

DISTINCTIVES OF GRACE
Bible Study Notes #7, October 2, 2005

GRACE ALONE (*Sola Gratia*)

After the gospel is fully revealed, and the Apostles are writing the letters to the church, they all invoke a form of greeting and blessing that becomes universal and common for them all. Paul, in *every one of his letters*, has some form of “grace to you” or “grace be with you all” or “grace and peace to you” (etc.). The writer of Hebrews says in Hebrews 13:25 “Grace be with you all.” Peter, in his two epistles, wrote “May grace and peace be yours in fullest measure.” (1Pet. 1:2), and “Grace and peace be multiplied to you...” (2Pet. 1:2). The Apostle John also writes “Grace, mercy and peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love” (2 John 1:3) and “Grace to you and peace” and “The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all” in his book of Revelation. *WHY?*

Why would so many of our church fathers write about “**grace**”? Why would C. H. Spurgeon write one of his most important works and title it “All of Grace,” and refer to his view of parts of the gospel’s teaching as the “doctrines of grace?” Why did John Newton in 1779 write the lyrics to the hymn *Amazing Grace*, and why is it probably the most beloved and well known of all hymns? Why did 15 men, after much discussion, prayer and thought, finally decide upon “Grace Fellowship” as the name of this new church? Why did we name ministry of the WGRW radio station “Grace Radio?” Why did I even name our last daughter Abigail *Grace*, and why did Carlton name his first Hannah *Grace*? *WHAT is so important about grace? Or, what is so amazing about grace?* (Personal note: The concept of grace or what I might define as a “grace orientation” has totally changed my life and my doctrinal positions on most all of the Bible’s teachings.)

The Doctrinal position called “**Grace Alone**” refers to the teaching that **we are “justified” by grace alone**, and more specifically, that we are “**sanctified**” by **grace alone**. Another way of saying the same thing is that God alone saves us, and that we do not contribute any merit or works to the process of God’s declaration of our being justified,” or of God’s work of making us holy and set apart after we are saved. Most Christians (at least claim to) believe that they are saved by the grace of God. But what does that mean? Why is this so controversial if **all** believe in it?

The doctrine or teaching called Faith Alone referred to the *means* or *instrument* of salvation or justification. **Grace Alone** refers to the **basis** or **source** of our justification or sanctification. Why then is it significant to note the prepositions “by” and “through” that precede “faith” and “grace” in **Eph. 2:8**? Explain the difference. Why is it irrelevant if faith is a “gift of God” or not if we are saved **by grace through faith**?

To understand this doctrine, we must first **define the terms** involved. The Bible is a story of salvation of a very unique and special nature. There is nothing else which gives us a perfect comparison or analogy. (No illustration of grace comes close to the real thing!) One of the many “Bible words” used so much by church goers and genuine Christians alike is **grace!** In many ways it could be called the *keyword of Christianity!*

Only with it can any or all of the Biblical doctrines be understood, and without it none of the major doctrines, especially salvation, can be explained or understood.

- **“Grace”** in the Bible:
 1. Old Testament – Hebrew roots *hen, hanan, chesed, raham* are used as nouns, verbs and adjectives for concepts that could be translated “grace.” These mean favor, grace, loving-kindness, affection, mercy and compassion as nouns; and to be gracious, show favor, loving-kindness, affection, or mercy and compassion as verbs.
 2. New Testament – Greek root ***charis*** is a noun meaning a gift which causes joy, pleasure, or gratification; a kindness granted; a benefit; a favor done without the expectation of return; a gift from God! Its various related forms (as nouns, verbs or adjectives) similarly refer to gifts or gifting or favor without reason, merit or works and based upon the initiative of God alone.
- **“Grace”** is at opposition to, in tension with, and the antithesis of **“works”** (*erga*) in the Bible. These two concepts are ***mutually exclusive***. So it affirms the initiative and gift of God based upon His loving-kindness, mercy and nature; but also denies that it is based upon merit or is deserved in any way by the recipient.
- **“Alone”** emphasizes the source and giver is the active agent in the gift and its effects. God alone is at work in grace. He alone is the *cause* and the *content* of our justification, sanctification and glorification.
- **“Sanctification”** comes from the verb “sanctify”, and literally means to set apart for special use or purpose, that being to make holy or sacred. Therefore, sanctification refers to the state or process of being set apart, i.e. being made holy by God. If justification is the “new birth,” then sanctification might be viewed as the “new growth!” Other ways to view sanctification might be growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ, being conformed to the image of Christ, being transformed by the renewing of the mind, being made into a new creation in Christ, our “walk with God,” or being strengthened or maturing in the faith.
- The concept of **“grace alone”** brings up the two opposing concepts called ***monergism*** and ***synergism***. These two concepts focus on ***who*** is responsible or at work in the actions of grace, specifically as they relate to our justification or salvation. ***Monergism*** declares that God alone is at work in our salvation, and that we are simply recipients of His grace. ***Synergism*** teaches that both God and man have parts to play and are at work in salvation. Do the practices of the modern church match up with its professions about grace? Explain.
- **Consider these questions** on the basis of what the Bible teaches:

1. How can grace be so misunderstood and even disbelieved in Christianity? Why is it so hard to understand? Why is it so hard to fully believe and accept?
2. Is faith a gift or a work? Does faith precede grace or does grace precede faith? Why is the answer to the first question important to the second?
3. What is the *order of salvation*? Based upon Romans 8:29-30, what is the order of the “chain of grace” of our salvation?

