

A Short Explanation and Defense of the Doctrines of Grace

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Grace And Salvation

What is the grace of God? The Greek word translated grace has as its root idea the concept of bringing joy and gladness through gifts. The Apostle Paul uses this word to refer to the unmerited and freely given favor and mercy which God bestows upon the sinner in salvation. Through this grace, the sinner is delivered from sin and judgment. This grace, though freely given, is precious and costly, for its basis is the saving work of Jesus Christ. A salvation that is received by grace is the very opposite of a salvation that is earned by working or by obeying the law of God. A person who is saved by grace has no basis for boasting in his salvation for he has done nothing to earn or merit it. The gospel of grace is the only true gospel. Those who teach a salvation that is earned or merited through obedience of any sort have to some degree fallen from the teachings of grace into legalism.

Being justified freely by His GRACE through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Romans 3:24

Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as GRACE but as debt. Romans 4:4

But the free gift is not like the offense. For if by the one man's offense many died, much more the GRACE of God and the gift by the GRACE of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many. Romans 5:15

And if by GRACE, then it is no longer of works; otherwise GRACE is no longer GRACE. But if it is of works, it is no longer GRACE; otherwise work is no longer work. Romans 11:6

For you know the GRACE of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich. 2 Corinthians 8:9

I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the GRACE of Christ, to a different gospel. Galatians 1:6

You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from GRACE. Galatians 5:4

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. Ephesians 2:8-9

(God) has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and GRACE which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began. 2 Timothy 1:9

What is the relationship of God's grace to salvation? There are three possible answers to this question. A few argue that there is no grace in salvation. Some maintain that salvation is mostly of grace. And others say that salvation is all of grace.

The position that salvation is not at all a gracious gift from God but a human achievement based on personal goodness and moral self-effort is characteristic of pagan religion and philosophy. Early in church history, a British monk named Pelagius tried to teach pagan moralism as Christian doctrine. Pelagius was condemned as a heretic, and his system was labeled Pelagianism. In Pelagianism, the saving work of Christ is not necessary; a man can save himself by leading a good and moral life. Yet even the Pelagian claims to teach a salvation by grace. According to the Pelagian, it is only by the grace of God that he was created as a man, a noble creature with the moral ability to earn heaven, and not as a frog or a rock. When the Pelagian speaks of

the grace associated with salvation, he is referring to the grace of creation which is common to all men. When the orthodox Christian talks about salvation by grace, he is referring to the special grace of God which is based upon the work of Christ and which saves undeserving sinners.

There are many systems that teach that salvation is mostly of grace but not all of grace. The most common of these are semi-pelagianism and Arminianism. What is common to all these systems is the idea that the work of Christ has only made salvation a possibility for all but not a finished reality for any. God has done His part, and now those who are willing to do their part will be saved. In these systems, although God has the major role in salvation, it is the human contribution to salvation that turns the point and makes the difference between heaven and hell. Where these various systems differ is in defining the human contribution that results in salvation. It can be one or any combination of a number of spiritual acts and attitudes, such as non-resistance to the Holy Spirit, cooperation with the Holy Spirit, faith, works, obedience, perseverance, baptism, church membership, etc. In these systems, the saving work of Christ is necessary for salvation but not sufficient. The sinner must supplement the work of Christ to obtain salvation.

The doctrines of grace are the teaching that salvation is all of grace. The saving work of Christ is both necessary and sufficient to save sinners. In this system, it is the cross of Christ without compromise which makes the difference between heaven and hell. There is no room for any boasting whatsoever. The believer in grace looks at others who have rejected Jesus Christ and who remain in bondage to sin and says, "There but for the grace of God go I." The believer in grace recognizes that he did not turn the point in his salvation. He did not respond to the gospel in faith because of any natural goodness or wisdom which sets him apart from others. All the glory goes to Jesus Christ, for He has done it all. Even the ability to come to Christ in saving faith is a gift based upon the cross of Calvary. At the cross, Christ purchased for His people deliverance from the spirit of unbelief. Through His resurrection, He secured for His people the spiritual life which enables them to savingly believe. When a sinner is converted in response to the preaching of the gospel, it is because Christ has poured out His Holy Spirit upon him to apply to his heart the saving power of Christ's death and resurrection.

The doctrines of grace are the teaching that Jesus came into this world to save sinners. **Jesus** saves sinners. It is not that Jesus saves sinners when given the proper help. Jesus and only Jesus does the work of salvation. Jesus **saves** sinners. It is not that Jesus potentially saves or makes salvation possible. Jesus actually saves and completely saves. His work is a finished work that needs no rounding out or filling in. Jesus saves **sinners**. It is not that Jesus has made salvation a possibility for all but a finished accomplishment for no one. Jesus came to earth to make salvation a reality for specific individual sinners.

