to understand, receive, and live out God’s unconditional grace and forgiveness; and the failure to give out that unconditional love, forgiveness, and grace to others. We read, we hear, we believe grace. But that’s not the way we live. The good news of the gospel of grace has not penetrated the level of our heart.

After nearly two thousand years, Paul’s writings are still yielding depths of truth that we all have yet to penetrate fully. Paul writes exactly-right formula of salvation—we are saved “not of works” but “by grace . . . *through* faith, and that not of [ourselves]; it is the gift of God” (Eph. 2:8). When we say that we are “saved through faith” we don’t want to give the impression (or

have the idea) that our own exercise of faith is the cause or the means of our salvation. No one in the hereafter will boast, “Yes, the Lord saved me, but I did my part: I did the work required, I believed—that’s why I’m here. I helped save myself.” Utterly whole-hearted thanks will pour out of our souls for all time and eternity. (To believe is not a work!)

We all long for clearer, sharper understanding of what it means to be saved, because of “the riches of [God’s] grace, . . . the gift of God.” If we have been “saved . . . *through* faith,” we will bear fruits of “good works” which are “His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus” (vss. 9, 10). All our reading the Bible is useless if it doesn’t result in “good works.” Although they don’t save us, they are an important evidence that we have truly believed and that our pride and arrogance have been humbled by appreciating that grace. That’s included in what it means to “believe.”

An important part of “good works” which are the fruit of mature faith is a preparation of heart and life for the second coming of Jesus—not just getting ready to die. Not until the second advent can God’s people safely claim graduation out of our “rich-and-increased-with-goods” complex which has continued to “frustrate the grace of God” (Gal. 2:23, KJV) for centuries.

We are living in this “time of the end,” the cosmic Day of Atonement, the hour of the *cleansing* of the sanctuary. Therefore our reading of Ephesians is prefaced by the conviction that we live in an hour of supreme crisis. *The Lord Jesus wants to return the second time*. He will forever retain His human nature so that He is still a Man seated at the right hand of His Father in heaven. All humanity is bound up there with

¹ Ephesians 2:8. 109, 111.

Him. He is an eager bridegroom who wants the wedding to come. The great controversy between Christ and Satan has not yet been finally settled even though Christ won His victory on His cross two millennia ago; His people now have a vital part in this *final* outworking of the issues.

Christ effected a legal justification for “all men” by His sacrifice on the cross. Some feel that His sacrifice only made a provision of grace for all men. There is a failure to realize that such a position is against God’s law, because we can’t have grace without a legal foundation for it. God’s holy law has been transgressed by the sinner; grace cannot now be extended to him unless the just demands of that broken law are first satisfied in his behalf.

First, let us define “grace.” Ellen White says it is “unmerited favor.” “We should continually realize that we do not deserve grace because of our merit, for all that we have is God’s gift.”² “We owe everything to grace, free grace, sovereign grace. Grace in the covenant ordained our adoption. Grace in the Saviour effected our redemption, our regeneration, and our adoption to heirship with Christ.”³ “It is only through the unmerited grace of Christ that any man can find entrance into the city of God.”⁴ “From eternal ages the covenant of grace (unmerited favor) existed in the mind of God. It is called the everlasting covenant, for the plan of salvation was not conceived after the fall of man, but it was that which was ‘kept in silence through times eternal, but now is manifested, and . . . made

² FE 457.

³ 6T 268.

⁴ COL 394.

known unto all the nations . . .’ (Rom. 16:25, 26, R.V.).”⁵

Only sinners can receive grace, not sinless beings such as the unfallen angels. “God loves the sinless angels, who do His service, and are obedient to all His commands; but He does not give them grace. These heavenly beings know naught of grace; they have never needed it; for they have never sinned.”⁶

Why? Only sinners have broken God’s law. Grace was never understood until after the fall. “By disobeying the commands of God, man fell under the condemnation of His law. This fall called for the grace of God to appear in behalf of sinners. We should never have learned the meaning of this word ‘grace’ had we not fallen.”⁷ Grace therefore is directly related to God’s broken law.

The common popular idea in Christianity is that God doesn’t mind if we have broken His law; He can simply overlook our sin, be merciful, pardon us cheaply, and by His sovereign authority He can forget about His broken law. It’s not important. The idea of grace without that law being upheld and satisfied is the teaching of the popular churches.