The Cambridge Declaration declared in 1996 that *Sola Gratia* (Grace Alone) was in need of re-affirmation due to “**The Erosion of the Gospel.**” This statement went on to say:

“Unwarranted confidence in human ability is a product of fallen human nature. This false confidence now fills the evangelical world, from the self-esteem gospel, to the health and wealth gospel, from those who have transformed the gospel into a product to be sold and sinners into consumers who want to buy, to others who treat Christian faith as being true simply because it works. This silences the doctrine of justification regardless of the official commitments of our churches.

God’s grace in Christ is not merely necessary but is the sole efficient cause of salvation. We confess that human beings are born spiritually dead and are incapable even of cooperating with regenerating grace.”

They then presented their *Thesis Three: Sola Gratia*

“We *affirm* that in salvation we are rescued from God’s wrath by His grace alone. It is the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit that brings us to Christ by releasing us from our bondage to sin and raising us from spiritual death to spiritual life.

We *deny* that salvation is in any sense a human work. Human methods, techniques or strategies by themselves cannot accomplish this transformation. Faith is not produced by our unregenerated human nature.”

- So, the question comes down to “What is the nature of our salvation and all its phases?” or more specifically, “WHO is responsible for our salvation and all its phases?” (i.e. if it is all of God, then it is an unmerited *gift* and is not based upon anything by or from us) When Jonah had been three days and nights in the belly of the great fish, he prayed in repentance and understanding that “Salvation is from the **Lord!**” (Jonah 2:9) Is that really and totally true or not?
- Consider the basic logic and reason of the argument: (Make **diagram** with triangle representing the Triune God with lines from each corner to groups A and B, representing all men who will ultimately be lost and go to hell, and all men who will ultimately be saved and go to heaven, respectively.) Present the modern American Evangelical view that: 1) The Father loves all men equally and has designed and desires all men equally to come to Him in salvation; 2) The Son gave Himself and died on behalf of all men equally, and His atonement is both sufficient and efficient for all; and 3) The Holy Spirit draws and woos all men equally without distinction. **What is wrong with this picture?** It is obvious that the grace of God displayed and given in the love of the Father, the life and death

of the Son, and the testimony and drawing of the Holy Spirit is all **insufficient to save alone or else all men would be saved!** What is it that saves if God's grace is not the efficient cause of salvation? It becomes based upon what a person *does*; his *decision* for God becomes a *work!* **Who** gets the *glory* for that?

- Read the account of Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus in **John 3:1-8**.

[1] Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; [2] this man came to Him by night, and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." [3] Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." [4] Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" [5] Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. [6] "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. [7] "Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' [8] "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

- What is the physical analogy Jesus uses to try to teach Nicodemus about salvation? What is God's part and what is man's part in this analogy? What other implications can be taken from considering the nature and results of a physical birth? Who does what?
- Read **John 6:35-45, 60-65**.

[35] Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst. [36] "But I said to you, that you have seen Me, and yet do not believe. [37] "All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. [38] "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. [39] "And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. [40] "For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him, may have eternal life; and I Myself will raise him up on the last day."

[41] The Jews therefore were grumbling about Him, because He said, "I am the bread that came down out of heaven." [42] And they were saying, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does He now say, 'I have come down out of heaven'?" [43] Jesus answered and said to them, "Do not grumble among yourselves. [44] "No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day. [45] "It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be TAUGHT OF God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me.

[60] Many therefore of His disciples, when they heard this said, "This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it?" [61] But Jesus, conscious that His disciples

grumbled at this, said to them, "Does this cause you to stumble? [62] "What then if you should behold the Son of Man ascending where He was before? [63] "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life. [64] "But there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him. [65] And He was saying, "For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me, unless it has been granted him from the Father."

- Who is at work here in this teaching? What is the result? How is this teaching received? What is the basis of its reception or rejection?

- Read **John 1:9-13**.

[9] There was the true light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. [10] He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. [11] He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. [12] But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, [13] who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

- Where is the grace in this passage? Who is giving what to whom?

- Read **John 11:38-44**.