The doctrines of grace are usually discussed in terms of five separate doctrines which are called the five points of Calvinism. There is independent Scriptural support for each of the five points, and the five points are logically related such that any one of them implies the other four. The five points are easily remembered with the help of the acronym **TULIP: Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace and Perseverance of the saints.**

Total Depravity

The first of the five points is the teaching of total depravity. This doctrine has to do with fallen man's natural spiritual state. The doctrines of grace teach that salvation is all of God's grace, and the doctrine of total depravity relates to this by demonstrating that natural man is unable to do anything to earn or merit his own salvation.

Fallen man has an inclination toward sinning that permeates and dominates his total person. Fallen man is not an absolutely depraved creature who has reached the limits of corruption and is as evil as is possible.

Fallen man's depravity is not absolute but total, which means that his sin orientation controls his total life and taints every aspect of his life. Total depravity is like the complete discoloration of a glass of clear water with a few well-stirred drops of ink. The water is not as black as possible but every single drop has been tainted. The discoloration pervades the solution and becomes its dominant characteristic. And such is the case with fallen man's nature in regard to sin.

The worst of men can do good in outward conformity with the law of God (Luke 6:33). This does not mean, however, that such deeds are good in the eyes of God. At issue in God's measure of good is not only outward conformity but also proper motivation, disposition and aim. The proper motivation is love for God and fellow men (Matthew 22:37-40). To have the proper goal, one must seek above all else to glorify God (1 Corinthians 10:31) and to promote His righteous rule in all of life (Matthew 6:33). The proper disposition is belief in God's Word (Hebrews 11:6). In relation to this standard of good, the Bible says "There is none who does good, no, not one" (Romans 3:12) and "All our righteousnesses are like filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6).

The Bible teaches that fallen man in his natural state is at enmity against God and cannot please Him (Romans 8:7-8). He does not seek after God and he does not do good (Romans 3:11-12). He has gone astray and has turned to his own way (Isaiah 53:6). Apart from the gift of God's regenerating grace, he is morally unable to come to Christ in saving faith (John 6:65; 10:26; 12:39-40). Emotionally, he loves moral darkness (John 3:19) and the things of Satan (John 8:44), and he hates God's light (John 3:20). Intellectually, the things of God are foolishness to him (1 Corinthians 2:14) and his understanding is darkened (Ephesians 4:17-18; 2 Corinthians 4:4; John 8:43,47). Volitionally, he has been taken captive by the devil to do his will (2 Timothy 2:26; John 8:44). In regard to his total being, he is spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1; John 5:25).

Fallen man is totally depraved and in need of a Savior from the time of his conception. The verse most often quoted to prove this is Psalm 51:5, where the Psalmist David said: "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin did my mother conceive me." Those who deny the morally depraved nature of infants tend to speculate that this verse is teaching that David was an illegitimate child. Even if one accepted this highly improbable interpretation of this verse, there are still other verses which clearly teach what is commonly called the doctrine of original sin:

Psalm 58:3: *"The wicked are estranged from the womb; They go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies."*

Isaiah 48:8: *". . . I knew that you would deal very treacherously, And were called a transgressor from the womb."*

The doctrine of original sin can also be deduced from the Scriptural teaching that all men in their natural state have a corrupt nature and the Scriptural teaching that a person's basic nature is established from birth. In Ephesians 2:3, the Apostle Paul made the statement that Christians before their conversion "were BY NATURE children of wrath." Jesus taught this same essential truth when He compared the sinner to a bad tree that can only bear bad fruit (Matthew 7:18). The bad tree does not environmentally develop its natural propensity to bear bad fruit. This is its very nature from the beginning of its existence. Scripture teaches that a person's basic nature, like that of the bad tree, is already established at the time of his birth. John 3:6 says: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh," the word flesh referring to a fleshly or carnal sin nature. After Adam fell into sin, we read that his son was born in his image (Genesis 5:3); that is to say, the moral image of a sinner.

Fallen man is unable to come to Christ in saving faith not in the sense that God is prohibiting him or erecting any external barriers. The inability is moral and arises from fallen man's heart condition. Fallen man is free in the sense that he is free to do as he pleases, free to act spontaneously in accordance with his own inclinations. But what we are determines what we want. And what we want determines what we will to do.

People are like fruit trees whose roots determine what sort of fruit they bear. A bad heart can no more produce good than a thornbush can produce grapes (Matthew 7:16-18). One can only bring forth evil from an evil heart (Matthew 12:34-35). Thus, sinful man's freedom to do as his heart desires is slavery to sinful living (Romans 6:20). He cannot do good or seek after God (Romans 3:11-12). Free agency plus a depraved nature produces not a free will but a will enslaved to sin (2 Peter 2:19).

