

**General Topics :: The Amazing Possibilities of Grace****The Amazing Possibilities of Grace - posted by KingJimmy (), on: 2009/4/26 20:24**

There is a word in the Christian vocabulary of many that is so incredibly rich and important, yet is at the same time a word that is so highly misunderstood and abused. And that word is 'grace.' The Greek word for 'grace' is 'charis,' whose classic textbook definition simply means, 'unmerited favor' or 'kindness.' Yet as simple as this word is, the implications of what grace is and how it relates to us who believe, is as deep as a vast sea that mankind has only begun to explore. There is an amazing quality to grace, all because of the endless possibilities that it offers.

It is important that we understand that the word grace is a word that automatically carries with it the idea of relationship. Without a relationship, there can be no grace. Grace is the manner in which God relates to us. Such can be clearly seen in three definite acts of God as outlined in the Scriptures. The first act would be in the creation of the world. The second act would be in the election of Israel. The third act would be our salvation experience. All three of these acts, as we shall see, are intimately related, and show the relational nature of God's grace, and the amazing things that grace can accomplish in us.

**The Creation of the World**

If we desire to understand grace, we must understand it chiefly from God's creation of the world. In the act of creation, God graciously and of His own free will created everything that came into being. The world exists simply because God willed it to be so. James reminds us that it was "in the exercise of His will that He brought us forth." (James 1:18) Apart from God there was nothing but God. Nothing begged or pleaded with God to create this world. There was nothing that could twist His arm into creating the world. Rather, He simply created.

There are some whose misunderstanding of the nature of God has led them to believe that because God is love, He was forced by His own character to create the world so that He might have somebody to love. Contrary to this teaching, God was under no obligation whatsoever to create the cosmos and all that it contains, in order to find personal fulfillment. God is self-sufficient, and within the Trinity is a Divine community in which God's love can be expressed within that community, and thus, it needs no other outlet in which to find expression. God was not coerced by Himself into creating the world.

Rather, the creation of the world shows that there was nothing in the world to merit its own creation. Such might seem like a silly and self-evident thing to even say, and one might wonder why this essay should even bring the topic up altogether. But sadly, there are many out there who profess to be Christians and preachers of the gospel, who need to be reminded of this very thing. For they think somehow that the grace of God is merited, and comes to them because of who they are or what they do.

However, in the act of creation God demonstrated the essence of what His grace is all about. Just as creation was ex nihilo, so God's grace is a free gift that comes ex nihilo—out of nothing. It is so important that we grasp this very thing. Just as nothing preceded creation, nothing precedes grace. The only thing that preceded creation is God, and likewise, the only thing that precedes grace is God. And in this we can see the issue of grace ultimately is ultimately the issue of choice. That is, God's decision to act and create was ultimately one of His personal choosing.

Nothing happened, nor could it happen, until God spoke the word of creation. There was no light until God said, "let there be light." Everything that exists now was entirely dependent upon this very thing. Indeed, creation could not continue to exist even now unless sustained by the power of this word. And it was a word He chose to speak, as an act of grace, when it so pleased Him to exercise His will. Grace, therefore, must be seen as the free decision of God to act, and upon which the results of His actions could not have been even fathomed or entertained apart from God's choice to do what God willed to do.

**The Election of Israel**

Continuing on the themes we have developed so far, let us turn our attention to God's gracious election of Israel. No doubt, this portion of this essay may prove itself the most difficult portion for many to swallow. But I think this will be the case, not because what is set forth is contrary to the sound and consistent teaching of the Scriptures from cover to cover,

but because there is something in human nature that bucks against the idea of God being specific in regard to His gracious decisions. We don't mind God being gracious in some abstract way, as when He created the world. But the rebellion latent in our carnal nature finds violent expression at the idea of God being gracious when He is being particular.