[38] Jesus therefore again being deeply moved within, came to the tomb. Now it was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. [39] Jesus said, "Remove the stone." Martha, the sister of the deceased, said to Him, "Lord, by this time there will be a stench, for he has been dead four days." [40] Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you, if you believe, you will see the glory of God?" [41] And so they removed the stone. And Jesus raised His eyes, and said, "Father, I thank Thee that Thou hearest Me. [42] "And I knew that Thou hearest Me always; but because of the people standing around I said it, that they may believe that Thou didst send Me." [43] And when He had said these things, He cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth." [44] He who had died came forth, bound hand and foot with wrappings; and his face was wrapped around with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

- What was Lazarus' contribution to this "reviving?" How "gracious" was the act of Jesus?

- Read **Eph. 1:1-12**.

[1] Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are at Ephesus, and who are faithful in Christ Jesus: [2] Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

[3] Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, [4] just as He chose us in Him

before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love [5] He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, [6] to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. [7] In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, [8] which He lavished upon us. In all wisdom and insight [9] He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him [10] with a view to an administration suitable to the fulness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth. In Him [11] also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, [12] to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

- What does God do here? What do we do? What is the result for us? For God?
- Read **Eph. 2:1-10**.

[1] And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, [2] in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. [3] Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. [4] **But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, [5] even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),** [6] and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus, [7] in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. [8] For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; [9] not as a result of works, that no one should boast. [10] For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

- What is our state, nature, and master before God's grace? What does God grace us with in place of each of these? What is the result?
- Consider **grace from a three fold perspective of what it is and what it does**. These three aspects of grace could be :
 1. Grace as **love** – Mark 5:22-43, Eph. 2:4, Luke 15:20, Rom. 5:8, John 3:16
 2. Grace as **power** – 1Ths. 1:5, Rom. 1:16, Eph. 2:5, 2Cor. 5:17
 3. Grace as **a free (but irresistible) gift** – Rom. 3:24, 5:10-21, 6:23, 11:6; Eph. 2:8, 3:7, 4:7; 2Tim. 1:9, Titus 3:4-7
- Now consider the conversion and life of **Paul**, the Apostle. Read Romans 8:1, 9:1-22, 1Cor. 15:9-10. How can we see the grace of God at work in Paul's justification and life as power, love and a free gift?

- What about *beyond* the initial point of conversion or justification, what place does grace have in **sanctification**? (Col. 2:6, 2Pet. 3:18) How is it different (from justification) and yet the same in its importance and impacts? In other words, how do we develop and mature as Christians?
- Most teaching and books on the Christian walk or growth might best be described as “how to” or “self help.” They present formulas or techniques for how to study the Bible, pray, worship, handle marriage or family issues, handle financial issues, handle work or career issues, etc...

1. Who makes us grow? **GOD!** (Paul said:)

1 Cor. 3:6-7 (NASB) I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. [7] So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, **but God who causes the growth.**

2. What kind of growth is this? (Go back to John 3:1-8 for the analogy of physical birth. Birth is a cause for great joy initially, but great concern later if not followed by healthy and steady growth!)
3. In what ways or how do we grow? Growing in grace means becoming like Christ! Jesus, who grew in grace is the *source* of spiritual growth. Jesus, who grew in grace, is the *example* of spiritual growth. Since He was a man, He needed to grow spiritually. (Consider how Jesus grew.)

Luke 2:40 (NASB) And the Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.

[51] And He went down with them, and came to Nazareth; and He continued in subjection to them; and His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

[52] And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

So, How did Jesus grow?

In the fruit of the Spirit

In the disciplines of life

In obedience to God

In experience (communion) with God and men

In the knowledge of the Scriptures

In the fellowship of God's people

4. Who are some more Biblical examples of growing in grace, and what can learn from them?

Daniel – “Growing faithfully” (he followed God wholeheartedly, he made an early commitment, his first victories were preparations for the later tests, he was a man of prayer, he was a student of the word [both “legs” of the “walk”])

Peter – “starts and stops, fits and failures” (growth is not the same with every Christian, growth can be present despite failure, growth cannot be judged by externals and standards)

Timothy – “coping with yourself” (trials of youth, weak conscience overcome by early training, Scriptural teachings, prayer, and discipleship by another)

- A. W. Pink said: “Just as the sinner’s despair of any hope from himself is the first prerequisite of a sound conversion, so the loss of all confidence in himself is the first essential in the believer’s growth in grace.”
- **What are the practical applications of this doctrine? Does it make evangelism easier or harder? Does it make living by grace (sanctification) easier or harder? Explain.**
- **Consider what may be meant by a “grace orientation” for a Christian. Is this a requirement to be saved? How would that impact his view of any teaching or doctrine? How would that impact his daily life and walk with God? How would it impact his view of heaven (eternity with God) and his future glorification? How would it impact his view of modern evangelicalism and its teachings?** (Discuss Modern American evangelicalism and its methods, traced back to Finney and the Second Great Awakening.)
 - From beginning to end, **the revelation of God is one of “GRACE!”**

Genesis 1:1 (NASB) In the beginning **God** created the heavens and the earth.

Rev. 22:21 (NASB) The **grace** of the Lord Jesus be with all. **Amen.**

All God does he does for His GLORY!

All God does for us, He does by His grace!