

The Grace of God

A Study of Romans 1:5-7

by Dr. Jack L. Arnold

The Grace of God. What does it mean? Christians speak of it so freely, but understand and appreciate it so little.

If someone were to give you a million dollars as a gift with no strings attached, what would be your reaction — surprise, thankfulness, unworthiness, reciprocation? You would probably first be grateful, then wonder, “Why me? I haven’t done anything to deserve this.” Then you might think about the person who gave you the gift: “What a gracious person. What can I do to show my appreciation?” God is a God of grace who does far more than give a million dollars. He gives salvation with no strings attached to whomever he pleases, and all anyone can do is receive the gift and say, “Thank you.”

God’s grace is centered in the person and work of Jesus Christ. At the beginning of Romans, Paul tells us that he was separated unto the gospel — the good news that Christ has come to give sinners the forgiveness of sin and eternal life. The gospel concerns Jesus Christ.

Christ was truly man: “made of the seed of David according to the flesh” (Rom. 1:3); and he was truly God: “declared to be the Son of God with power” (Rom. 1:4). Christ is perfect humanity and undiminished deity united in one person forever — the unique person of the universe.

Because of the person and work of Christ, the grace of God has been brought down to men.

GRACE TO THE APOSTLE PAUL (Rom. 1:5)

“By whom” — It was through the resurrected and living Christ that Paul and other apostles (we) received the grace of God. This shows that Paul believed in the resurrected Christ who dispensed grace and apostleship.

“We have received grace” — Paul put grace before apostleship, for a person must be saved before he can serve Jesus Christ. “Grace” means “unmerited favor.” It means that no person can buy his salvation, he cannot work for his salvation, he is not worthy of his salvation. It is all a gift from the sovereign God. Salvation and sanctification are from God alone.

Paul knew he was an undeserving sinner and had no right to a free and gracious salvation: “For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (1 Cor. 15:9-10). Paul knew that God could have justly condemned him to eternal hell as a sinner. But because of God’s grace, Paul became a Christian and God made him an apostle. Salvation is always “by grace through faith” (Eph. 2:8). God is always the ultimate cause of a man’s salvation — a person only appropriates God’s gift by faith. God’s grace did not make Paul a fatalist, but he labored harder than others because he appreciated his salvation. He realized that even the labor was by the grace of God.

“Apostleship” — Having been saved, Paul was appointed by God to be an apostle. Grace and salvation always precede service! Paul knew that he had received his apostleship from Christ.

A man must be called into the full-time ministry. A preacher, teacher, or evangelist must have a calling from God. We must ask God to call our young people to the ministry. How many young folks have been forced into the ministry? Or how many have raised their hands at some emotional meeting asking for full-time Christian service and never made it or, if they made it, were unsuccessful and unhappy?

Donald Grey Barnhouse used to say:

“Don’t be a minister if you can help it. If you can be happy as president of a bank, or as head of a factory, or as pitcher for the New York Yankees, or as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, or President of the United States, or anything else on this earth, then God has never called you into the ministry.”

At seminary our teachers used to tell us, “If you can do anything else in life, don’t go into the ministry.” Then they continued, “If your heart beats only for Christ and the Bible, and to reach men, then you are called to the ministry.”

Every person that God has ever called into the ministry is in the ministry, but there are many people that have never been called to the ministry who are trying to preach and teach and are unhappy and unsuccessful.

“For obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name” — Paul was called by God to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ to all the nations of the world so that individuals might obey the gospel. This could be translated, “obedience which is a result of faith,” or “faith which is obedience.” Men are called upon to obey the gospel.

Faith obeys the command to believe. This is not just intellectual assent, but is also commitment to the person of Jesus Christ. Men are called to repent: “And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent” (Acts 17:30). They are called to believe: “And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31). Men are to obey these commands. (Other passages dealing with the obedience of faith include: Rom. 10:14-16; 2 Thess. 1:8; Heb. 5:9).

The gospel is to be declared; it is not pleading with people to believe. Christians must declare this message faithfully to everyone, but they do not bear the responsibility of changing people’s hearts or convincing people through their powers of persuasion. Only the Holy Spirit has the power to change hearts, and to bring men to repentance and faith.