What does His grace accomplish for “all men”? They are “justified by His grace” (Titus 3:7). Therefore, if we tell someone that he can be justified without that law being satisfied by a legal justification, we are opposing God’s law whether we realize it or not.

Here is the reason why grace requires justification: “The righteousness of God without law is manifested, .

⁵ TMK 366.

⁶ *God’s Amazing Grace* p. 10; *In Heavenly Places*, p. 34.

⁷ GAG, p. 10.

. . . even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by His *grace* through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God. To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be *just*, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus” (Rom. 3:21-26).

This means all “have sinned” at some given point in time. We all sinned “in Adam,” when he sinned. The phrase “being justified” relates the justification to the time when “all sinned.”

Paul tells us that what Adam did to bring condemnation upon the human race Christ reversed by bringing justification upon the human race: “If through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many . . . By the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.” And Paul goes on to say in the same passage that “grace did much more abound” by the fact that this “justification of life” has been given to “all men” (Rom. 5:20).

Thus the justification and the grace are linked together, and cannot be separated: “The *law worketh wrath*: for where no law is, there is no transgression. Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by *grace*” (Rom. 4:15, 16). Do you see it? The “wrath of the law” must be satisfied before there can be grace. When someone

is “under the law” he cannot be “under grace” (Rom. 6:14).

Paul goes on to explain that we cannot be under grace unless first “God has sent His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh” (Rom. 8:3). Thus when Christ satisfied the broken law by His sacrificial death, by necessity He *effected* a legal justification for all men. Otherwise we could not even live so as to have another trial.

That broken law is satisfied only by the righteousness of Christ. The point is that law cannot be satisfied by a righteousness that is effected *instead* of us, but only *to* us. In other words, Christ must enter the corporate stream of fallen mankind, and fully identify with us.

When that “wrath” of the law was poured upon Christ in the sinner’s behalf, He has “tasted death for every man” (Heb. 2:9). Upon Him was laid “the iniquity of us all.” Unless we recognize this truth, we lapse into cheap grace, even while declaiming against it. It was “by the *grace* of God [that Christ] should taste death for every man” (Heb. 2:9).

This is very *expensive* grace. If all Christ endured was the “rest” which we call death, that is, a sweet sleep as a brief relief, then it necessarily becomes cheap grace. But if He endured the equivalent of the second death, the complete pouring “out of His soul unto death,” the real thing, the giving of Himself unto eternity, going to hell in our behalf, then it is extremely *expensive* grace.

Christ’s sacrifice on the cross as accomplishing infinitely more than “merely deferring” the original punishment for sin. “The punishment or wages of sin—

eternal death” was neither “waived,” “deferred,” nor “delayed,” but was inflicted totally on Christ.

This is the only foundation on which grace can rest. Grace that does not rest on Christ’s complete sacrifice must be “cheap grace.” He actually and truly paid the debt of every man’s sin, and therefore fully died the second death of “every man.” Thus there is no reason for any human soul to die that second death except for his own personal unbelief, his refusal to appreciate what Christ has actually (not provisionally) accomplished for him on the cross (John 3:17-19).

This view of the cross may take one’s breath away, but we see it as stark Bible truth, the “objective gospel.” This truth is practical godliness, for it motivates the human heart to do what nothing else can do—to live “henceforth” not for self, but for Him.

There is evidence that Ellen White agrees. She says that it is Christ’s death that gives efficiency to His grace. “His grace can act with unbounded *efficiency*.”⁸ In other words, there could be no grace apart from His death.