Some today view the lost in their natural state as drowning men desperately looking for a life line. Scripture paints a much more desperate picture. Man in his natural state is like a man who has already drowned and is dead (Ephesians 2:1). Fallen man is in a state of total spiritual inability and can contribute nothing toward his own salvation. When a man savingly believes, the saving power of Christ has already delivered him from his state of spiritual death. The man who believes (present tense) is the man who has passed over (past tense) from death unto life (John 5:24-25; cf. 1 John 5:1).

Objections Against Total Depravity

The main argument commonly used against the doctrine of total depravity is not a Biblical argument at all but a philosophical argument. And we must take care not to be theologically defrauded through human philosophies and worldly axioms (Colossians 2:8). This philosophical argument is that moral responsibility implies moral ability, that *ought* implies *can*. According to this axiom, since God holds fallen man accountable for believing in Christ, then fallen man must have enough spiritual life and goodness within himself to savingly believe. If fallen man ought to believe, then fallen man can believe. And, by implication, if fallen man does not have within himself sufficient moral goodness to obey the Gospel command, then God cannot hold him accountable for this moral failure. In other words, ability limits responsibility.

In some contexts, this principle does apply as a general rule. For example, in a well run office, the responsibilities of the workers should be a fair measure of their office abilities, and *vice versa*. But there are other contexts where this principle simply does not apply. For example, only the baseball player who is up to bat has the ability to drive home runs or to strike out. Yet if the player at bat does strike out and thus loses the game, the whole team loses.

Which of these two analogies best fits Adam's situation when he fell into sin? Was he an office worker who alone was fired because of his failure? Or was he a player up to bat who struck out for an entire team? The Bible gives us the answer: "for by one man's disobedience many were made sinners" (Romans 5:19a).

Normally a person cannot be held accountable for the sins of another or rewarded for the obedience of another (Ezekiel 18:20). The two exceptions are Adam and Jesus. When Adam sinned in the Garden, He did so as the covenant head of the human race. When Jesus, the second Adam, obeyed even to death on the cross, He did so as the covenant Head of all who believe in Him. "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:22; cf. Romans 5:12-21).

Adam as originally created had both the moral responsibility to obey God and the moral ability to fulfill that responsibility. When Adam sinned in the Garden, he lost his native moral ability. That was one dimension of the death which God had warned would result from sin. Adam did not, however, through his disobedience lose any of his moral responsibility to obey God. Just as squandering the family inheritance does not somehow automatically lessen financial obligations, so Adam's loss of original righteousness did not relieve him or his posterity of their obligation to obey God. After his fall into sin, Adam no longer had the moral ability to meet his continuing moral obligation. He retained the moral *ought* but lost the moral *can*. And that is the situation his children, the human race, have inherited.

In addition to the Bible's teaching on the relationship of the human race to Adam's first sin, the Bible also teaches very clearly that a moral *ought* does not necessarily imply a moral *can*. For example, the Bible

teaches that those who are accustomed to doing evil ought instead to do good. The Bible also teaches that those who are accustomed to doing evil can no more do good than the leopard can change his spots (Jeremiah 13:23).

This axiom also proves too much. Limiting its application to Gospel obedience is quite arbitrary. If *ought* implies *can*, then everybody has the moral ability to live a sinless life because living a sinless life is what everyone ought to do. The consistent application of this axiom leads to pure Pelagianism, the teaching that fallen man has the moral ability to save himself by living a morally perfect life.

Finally, this axiom implies that a perverse and corrupt heart is an excuse for sinning. If responsibility implies ability, then no ability implies no responsibility. But this is not what the Bible teaches. For example, Christ compared false prophets to bad trees that cannot bear good fruit. Here is a clear case of moral inability. They cannot bear good fruit. Does this mean that God releases such men from their responsibility to bear the good fruit of godly living? No, not at all. "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Matthew 7:19). An evil heart is no excuse for sin. On the contrary, a hardened and incorrigible heart is all the more reason for judgment.

Other Scriptures which contradict the "*ought* implies *can*" axiom are easy enough to find (Romans 8:7,8; 9:18,19; 1 Corinthians 2:14; John 6:44).

Unconditional Election

The second point is unconditional election. To elect is to chose, and I assume all would agree that God's people are His chosen people (1 Peter 2:9). The real issue is why God chose the people He did. Is it because they met some condition, passed some test, were better or wiser than others? Or is God's choice all of grace and totally a matter of God's mercy upon the undeserving? The doctrine of unconditional election teaches the latter.

God elected His people before time began (Ephesians 1:4) and thus made His choices before the people involved had actually done anything good or evil. From this basic fact, Paul argues that God's election is based not on human will or works but on God's sovereign choice to have mercy on whomever He will have mercy (Romans 9:10-16).

The Christian chooses God when he savingly believes, but it is God's choice that is primary and deciding. An old hymn expresses it this way:

I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew
He moved my soul to seek Him, seeking me;
It was not I that found, O Savior true;
No, I was found of Thee.