Indeed, the violence that erupts out of the hearts of men in the last days will show this, as God enters into His "controversy with the nations." History is full of men trying to make an everlasting name for themselves, in hopes that somehow the nation or race might last forever and ever, and that they might reign supreme. Such was seen in the building of the tower of Babel, the pyramids of Egypt, the Babylonian empire, the Roman empire, and stretching all the way into modern day history with China, Nazi Germany, Communist Russia, and even the United States of America. Example after example could be given, and the future will continue to see such nations arise until the greatest expression of it is found in a nation ruled by the anti-Christ.

But as we shall now see, God's gracious dealings with Abraham and his descendants is the simple continuation of the pattern found in the creation of the world, concerning the issue of grace.

Quote:  
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"And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; And I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed." (Genesis 12:2-3)  
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The text above follows the exact same pattern we saw in regard to God's gracious creation of the world. Abraham was one of many people alive at this time in history. We know almost nothing about his life up until this point except for a brief account of his genealogy, of which there is nothing impressive to read. In fact, the little we know about him is that there is something entirely disappointing with his life. While his siblings have produced children, Abraham and his wife had produced none. They were "barren." And in those days, to be barren was tantamount to being nothing. But in the midst of this empty nothingness, there was God, and He acted.

When great darkness hung over Abraham and Sarah's life, and when there was nothing going for them, God spoke His creative word into their lives. This was their equivalent of, "let there be light." Here, God acted just as He did in the creation of the world. It was a creation ex nihilo—out of nothing. Out of nothing, God promised to bless Abraham, and to make of him a great nation, from whom he would be the source of universal blessing for all the earth, out of the land that God would give to him. Out of nothing Sarah's womb would be opened, from whom the Messiah would eventually come.

From this point on, the rest of the Old and New Testaments is the mere outworking of this very act of grace, whereby God made a decision and acted upon it. Indeed, all of history that has come since, and all that is yet to come is also the outworking of these things. But as mentioned before, there is a carnality found in human flesh that violently opposes this very thing.

From a human perspective, Abraham and his wife were but one of a thousand such couples in the world at this time who were also old and barren. There was nothing special or unique about their situation that should make them stand out as a reason to be chosen by God. "But God!" (Ephesians 2:4) And that is the only thing that made their situation different than anybody else. In God's election of Israel, God needed no more reason (or lack thereof) to establish His covenant with them over that of anybody else in the world.

Man in his rebellion always wants to cry out "Why?" (Romans 9:19-20), and to clench his fist and shake it at God, in protest that such an arbitrary decision is unfair. But as we saw with the creation of the world, God had no "reason" to coerce His decision to create the world. It was in the mere "exercise of His will" that we were brought forth. Likewise, His singling out of Israel to be the medium by which salvation would come to this world was done as the mere "exercise of His will." And continuing on this theme, we shall now turn to the individual salvation experience.

### **The Salvation Experience**

Building on what has been said so far, I would like to take the conclusions of the previous two sections and apply them to the salvation experience of the individual believer. My intention here is not to participate in the everlasting debate between Calvinists and Arminians, as to how we can best understand the "doctrines of grace." I have a definite theological bent in this area, which I shall not name, but, if I am faithful to the Scriptures, I hope to simultaneously anger and make glad both camps. The truth of the matter is that the answer to the theological difficulties raised by both schools of thought probably is somewhere in the middle.

When we look at the salvation experience of the individual believer as it stands in relation to God's grace, we can only conclude that God's relation to creation as a whole, and God's relation to Israel is built upon the very same foundation. To divorce these things from one another and to try and make up an entirely unrelated scheme is to do grave injustice to God, the Scriptures, and those who most desperately are in need of salvation. What we have learned from God's act of creation and from God's election of Israel must find the same application in the life of the individual believer.

What was the pattern established in the first two examples? That in grace, God freely acts entirely apart from the coercion of another. Everything in the created world was created *ex nihilo*—out of nothing. The same was seen in the life of Abraham. There was nothing unique about Abraham and Sarah's situation. They were merely one in a thousand who found themselves old and without children. Yet, God intervened in their situation, again freely creating *ex nihilo*. In each situation there was nothing to warrant God's action, rather, we see that in each circumstance God graciously chose to make a decision and acted upon His own will.