This grace was so *expensive* that it is impossible to “measure” what it cost Heaven to give it. Grace was paid for by a price impossible to measure. “The grace given cost Heaven a price it is impossible for us to measure.”⁹

Again, that grace is inseparable from law. “That precious grace offered to men through a Saviour’s blood, establishes the law of God.”¹⁰ She says it’s a “deception” to speak of grace without the law being

satisfied. If we seek to establish grace apart from a legal justification, then we are disparaging the law of God. We are unwittingly falling into the trap that Ellen White speaks of:

“It is the sophistry of Satan that the death of Christ brought in grace to take the place of the law. . . . That precious grace offered to men through a Saviour’s blood establishes the law of God. Since the fall of man, God’s moral government and His grace are inseparable. They go hand in hand through all dispensations.”¹¹

“The gospel of Christ is the good news of grace, or favor, by which man may be released from the condemnation of sin and enabled to render obedience to the law of God.” Ellen White says that grace releases from condemnation. “The gospel of Christ is the good news of grace, or favor, by which man may be released from the condemnation of sin and enabled to render obedience to the law of God.”¹²

Paul says that the legal justification effected at the cross releases from condemnation (Rom. 5:18), then the two truths must go together. We may conclude therefore, that the grace manifested through the cross is founded upon the legal justification effected there.

No wonder Paul soars into the heavenly realms when he writes: “*But God*, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He

⁸ *That I May Know Him*, p. 69.

⁹ *In Heavenly Places*, p. 220.

¹⁰ *Faith I Live By*, p. 89.

¹¹ *Faith and Works*, p. 30.

¹² *Mind, Character Personality*, Vol. 2, p. 563.

might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:4-7).

The apostle introduces the glorious alternative available to this pathetic lot, “dead in trespasses,” in two dramatic words, ‘*But God . . .*’ These two words may be among the Bible’s most beautiful words. We were dead, *but God*; we were rebels, *but God*; we were under judgment of death, *but God*; we were aliens and strangers, *but God*; Satan may seem triumphant, *but God*.

Muslims believe that Allah is “merciful.” Paul goes further and establishes how God is merciful by linking His mercy to His love, which in Paul’s vocabulary is a special word, *agape*. The apostle John reaches the zenith in portrayals of the character of God by declaring simply yet profoundly that “God is *agape*” (1 John 4:8). *Agape* is what is missing in Islam, indeed, it has also become missing in much of modern professions of Christianity.

The reason is that a very popular teaching, embraced by the great bulk of Christian people, acts as a smoke screen or clouds that cover the snows of Everest; it hides *agape*. The doctrine of the natural immortality of the human soul which is embraced by most Roman Catholic and Protestant churches (and of course in Islam) came originally from ancient paganism and has been imported into popular Christianity. Multitudes are totally unaware how it happened.

At first thought it is assumed that it doesn’t matter whether or not we believe in natural immortality; we still believe in the cross because we put it up on our church steeples and we wear it around our necks. But we can’t grasp what happened on the cross if we

believe in that natural immortality teaching. Here’s why:

The Bible says that “Christ *died* for our sins” (1 Cor. 15:3), but if natural immortality is true, He didn’t! If you believe in natural immortality, you can’t believe that anybody will ever die; all go to heaven or to hell in eternal life-consciousness. (Paul says that the first death is a “sleep,” 1 Thess. 4:16, 17.) That’s why popular religion sends people straight to heaven when they die or straight to hell (or to Rome’s invention of “purgatory”). But the Bible teaches that when people die, they “sleep” and await either the first resurrection or the second—the first being “blessed and holy” and the second, “unto damnation” (Rev. 20:6; John 5:29). That expression, “Christ died . . .” means that He actually died the real, genuine death which is what the Bible calls “the second death” (Rev. 2:11; 20:14). That only is the real thing!

The Bible goes into great detail in describing the nature of the death that Jesus died. Isaiah says that He “poured out His soul unto death” (53:12). He “emptied Himself” (Phil. 2:7). No man has ever done that other than Christ, for no man ever had a divine soul of which to “empty Himself”! Jesus described the death he was dying as God forsakenness. No other man has ever borne the full weight of such utter forsakenness, for he never had the divine consciousness to realize it.

The Bible consistently teaches that man is by nature mortal and that immortality is something given to man only by Christ. Thus in one stroke, the superstitious fear of an eternally burning hell in consciousness is removed; the character of God begins to shine in its

natural clarity as truly being “mercy.” God could never be happy in eternity with a burning hell in perpetuum filled with tortured humans. Neither could you be happy in such a heaven!

When Paul says that God “made us alive together with Christ,” he means He saved us from that same second death that had claimed Christ! You have infinitely more reason to be glad that you can take your next breath if you can realize the price that Christ paid to “make you alive”!