Thou didst reach forth Thy hand and mine enfold;
I walked and sank not on the storm-vexed sea;
'Twas not so much that I on Thee took hold
As Thou, dear Lord, on me.

I find, I walk, I love, but O the whole
Of love is but my answer, Lord, to thee!
For Thou wert long beforehand with my soul;
Always Thou lovest me.

It is not that God chose His people because He foresaw that they would believe or live holy lives. Rather God's people believe and obey because God freely chose in eternity past to give them grace in Christ Jesus (Acts 13:48; 18:27; Ephesians 1). God's choice of a people was not the result of their faith and holiness but rather is the cause of their faith and holiness (Ephesians 1:4; 2:10; 2 Thessalonians 2:13). As Jesus said in John 15:16: "You did not choose Me but I chose you and appointed you to bear fruit."

The Christian should not think that God has chosen him because he is any better than others. Paul spoke of sinful humanity as one common lump of clay, and of God as the divine Potter who chooses from this common lump some clay to make vessels unto mercy and some to make vessels unto wrath (Romans 9:20-23). God chooses His people not because they are naturally better clay than others. In fact, God's chosen people before their salvation are often the more foolish and weak and lowly so that God will have all the glory for their salvation (1 Corinthians 1:27-29). God's choice is not because of human merit but according to His own purpose and grace (2 Timothy 1:9; Ephesians 1:5).

Some question God's fairness in giving free grace to some while allowing the rest to remain in their slavery to sin (Romans 9:18-20; 1 Peter 2:8). We must remember that fairness would be for God to allow all to remain in sin and under judgment. God's choice to save some is all of mercy and grace.

But, you say, what about Romans 8:29 where it says that those whom God foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son? Does this not mean that God before the foundation of the world looked ahead into history to see who would believe and obey and then chose them to be His people? That would mean that faith and obedience are the cause or condition of God's election. That would mean that God in eternity past did not plan out history but merely passively observed history to see what would happen. Since we must allow Scripture to interpret Scripture, this understanding of divine foreknowledge cannot be correct. Scripture clearly teaches that faith and good works are the result of God's election, not the cause or reason for God's choice (Acts 13:48; Ephesians 2:10; John 15:16). Also Scripture teaches that the reason God is able to know the future is because He is in total control of the future (Isaiah 46:8-11). The idea that God knows the future without having planned it and without controlling it is totally foreign to Scripture.

Also notice that Paul in Romans 8 was not talking about foresight but about foreknowledge. Foreknowledge does not refer to God's finding those who merit salvation but rather to God's setting His heart and affections upon those whom He has chosen to freely give salvation. The foreknowledge of Romans 8:29 is God's saying "Yea, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I will draw you." In eternity past, God, standing above time and history, looked in love upon certain children of Adam who, like all the rest, deserved only God's wrath, and He chose to give them mercy and grace in Christ Jesus.

Romans 8:29 does not speak of God's knowing something about people but of God's personally knowing certain people. This is not the passive knowledge of the intellectual observation of events but the active knowledge of personal acquaintance and friendship. Scripture elsewhere speaks of this intimate, personal sort of knowledge:

Psalm 1:6: *The Lord KNOWS the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked shall perish.*

Amos 3:2, with God speaking to the children of Israel: *You only have I KNOWN of all the families of the earth.*

Genesis 18:19, with the LORD speaking of Abraham: *For I have KNOWN him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice, that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him.*

The doctrine of election is a part of the larger teaching that God is in sovereign control of every detail of history. God is not just one influence among others, such as fate, chance and human whims. God is in absolute and total control of all that happens, and this should be the greatest of comforts to all those who love and trust Him.

Some, however, object that if God is in sovereign control of history, then people are just robots, history is just a cosmic computer printout, and God is morally responsible for evil. The same Bible, however, that teaches the sovereignty of God also teaches that God is not the responsible author of evil, that man is a free moral agent who is not forced to sin and who is responsible for what he does, and that history is a meaningful, dynamic process. Our limited minds may not be able to comprehend how man can be a responsible moral agent while God is totally sovereign, but God's ways are above our ways (Isaiah 55:8-9). "How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out" (Romans 11:33). The teachings of human responsibility and divine sovereignty are like two parallel lines that meet only in infinity. We cannot understand how both can be true because of the limitations of our finite minds, but God can understand such matters and God has told us that both are true. That should settle the matter for us.

If God is in sovereign control, this means that there are no real chance happenings. From the human perspective, some events do appear to be accidental. For example, the parable of the good Samaritan speaks of a certain priest's coming down a road by chance (Luke 10:31). And Ruth, we read, just happened to glean in the field of Boaz (Ruth 2:3). Also, from the human perspective, the arrow that killed King Ahab was fired at random (1 Kings 22:34). Yet the death of King Ahab in that battle had been planned by God and prophesied by God's prophet.