In regard to the salvation of the individual believer, how is it any different? The truth of the matter is, that it is not. Our individual salvation follows the same pattern as seen thus far. In our salvation, God sees us just as we are: dead, lost, and unable to help ourselves. Like the previous examples, there is nothing we can do to twist God's arm so as to bring about our salvation. He will not be coerced. If God can be coerced, then grace is no longer His free act. Indeed, if God can be coerced, then God is no longer God.

Again, James reminds us that it was "in the exercise of His will that He brought us forth by the word of truth." (James 1:18) As creation was a mere response to God's declaration of letting there be light, so our salvation is the mere response to God's declaration found in the gospel message, that all men should repent and believe in Jesus Christ. "So then, it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God..." (Romans 9:16) No matter what freedom man may or may not have in his will, man cannot will his own salvation anymore than the creation could bring itself into existence, or anymore than Abraham could bring a nation into existence. All these things wait "...on God..." And until God acts, there can be no creation, no opening of the womb, and no salvation.

### **What Grace Can Accomplish**

In light of these things, can you not see what amazing possibilities God's grace offers us? To begin to enumerate the possibilities of the life we can live in light of these things is a daunting task, because the life available to us by His grace is so immeasurable, I simply do not know where I could ever hope to begin. In the writing of this essay, I've had to step a way from the computer multiple times in hope of finding some way in the Lord to rewrite this section, but continually I find a strange sense of "writers block" every time I sit back down. Yet, oddly enough, I think the Lord is happy in this very thing!

God's grace is a mindset that He takes on in regard to those who are the recipients of His grace. What God does in His actions is the expression of the personal favor He has towards us. Thus, though we were once alienated from God, He loved us and allowed Himself to be found by us. Had God intended to forever remain aloof and hidden, we would have never discovered Him. God could have very well decided to create the world, and forever be hidden from the eyes of His creation. We could have turned over every rock on earth and searched to the edges of the universe, yet we would not have found Him. But "in the fullness of time," that is the time of His choosing, He was pleased to reveal Himself to us, namely in the person of Jesus Christ.

God's grace is not some mere abstract thing that makes little to no difference in our lives. Quite the contrary, to be the recipient of God's grace is to be the recipient of something quite tangible and amazing, which will make a major impact on your life, not only now, but in the ages to come. If you have received the grace of God, you have received the greatest gift of all. You have received His personal favor, and all the benefits thereof!

Prior to receiving His saving grace, you were engaged in a hostile relationship with God. Because of your sins, you stood before Him condemned, subjected to the curse of His law, and on the way to hell. Far from being the intended recipient of His pleasure, you were the intended recipient of His displeasure and wrath! But because of His grace towards you, things have changed. As a result, instead of continuing to live a life that is consistent with those whom God is continually angry with, you should now live a life consistent with the One whom God is continually pleased with.

Instead of being a crutch used to explain away a life of continual failure, Paul says that the grace of God was why he was able to accomplish so much! It brought victory to his life. The apostle writes:

Quote:

"But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me." (1 Corinthians 15:10)

Far from being merely a thing that pacified God's wrath for his shortcomings, Paul saw grace as an active force laboring within him to become the very thing God wanted him to be. It was accomplishing something mighty in him. Likewise, if God's grace is at work in your life, it should be accomplishing something mighty within you as well. If not, it begs the question whether you have ever truly been a recipient of God's grace. And if you have, then it only shows to date you have only received it in "vain."

When grace is properly understood, then all questions about having a "license to sin" and "once saved always saved" should become out of the question. The saint who has received God's grace should know that grace has given him a license to freely obey God and accomplish mighty things in His name, and not a license to fail, sin, and get away with it. Far from having a lax attitude towards sin, the saint knows that:

Quote:

"...the grace of God has appeared... instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age." (Titus 2:11-12)

If we have received God's grace, and know that it instructs us to deny ungodliness, then there should be no room for the idea that one is now free to live in sin without eternal consequence. Indeed, the idea that one might live in sin and not see consequences for it originated with the devil, who said to Eve, "You shall not surely die!" Such an idea is one entirely foreign to the nature of God's marvelous grace.

