

The Grace of God

By Dr. Jim Norton

"For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ."—*Titus 2:11-13*.

The word grace (meaning "unmerited favor") appears in the Bible 167 times. While we deserve Hell, we may gain Heaven. Though we should experience God's wrath, we can know His favor. All of us are under sin's condemnation, but we can be forgiven through the grace of God.

I This Grace Has Appeared to All

It is not something which has been hidden away so that no one can discover it. The Lord would not leave mankind destitute of the hope of gaining eternal life. He has made it so simple that anyone who truly wants to can be saved and not end up going to Hell. There are none too wicked, too deep in the quagmire of sin, making it impossible for them to be forgiven. Yes, sin and transgression go deep, but God's grace goes still deeper! "But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Romans 5:20).

Yes, God is just and holy, and if these were His only characteristics, we could never be saved! God would have to condemn us, because all of us have sinned and broken His law.

However, even though this is true, along with His justice and holiness is mixed a generous amount of grace. Ephesians 2:8,9 makes it abundantly clear how a person is to be saved:

"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast."

Most religions teach that one can be saved by performing good works, such as visiting temples and shrines, praying to the dead, doing good unto others, etc. But Ephesians 2:9 contradicts that by saying, "Not of works, lest any man should boast." If we could be saved by our own works, we would boast about how well we had done this or that.

Many say they expect to be saved because they keep, or try to keep, the Golden Rule, referring to Christ's words in Matthew 7:12: "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets." But these words were not spoken to teach men how to be saved, but rather, how to live after they are saved.

Others may say that by keeping the Ten Commandments they expect to be saved. But, in reality, who among us has kept those Ten Commandments perfectly? No one except Christ Himself.

Another says he hopes to go to Heaven by following the teaching found in the Sermon on the Mount, recorded in Matthew, chapters 5 through 7. But eternal salvation is not given to us in any such way. Rather, "it is the gift of God." His rich grace makes that superb gift possible!

In *Acts 15:11* Peter declares it is grace alone which can save Jew or Gentile. In this present era we might add: Japanese, Korean or Westerner. "But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they."

II First Mention of Grace

But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord" (Genesis 6:8). Noah lived six hundred years prior to the Great Flood which covered the whole earth. According to verse 5, mankind had grown increasingly evil so that his mind was devoid of anything which was good: "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."

As much as it grieved the Almighty to do so, He determined He would destroy His creation. Nevertheless, in this vast population—perhaps hundreds of millions—one man, Noah, found grace in the eyes of the Lord. He was living an upright and godly life in contrast with the licentious and profligate lives of the rest of humanity during that period of history. Thus, he and his family, consisting of eight members, were spared. The Lord preserved them so they did not perish beneath the waves like the rest of humanity.

As Noah was saved by grace, so are we. If we try any other way, we will find the gates of Heaven locked tightly against us!

Right now ask yourself: Am I saved? Have I trusted Jesus Christ, God's Son, as my personal Saviour; or am I trusting in my own works or in some other false god?

III This Grace Also Teaches Us

"Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world" (Titus 2:12).

When we come to Christ, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell inside our bodies. We become new creatures in Christ Jesus. "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (II Corinthians 5:17).

We will no longer be attracted to what the world has to offer, but will possess a new nature which hungers and thirsts after God. "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled" (Matthew 5:6).

Since the Holy Spirit has come to take up residence in us, our bodies are called the temple of God (II Corinthians 6:16).

Of course, each one of us is thankful for this fine church building where we can meet Sunday after Sunday, but the truth is, this building is not God's temple. "Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands" (Acts 7:48). In Acts 17:24-25 a more detailed explanation may be seen:

"God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things."

The body of the believer is very important, and how we treat it is also vitally important. Don't defile it through immorality, lustful thinking, imbibing alcohol, the use of illicit drugs or smoking tobacco with its nineteen poisons.

The Holy Spirit is a most sensitive Person. Nothing can be hid from His searching gaze. He comes into our lives and acts like a Teacher.

Before our Lord left this earth to join His Father in Heaven, He promised to send the Holy Spirit in His place. On one occasion, He told His disciples, "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you" (John 14:18). This promise is not just for the missionary, the preacher, but is for every believer in Christ. We are to walk close to the Lord, allowing ourselves to be sensitive to His tender voice. Do not allow the world, with its clamor and din, to drown it out. According to John 16:8, when the Holy Spirit came, He would "reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment."

This grace teaches us to '*deny ungodliness and worldly lusts*' (Titus 2:12). Such elements were prevalent back when this letter was written by the Apostle Paul and addressed to the young preacher Titus in A.D. 65. And a similar climate prevails today. The Devil is still on the loose, tempting and seeking to drag down every believer who is careless enough to let down his guard. That part deals with the negative side of this admonition. Do not get tripped up by our archenemy, but put on the whole armor of God (Ephesians. 6).

On the positive side, we are to "*live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.*" That means today, right now, in 1998 (*year preached ed.*)! Sometimes the present is called "the nasty now and now," whereas, being in Heaven is called "the sweet by and by."

Our Lord has need of good, bright, shining, right-living Christians! How do we become such? By allowing His wondrous grace to teach us. Probably each of us has some areas in his life which need some changes. Some believers are "put on the shelf" because they have refused to let the Holy Spirit make these changes.

Paul feared that such a thing should ever happen to him (1 Corinthians. 9:19-27). He determined never to allow self or his own stubborn will to get in the way. We must take the same precaution.

Live a disciplined life. Get up in the morning when you should. Eat what is nutritious and healthful. Do not continually ingest "junk food" that will cause your health to deteriorate and your life to be shortened.

Associate with the right kind of people. "*A companion of fools shall be destroyed*" (Proverbs 13:20). Make prayer and Bible reading a regular part of your day. Be in the house of God regularly and thus honor the God who saved us by His grace! "*I do not frustrate [set aside or cast away] the grace of God*" (Galatians 2:21).

Above all, if you are not a child of God, trust in the Lord and be saved by His grace today.

This sermon and others like it may be found on the Sword of the Lord website:
<http://www.swordofthelord.com/archives/>

This sermon has been graphically enhanced for the internet.