According to Scripture, God is in control of all events. As it says in Ephesians 1:11:

". . . (God) works ALL THINGS according to the counsel of His will." See also Daniel 4:35; Isaiah 14:24 and Isaiah 46:9-11.

God is in control of all things, even to the fall of the sparrow and the number of hairs on our heads (Matthew 10:29-30). There are no exceptions to this rule. When there are calamities, God is in control (Isaiah 45:7; Ecclesiastes 7:14). When there are physical handicaps, God is in control (Exodus 4:11). When evil men come to power, God is in control (Exodus 9:16; 4:21; Romans 9:18). And when someone believes or rejects the gospel message, God is in control (Acts 13:48; 1 Peter 2:8; Romans 9:16).

The doctrine of election is difficult, and God has not answered all our questions. The Christian should respond to election not with an arrogant curiosity into the unrevealed secrets of God (Deuteronomy 29:29) but with an humble gratitude to God for His unmerited mercy. The non-Christian should respond not with useless worry as to whether his name is on God's secret list but with a prayerful seeking to obey the Gospel command to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Limited Atonement

The third point is limited atonement, perhaps the most misunderstood of the five. At issue here is the reason why the cross of Christ does not save everyone. Those who do not savingly believe in Christ will suffer eternal punishment and will never be reconciled to God.

Why does the cross not save all? Is it because God has limited power in the cross or because God has a limited purpose for the cross? Did God intend to save everyone through the cross and fail, or did He plan to save only a limited number through the cross and succeed? Our position is the latter. We believe that God

had a limited design or purpose in the atonement and that the cross of Christ saves everyone God intended it to save.

We believe this because God never fails to carry out His plans. If God had intended the cross to save everyone, then everyone would be saved through it. What God has planned, that He will do (Isaiah 46:9-11; 55:11; Daniel 4:35; Ephesians 1:11).

We believe this because the Bible teaches that Jesus came to accomplish a real and saving salvation for His people. He did more for them than provide a mere possibility of salvation. See Matthew 1:21; 26:28; Acts 20:28; Ephesians 5:25-26; Titus 2:14; Hebrews 2:17; and Revelation 5:9.

We believe this because the Bible says that God will give everything, including saving faith, to those for whom He delivered up His Son to die (Romans 8:32). If we were reconciled to God at the cross, then we will be saved (Romans 5:10). Through His work on the cross, Christ provided for the deliverance of His people from the spirit of unbelief and purchased for them the gift of saving faith.

We believe this because the Bible teaches that the Good Shepherd laid down His life for His sheep (John 10:11) but nowhere teaches that the Good Shepherd in like manner laid down His life for those who are not His sheep (John 10:26). Christ's sheep are those whom the Father has given Him (John 10:29), and they manifest themselves through their faith and obedience; that is, they in faith recognize Jesus as the Messianic Good Shepherd and listen to His voice and in obedience follow Him (John 10:3-4, 27). Christ died for the sheep, and all the sheep will savingly believe. Christ died for those whom the Father gave Him, and all these will come to Christ and none of them will be lost (John 6:37,39). Those who are not Christ's sheep manifest themselves through their moral inability to believe (John 10:26).

We believe this because Christ as high priest prayed only for those whom the Father had given Him (John 17:9). If Christ had offered up His life as a priestly sacrifice for everybody, then why did He not also offer up His priestly prayer for everybody?

We believe this because it would not be just for God to require double payment for sin. If Christ died equally for the sins of all men, then those who go to hell will be paying for their sins themselves even though their sins have already been paid for once through the sufferings of Christ.

We believe this because the Bible speaks of individuals for whose sins there was never to be any atoning sacrifice (1 Samuel 3:14; Isaiah 22:14; Hebrews 10:26; cf. Jeremiah 18:23).

This doctrine does not deny that the cross has infinite saving potential. It teaches that the cross could save everyone if God had only intended it to do so. This doctrine does not deny that there are common grace benefits from the cross for every man. In this sense, God through Christ is everyone's Savior (1 Timothy 4:10). The doctrine of limited atonement is simply that the cross of Christ provides a sure, secure and real salvation for everyone God intended it to save and for them alone.

But, you ask, what about passages which mention the world and use the universal term all? These passages do not teach that God planned for the cross to save every sinner that ever lived. These passages no more refer to every individual without exception than Paul's statement that the gospel "was preached to every creature under heaven" (Colossians 1:23) means that even the slugs and snails were evangelized. Passages with universal terms must be interpreted with careful consideration of both the immediate context and the clear teaching of other verses. For example, what did Paul mean in Romans 5:18 when he said that "the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life"? He could not there be referring to all men without exception because the Bible clearly teaches that not all men will be saved. Paul's context in Romans 5

indicates that by "all men," he was there referring to all men who are under the covenant headship of Christ. The message of some other passages with universal terms is that Christ has saved the world in the sense that His people are now from every tribe, nation and tongue of the world and not from only one nation as under the old covenant. Christ also will take away the sin of the world in the sense that He will totally remove sin and the curse from the world at His second coming.