Quote:

"What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?" (Romans 6:1-2)

Don't I have to continually sin so as to see God's grace towards me increase? Such seems like a logical question to many people. Many people think that the only way to be in continual need of God's grace is to continually sin, otherwise they think somehow they are relying on something besides God's grace so as to secure their salvation. Yet the apostle Paul says that such is an unthinkable thing. In Paul's thinking, grace brought about a transformation in God's relationship towards you, therefore, it should also bring about a transformation in your relationship towards God. The idea of living in continual and habitual rebellion towards God is entirely unbecoming for those making claim to being recipients of God's grace.

So, contrary to conditioning us to a life of continual failure as being the normal Christian life, grace conditions us to be victorious over-comers. Instead of becoming overtaken by trials and temptations, grace becomes the banner by which we are to march on to victory, triumphing over all the works of the devil. Instead of being something to soothe us and comfort us for when we live below God's purpose and intentions for our lives, grace shows us the very thing God can make us to become.

Quote:

"And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.' Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore, I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong." (2 Corinthians 12:9-10)

Contrary to the teaching of many, the "weakness" that Paul speaks of here is not some habitual sin or thing that made him prone to sin. In fact, this weakness was something given to him to keep him from getting a big head and sinning. While he never exactly says what it is, contextually speaking, the "weakness" is grouped together in this passage with the physical and emotional sufferings he has undergone for the sake of Christ.

This weakness clearly created a handicap of some sort in his life, and was something that made Paul feel a little less confident in himself, and his ability to do the Lord's work. And after having implored the Lord to take away this weakness, the Lord showed Paul that the weakness he had was actually a Divine opportunity for the surpassing greatness of God's grace to be demonstrated in his life. Personal lack and weakness, the Lord said, allowed for the power of God to be perfected in the life of the believer.

Grace allows the weak to say they are strong. Grace allows the poor to say they are rich. Grace says whatever I don't have in and of myself, God does have. Wherever I am unable, grace says that is the opportunity for God to make me able. Grace allows Paul to say, "what I am, I am by the grace of God," and to know exactly at what points in his life grace touched him, and transformed him. As has been said time and time again in this essay, where there is nothing, there is the opportunity for God to create something ex nihilo—out of nothing.

**Re: The Amazing Possibilities of Grace - posted by KingJimmy (), on: 2009/4/26 21:27**

I realize this essay may be a bit long, but I think many will find it a beneficial read. Don't be discouraged by its size, as grace is a topic of great depth :-)

**Re: - posted by KingJimmy (), on: 2009/4/27 21:27**

Just one bump :-)

**Re: , on: 2009/4/28 10:06**

Brother, you have a gift of writing and I love reading your messages. I think you should never stop. Truthfully. There's not that "talking down to" in the way you express yourself. No guile - very clearly written and it expresses a gentle heart before Him.

I believe GOD did create the earth and all in it out of HIS Love and to have us to Love. I believe He does everything out of His Love.

Reminds me of Eph 5 "This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church."  
As why any loving couple would desire to 'create' babies.

I believe He created humankind to Love. "For the Joy set before Him." And created all of creation for His creation/people to enjoy.

That He can't help but LOVE. Love is limitless and seems to want to love more & more. The more the merrier. :-D

**Re: - posted by KingJimmy (), on: 2009/4/28 16:47**

I'm glad you were blessed. The last part of my first section wasn't written in the grace-filled spirit becoming the topic in the first couple of drafts. After a holy dissatisfaction, I had to delete about 2-3 pages worth of material and start back over. It just didn't work. I think the Lord was much more pleased with the last edit :-)