The spreading of the gospel is to be “for his name.” It is to be done for God’s glory and not for our own.

Note that Romans both begins and ends with the phrase “obedience to the faith” (Rom. 1:5 and Rom. 16:26).

GRACE TO THE ROMAN CHRISTIANS (Rom. 1:6-7)

“Among whom are ye also the called of Jesus Christ” — From among the nations God is calling a people to salvation. The Roman Christians were a part of this small group of called ones in Paul’s day.

The Bible speaks of two kinds of calls. There is a general call when the gospel goes out calling men to place their faith in Christ: “For many are called, but few are chosen” (Matt. 22:14). Many men have heard this call and refused to come to Jesus Christ. The other call is the efficacious call of God to salvation. This is when God calls a person directly to salvation and the person responds by believing in Jesus Christ:

“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28).

“But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:23-24).

When God gives this call, men always respond to Jesus Christ! Salvation begins with God and ends with God — it is all of grace.

“To all that be at Rome” — This letter was not written to every person in Rome, but to all who had believed in Jesus Christ.

“Beloved of God” — Because of God’s grace, the Christian is a special object of God’s love. God loves the world in that he has provided a Saviour (John 3:16), but Christians are special objects of his love — he loves us because we are his children by faith in Christ Jesus. The Christian has been accepted in the beloved, Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:6). He is beloved of God because of his relationship to Jesus Christ.

“Called saints” — This should be translated “called saints,” not “called to be saints.” God called every one of these Roman saints to sainthood.

“Saint” comes from the same root as “sanctified,” from the Greek word which means “to set apart.” At the moment of salvation every Christian is set apart unto God

for salvation: “the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord” (1 Cor. 1:2).

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that after death people may become saints, but that no one is a saint in this life. When a person has been an exceptionally good church member in this life, his time in purgatory is limited. While the person is still in purgatory, the church appoints a committee to look into the past life of the person to find reasons why the person should be made a saint. (The committee is organized like a courtroom and its head is known as the “*avocatus diaboli*,” the devil’s advocate.) If the person is found innocent (by this time he is probably out of purgatory), he becomes a saint. This view is far from the biblical teaching on the subject of a saint.

The Bible teaches that a person does not become a saint through the church, but is made a saint the moment he believes on Jesus Christ. He is separated unto God. Those who are saints are to live saintlike lives! If you have believed in Christ, you are Saint Jim, Saint Jane, Saint Jack, Saint Bettie, etc.

Dr. H. A. Ironside of Chicago, a great Bible teacher of some years ago, was on his way to the Pacific coast for a Bible conference. At that time the trip took about four days by train. On the train there was a party of nuns. Dr. Ironside made their acquaintance and began to read the Bible to them and speak to them of Jesus Christ. They were delighted and interested in what he had to say for they did not read the Bible themselves. On the third day, Dr. Ironside asked them if they had ever seen a saint. They all said that they had not and could never see one — that they would give anything to see a saint. Then Dr. Ironside astonished them by saying, “I am a saint; I am Saint Harry.” He then opened the New Testament to the first chapter of Romans and the first chapter of 1 Corinthians and showed them that everyone who believes on Jesus Christ is a saint.

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ” — Paul began with grace for salvation and then exhorted his readers to experience in their lives God’s grace and peace, to make these things a reality by faith. A Christian can have an inner peace or assurance while he is in the midst of conflict. The source of this peace and grace is God!

CONCLUSION

The Bible says that it is by grace through faith that one is saved. If anyone at any time becomes a Christian, it is by God's grace alone. Yet this gracious gift of salvation can only be made a reality as one believes that Christ died for his sins and that Christ is the Lord of his life.

If you feel a struggle going inside of you, this is God's *general* call which says you must respond to Jesus Christ or face eternal separation from God. If you turn to Christ and believe on him as personal Lord and Saviour, then you can rest assured that you have received God's *efficacious* call to salvation.

If you are a Christian you are a recipient of God's grace and you can sing:

Oh! the love that drew salvation's plan,
Oh! the grace that brought it down to man,
Oh! the mighty gulf that God did span
At Calvary!