Some object that if Christ did not die for all men without exception, then we cannot go up to the lost and say, "Christ died for you!" But where in all of Scripture do we find an example of that sort of evangelistic message? We should follow the example of the Apostle Paul and say to the lost, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved." That message is the gospel truth and in no way contradicts the doctrine of limited atonement. All are commanded to come to Christ, and none who come will be cast out. And all whom the Father has given to Christ (i.e., the elect for whom Christ died) will come (John 6:37).

The doctrine of limited atonement also does not contradict the sincere nature of God's gospel offer. Our Lord Jesus Christ genuinely grieved when Jerusalem rejected Him (Matthew 23:37), and this sorrow reached to the depths of His divine Person. God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked and sincerely exhorts them to turn from their wicked ways and live (Ezekiel 18:23,32). God really desires obedience to His revealed will, His commands (Deuteronomy 5:29), including the gospel command to believe in Christ. And yet at the same time, God, in terms of His secret will, has sovereignly planned all of history to bring to Himself the greatest possible glory. He has sovereignly chosen to give saving grace to some to the praise of His mercy, and He has sovereignly chosen to pass others by and allow them to remain in their depraved state to the praise of His justice.

Romans 9:14-16: What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion." So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.

Romans 9:21-23: Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor? What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory?

There is here admittedly a degree of mystery beyond our understanding, for we cannot fully comprehend the inter-workings of the secret and the revealed aspects of God's will (Deuteronomy 29:29), nor the relationship between divine sovereignty and human responsibility. All we know is that when someone rejects the gospel message, the fault is theirs and God is grieved; and when someone believes the gospel, the reason is God's sovereign gift of undeserved grace and God alone deserves the glory and the praise.

Irresistible Grace

The fourth point is irresistible grace or effectual grace. This point logically follows from the three we have discussed so far. If fallen man is totally depraved and at enmity against God and unable to do anything good, then grace must be irresistible if any are to be saved. If fallen man has to pay the price of not resisting the gospel while still in his natural state as a son of Adam, then no man will be saved, for no son of Adam has the native moral ability to pay that price. If before the foundation of the world, God "predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will" (Ephesians 1:5) and if God's sovereign plans never fail, then God's saving grace must always be effectual. If the Good Shepherd

laid down His life for the sheep and then gives all the sheep eternal life (John 10:11, 28), then logically the work of the atonement must be applied without fail to all for whom Christ died.

According to the doctrine of irresistible grace, the spiritual state of heart that unfailingly results in repentant saving faith is a gift God gives to His people. Saving faith is not something that fallen man is able to do by means of his own natural spiritual abilities as a token payment to God in exchange for the otherwise free gift of salvation. The ability to savingly believe is a gift from God, as evidenced by the following verses:

John 6:65: Jesus said: *"No one can come to me unless it has been granted to him by My Father."*

Acts 13:48: *And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.*

1 Corinthians 4:7: *For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you glory as if you had not received it?*

Romans 11:36-37: *Or who has first given to (God) And it shall be repaid to him? For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.*

Acts 5:31: *Him God exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.*

Acts 11:18: *Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.*

Acts 14:27: *(God) had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.*

Acts 16:14: *The Lord opened (Lydia's) heart to heed the things spoken by Paul.*

Acts 18:27: *(Apollos) greatly helped those who had believed through grace.*

Philippians 1:29: *For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ ... to believe in Him ...*

Philippians 2:12-13: *... it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.*

Romans 9:16: *So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.*

Ephesians 2:8-10: *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. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.*

Further evidence for irresistible grace is found in the Biblical data on the inner and the outer calls of the Gospel. The outer call of the Gospel is that general call to repentant faith in Christ which comes to all who hear the Gospel message. The outer call is a promise that all will be saved who will comply with the Gospel condition of genuine faith. It is a command that tells the sinner of his obligation before God to respond to the Gospel message with this genuine faith. This general call is accompanied by a general working of the Spirit that causes a temporary conviction of sin and a temporary desire for salvation through Christ. Many who receive this outer call reject the Gospel (Matthew 22:14). All totally depraved sinners successfully resist this outward call and general work of conviction (cf. Acts 7:51) if these are not accompanied by the efficacious inner call.

The inner call of the Gospel occurs when the Holy Spirit accompanies the preaching of the Gospel with life giving power. All those and only those who receive this inner call from God respond to the Gospel with truly saving faith.

Romans 8:30: *Those whom God has called, He also justified.*

1 Corinthians 1:23-24: *We preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.*

The general call, like sheet lightning, is grand and beautiful but never strikes anything. The special call is like the forked flash from heaven. It strikes somewhere and does an effectual work. And who can resist it (cf. Romans 9:19)?