Paul says that you and I were “dead with Christ” in order to have been “made alive . . . with Christ.” “Alive” takes on an enormously greater meaning. You were born as all babies are born, and that birth was the beginning of your existence in this universe; but Paul perceives a deeper spiritual meaning—your birth was in fact a resurrection from what would have been for you the horror of the second death! And he can’t bring himself to say it without throwing in again, “by grace you have been saved”!

The Father simply sent His Son with the command, “Save that person!” And He did—you! Paul speaks of what it means to “frustrate the grace of God” (Gal. 2:21, KJV). Let that grace have its way with you; don’t resist or frustrate it.

And where now is our new home? You may still have your earthly residence in a shack, but Paul puts you right there with Christ. So he has to say that God has “made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” The sitting is “together” with Him; a shack in the slums is better than being nailed to a cross, so that any living condition now short of crucifixion is something to be thankful for—difficult as that may

seem to be. But seriously, the Lord Jesus has promised that He lives with you! His presence transforms your humble home into His palace.

Don’t mock this holy truth, or even let yourself doubt it. His presence with us is most real; only sinful unbelief will deprive us of the joy of its comfort.

And what is His greatest “pleasure,” His “fun”? Showing off the purchases of His great sacrifice throughout the wide universe, “that in the ages to come He might show [display] the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” We can understand this just a little if we think how a father or a mother loves to show off their child; their lives are bound up with the little one—and it’s only natural that God the Father loves to “dote” (that’s not the best word, but what’s a better one?) on His adopted children!

And all this glorious destiny, God has prepared for us long ago. Not that He has predestined anyone to be saved against his will—He can’t do that to anyone; but He prepared it all “beforehand” that we should walk in all these “good works,” to our eternal delight and to His eternal joy as well.

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Eph. 2:8-9).

Here we have the classic, inspired formula that forever ends all controversy and confusion! Paul, no angel could have said it more plainly! You have cleared up all the controversy that has raged through the centuries about “faith and works.”

It may be popular to say “we are saved by faith,” but that is not the precisely accurate definition: rather, “by

grace you have been saved.” Faith is not far away: the grace operates “*through faith*.” The latter is only the appreciation of the former.

When and where was the saving grace revealed? *At the cross*.

Whose grace is it? “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men” (Titus 2:11).

Is it possible for us to resist this grace? Paul says, “I do not set aside [frustrate, KJV] the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain” (Gal. 2:21).

Does this grace of God wipe out the reality of obedience to all the commandments of God? This grace of God “teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present age” (cf. Titus 2:12). We have teacher!

What are the dimensions of this grace? “Where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, so that as sin reigned in death, even so might grace reign through righteousness to eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 5:20, 21).

Therefore, which is stronger—our wicked, sinful nature, or this much more abounding grace? Astonishing as the answer is to many, the simple truth is clear: there is no temptation that Satan and all his evil angels can invent that is not weaker than the corresponding grace that “abounds much more.” Don’t let yourself think upside down; think the pure Bible good news: it is better news than we have thought.

This means, of course, that the blessed truth of the pure good news says that it is easier to be saved at last, than to be lost—if only we appreciate how that

grace is revealed—in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

A father was battling with his fifteen-year-old daughter. Several nights she had not bothered to come home at all. The parents had tried various forms of punishment, to no avail. The daughter lied to them, deceived them, and found a way to turn the tables on them. “It’s your fault for being so strict!”

He said, “I remember standing before the plate-glass window in my living room, staring out into the darkness, waiting for her to come home. I felt such rage. I wanted to be like the father of the Prodigal Son, yet I was furious with my daughter for the way she would manipulate us and twist the knife to hurt us. And, of course, she was hurting herself more than anyone. I understood then the passages in the prophets expressing God’s anger. The people knew how to wound him, and God cried out in pain.

“And yet I must tell you, when my daughter finally came home, I wanted nothing in the world so much as to take her in my arms, to love her, to tell her I wanted the best for her. I was a helpless, lovesick father.”

I think of Jesus’ depiction of the waiting Father, heartsick, abused, yet wanting above all else to forgive and begin anew, to announce with joy, “This my son was dead, and is alive again, he was lost, and is found.”