Further evidence for irresistible grace is found in the language Scripture uses to describe the regenerating work of the Spirit. In places, this work is compared to a spiritual birth. The sinner contributes no more to his spiritual begetting than a baby contributes to his own conception. For a baby to do anything, he must first be given life; and for a sinner to see and enter the kingdom of God, he must first be born again (John 3:3,5). The new birth as the beginning of spiritual life is a secret work of the Holy Spirit that can no more be seen or controlled than the coming and going of the wind (John 3:8). In this begetting of life, the Holy Spirit works in conjunction with the Gospel message, which the Holy Spirit empowers as a life giving seed (1 Peter 1:23; James 1:18). The effective agent in this begetting of life is not the will of man but the will of God (John 1:13; Romans 9:16).

The book of First John teaches that those who are truly born again will manifest repentance, faith and good works just as surely as the newborn baby manifests life through crying and eating (1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1,4,18). Though one cannot see the Holy Spirit implant spiritual life in a heart, one can see the effects of this new life, just as one cannot see the wind but can hear the sound it makes (John 3:8). The spiritual effects of this divinely implanted life are not temporary but endure and remain (1 John 3:9).

Scripture also compares regenerating grace to a new creation (2 Corinthians 4:6; 5:17). And what creature has ever successfully resisted his own creation or made any active contribution to his own creation? When the Word of God goes forth as a word of new creation, it creates spiritual life just as surely as God's words "Let there be light" brought light to a darkened world.

Scripture also refers to regenerating grace as a spiritual resurrection (Ephesians 2:4-5; John 5:25). When the gospel goes forth in word only, it goes forth to men dead in sins who have no spiritual life or ability wherewith to answer. But when the gospel goes forth in Spirit and in power, it carries with it the life giving power of Christ. In such circumstances, the sinner can no more stay in the sepulcher of spiritual death and refuse to come to Christ than could Lazarus have disobeyed when Christ spoke the life giving words, "Lazarus, come forth" (John 11). Will any of the physically dead be able to resist the voice of Christ when He calls them from their graves (John 5:28-29)? Neither can the spiritually dead resist the voice of Christ when He calls them to spiritual life through the gospel in the power of the Spirit (John 5:25).

Perseverance of the Saints

The fifth point is the perseverance of the saints, perhaps the most misused of the five points. Some imagine that the perseverance of the saints means that once a person has made a public profession of faith, he must be considered a Christian regardless of what sort of life he lives. This is not what this doctrine teaches at all.

This doctrine teaches that those who truly have come to saving faith in Christ will persevere in the faith. Jesus Christ saves His people not only from hell but also from the dominance of sin in this life (Matthew 1:21). Sin cannot lord it over those who are truly the people of God (Romans 6:14; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10). They are a new creation in Christ Jesus; old things have passed away (2 Corinthians 5:17).

The saints will persevere, and those who persevere are the saints. We cannot see God's secret books in heaven or penetrate into the inner recesses of the human heart to see who the saints really are. We are limited to looking at a person's life to see if it is consistent with his profession of faith. As our Lord Jesus said, "For a good tree does not bear bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. For every tree is known by its own fruit" (Luke 6:43-44).

We must avoid the opposite errors of legalism and license. Contrary to legalism, personal holiness is not meritorious; that is, we are saved by grace and not of works (Ephesians 2:8; Titus 3:5). Contrary to license, personal holiness is a necessary, not an optional part of the true Christian life; that is, we are saved from a life of sin and unto good works (Titus 2:14; Ephesians 2:10). Good works are not the cause of our salvation or the reason for our salvation. They are an inevitable and necessary result of our salvation. We were chosen in Christ unto holiness (Ephesians 1:4). We were chosen for salvation through sanctification and belief (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14). Without holiness, no one will see God (Hebrews 12:14).

There are those who profess faith in Christ and join the church who later abandon the faith and return to worldly living. A person who does that is giving evidence that he is not a Christian and never has been a Christian in the sense of having been in genuine covenant union with Christ and having experienced the new birth. As 1 John 2:19 says,

They went out from us, but they were not of us, for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.

The person who submits to water baptism but then returns to the mire of sinful living is but a washed pig who never experienced a spiritual change of nature (2 Peter 2:22). Paul, speaking in terms of the old covenant, explained that not all who are of Israel are truly Israel and that one can be a Jew outwardly without being a Jew inwardly. In John 15, Jesus referred to the covenant breaker as one who had outwardly been a branch on the Vine but who had never truly abode in the Vine as the source of life. Apart from the Vine, the branch cannot bear fruit and will be cut off in judgment (cf. Romans 11:17). Also, Christ referred to the covenant breaker in the parable of the soils. A plant in stony ground has no real depth of soil and spiritual root and thus cannot endure tribulation for the faith. A plant in thorny ground is choked by the thorns of love for the world and thus cannot bear spiritual fruit. The good ground plant, however, bears much fruit and cannot become a covenant breaker. Those who are truly born again will overcome the world and the devil does not touch them (1 John 5:4,18).

If a person who is truly and inwardly a child of God cannot lose his salvation, then why does God warn them against denying the faith and falling into sin? This is a good question. The answer is that God has ordained not only the ends but also the means unto the ends. And God uses warnings to keep His true people on the straight and narrow. An example of something similar is found in Acts 27. Paul was on a ship in a great storm, and an angel revealed to Paul that no life would be lost in the storm (vv. 23-24). Then some sailors sought to abandon the ship in the lifeboat, and Paul then warned the soldiers, "Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved" (v. 31). As a result of this warning, the soldiers cut off the lifeboat and let it fall away, thus preventing any sailors from abandoning the ship. God used the warning to fulfill the promise He had given to Paul through the angel.

Well, what about the apostasy passages? These passages do not contradict the doctrines of grace. Those who apostatize have never truly been saved. They may have outwardly been a member of God's covenant

community and may have experienced firsthand many of God's blessings. For example, Judas was one of the twelve who had been given the power to cast out demons, to heal the sick and to raise the dead. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus spoke of those whom He never savingly knew but who on judgment day will claim to have prophesied, cast out demons and done many wonders in Christ's name. And in Hebrews 6, the one who falls away is said to have partaken of the Holy Spirit and to have tasted the powers of the age to come. But none of these passages teach that the one who falls into apostasy was ever genuinely saved.

With great opportunity comes great responsibility. Scripture teaches that if, after such an intimate exposure to God's covenant, one rejects the covenant to the point of deliberately and maliciously trampling underfoot the blood of Christ, then the day of gospel opportunity ends (Hebrews 6:4-6; 10:26; 12:17). The judgment for apostasy is a divine abandonment to a seared conscience and a hardened heart. The apostate never was saved and never can be saved.

There are many Scriptures which plainly state that all those who truly believe already possess everlasting life and will be kept in the faith by the power of God. I will close by listing a sampling of these:

John 3:16: For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

John 10:28: And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.

Romans 8:35-39: Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers nor things present nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

I Peter 1:3-5: Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Conclusion

The doctrines of grace are certainly humbling. It is humbling to think that when I sin, the fault is totally mine, but if I do any good, the credit must go entirely to God. It is humbling to learn that there are doctrines that I will never fully understand because of my limitations as a finite creature. It is humbling to find out that but for the grace of God, I would still be in bondage to sin. It is humbling to discover that I found God only because He first found me. It is humbling to realize that I stand firm in the faith only because God keeps me from falling. These doctrines are very humbling, and perhaps that is why not all Christians accept them in spite of their strong and clear Biblical basis.

In our theologizing, the temptation is to look for elements of human sovereignty in our deliverance, to theorize ways to hold God responsible for our mistakes, and to hope that there might not be some degree of truth in Satan's claim that man can be "as God" (Genesis 3:5). We have to mature in the faith and become familiar with Scripture before we overcome this temptation in our theologizing and sermonizing. But, as C.H. Spurgeon has pointed out, all true Christians pray in terms of the doctrines of grace. All true Christians

pray in terms of divine sovereignty and human responsibility and never in terms of human sovereignty and divine culpability. We lower our eyes, smite our breast, and cry out, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" We never look God proudly in the eye and say, "God, I thank you that I am the man I am!" Allow me to leave you with Mr. Spurgeon's thoughts on this subject:

You have heard a great many Arminian sermons, I dare say; but you never heard an Arminian prayer -- for the saints in prayer appear as one in word, and deed and mind. An Arminian on his knees would pray desperately like a Calvinist. He cannot pray about free will: there is no room for it. Fancy him praying, "Lord, I thank thee I am not like those poor presumptuous Calvinists. Lord, I was born with a glorious free-will; I was born with power by which I can turn to thee of myself; I have improved my grace. If everybody had done the same with their grace that I have, they might all have been saved. Lord, I know that thou dost not make us willing if we are not willing ourselves. Thou givest grace to everybody; some do not improve it, but I do. There are many that will go to hell as much bought with the blood of Christ as I was; they had as much of the Holy Ghost given to them; they had as good a chance, and were as blessed as I am. It was not thy grace that made us to differ; I know it did a great deal, still I turned the point; I made use of what was given me, and others did not -- that is the difference between me and them."

That is a prayer for the devil, for nobody else would offer such a prayer as that. Ah! when they are preaching and talking very slowly, there may be wrong doctrine; but when they come to pray, the true thing slips out; they cannot help it. If a man talks very slowly, he may speak in a fine manner; but when he comes to talk fast, the old brogue of his country, where he was born, slips out.

END

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