

THE GRACE OF GOD

Words:

Date:

Scripture:

INTRO: Our subject this morning is the grace of God. Last year at Bible study we studied the word "grace." I thank the group for their patience and input. I am so grateful for the help that gave me.

I planned to deal with grace as viewed by Catholicism, Calvinism, and Arminianism. I spent a lot of time only to find out that the way I wanted to deal with it was too big for what I plan to do. There are such varied views on what grace is and how salvation takes place by grace and how sanctification takes place that I became bogged down. I felt the subject had become too cumbersome for me to be able to bring it all together without it becoming confusing. So I will deal with it in one message and some day *maybe* show the errors I see in say Catholicism, Calvinism, and even Arminianism.

So I decided to seek to keep this message as uncluttered with other views as possible and so I have reduced it to two points. I want to define grace from my personal point of view, and then give a defence of that definition both in justification and sanctification.

Now grace is truly a difficult word to define. I think it may be the various views that have been generated by various theological positions over the years that have muddied the waters and it is that which has made it so difficult to define, and not the actual word itself. You see, there is talk of common grace, special grace, prevenient grace, and sacramental grace, unconditional grace, and I don't know how many more kinds of grace.

Here is our question for this message: just what is grace? Use the back of your outlines if you need more space this morning.

I. PERSONAL VIEW OF GRACE DEFINED

Before I give you my definition of grace we'll look at some others.

A. Views From Others

1. God's riches at Christ's Expense

You may have heard of the acronym that goes like this: Grace is God's Riches at Christ's Expense. That is a reasonable definition, but what that means has to be explained in order for it to become useful to the one who reads the word "grace" in any given context. For example, when you come to a verse like Genesis 6:8 and it says that Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord, what does that actually mean?

In light of that definition, what does grace mean in that verse?

2. Unmerited favor

Then there is this definition that grace is unmerited favor. That is probably the best and most concise definition of grace, but again, one needs an explanation as to what that means.

3. John MacArthur

John MacArthur, agreeing with the unmerited favor definition says: "Thus we could properly define grace as *the free and benevolent influence of a holy God operating sovereignly in the lives of undeserving sinners.*"

That definition has turned the former definition into a clearly Calvinistic definition. Whenever you have the word "sovereign" it is likely a Calvinist speaking. That word alone needs clear definition because it does not occur in the Bible except for some modern versions, and I believe it does not mean what the Calvinist makes it to mean.

4. A.W. Tozer

A.W. Tozer has defined grace like this: "Grace is the good pleasure of God that inclines him to bestow benefits on the undeserving." There is much

in that definition that is good and I trust we will see that as we go along.

5. Louis Berkhof

MacArthur quotes the theologian Louis Berkhof as defining grace like this: "the unmerited operation of God in the heart of man, effected through the agency of the Holy Spirit."

6. Merriam-Webster

I haven't given any dictionary definitions but I was amazed to see this definition in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary. They say grace is:

1a: unmerited divine assistance given to humans for their regeneration or sanctification

b: a virtue coming from God

c: a state of sanctification enjoyed through divine assistance

That is an amazing definition coming from a regular dictionary and I'll mention it later.

7. Vine's Dictionary

Vine's Dictionary defines grace from two viewpoints. Vine was a Greek scholar and a good one. He defines grace from two points. He says, "on the part of the bestower, the friendly disposition from which the kindly act proceeds..." And then, "...on the part of the receiver, a sense of favor bestowed, a feeling of gratitude..."

He recognized that when there is grace there is a bestower and a receiver. I would add that when you have grace as related to God, and maybe always, there has to be someone in need and someone who can fulfill that need.

B. Personal View of Grace

1. Definition

Let me now define grace as I understand it. Before I do that I see three points necessary for grace to happen. 1 There must be a person in need. In salvation, it is the sinner in need of salvation from sin and its consequences. There is absolutely nothing man can do to save himself. 2 Second, in grace there must be someone who can fulfill that need. If there isn't, there can be no grace. 3 Third, the one in need must qualify in order to get what is needed from the one who can supply that need.

It is this third point that may well raise eyebrows or maybe even a fire-storm for some listeners. It is that which is missing in most definitions. One might argue that would suit better to say the qualifying factor is the means of grace. But I include it in the definition and encourage you not to tune out.

From those three points I define the grace of God like this: "The grace of God is that favorable disposition in God toward fallen man which is caused by something in them that pleases Him, and this favorable disposition causes Him to freely grant them what they desire."

Grace is the means by which one freely receives the things one desires from another who can give what is desired and this is achieved by finding favor with the one who can give what one desires.

The means by which one receives what one desires is "unmerited" because it is freely given. Second, it is "favor" because there is something in the one in need that pleases or causes favor in the one who can give what is needed.

Now when I indicate that a lost sinner can do something to please God to grant him salvation, that is what will cause objection to this definition and I believe that is exactly what is missed by so many. For example, in Calvinism there

is no human qualification for grace. Man can do nothing to please God. As I studied I came across the Calvinistic use of the word "monergystic" several times. Grace is what they call "monergystic." And when I typed it into my computer it stuttered and rejected the word. And when I asked my computer what the problem was it said: "Did you perhaps mean "modernistic?"

R.C. Sproul, a staunch Calvinist says the word "monergyistic" is a three dollar word. It's meaning is simple enough, it just sounds deep. It simply means grace is totally one-sided. Man has nothing to do with it. God decides who gets grace and who doesn't. It is *monergystic*. If you are one of the elect, God will send you irresistible grace. You have absolutely nothing to do with it because you can't do anything about it because you are dead in trespasses and sins. If you are not one of the elect, nothing will ever move God with favor toward you. You were damned before you were born. That is Calvinism. Let me just mention that the Calvinist does not mind telling you about election, but he is very shy to talk about reprobation.

Now you may wonder about the definition I have given as well. What I have added is a human qualification and this may cause you to question this definition as well.

Here is what might cause concern. It is that in order for the one who is in need, to get that need fulfilled, he or she has to please the one who can fulfill that need. That raises this major question: Can lost, sinful man, ever do anything that would please God? Or is grace unilateral? Monergystic, if you like? Does God grant grace to a non-believer indiscriminately? To that question the Calvinist will say a resound, "Yes! But only if you are one of the elect. It is entirely God's choice! It has nothing to do with man, period!" If you are elect, you are; and if not, you aren't and never will be. You are doomed, period.

When Jacob Arminius, who was a Calvinist, struggled with predestination and felt man must have a free will to choose or reject salvation he could not get around the fact that salvation is totally by grace. So how could he teach salvation is totally by grace, and still say man has a free will? And so he fell back on the Catholic view of prevenient grace. That simply means God grants sinners the grace to be able to choose. That is a kind of grace given before one is saved by grace. It is enough grace to enable one be able to choose.

2. Difference from other views

Let me show you how the definition I have given differs from others. You will notice that I give a human qualification to experiencing the grace of God, and that qualification is that the one who wants something from God must please Him first. So let me ask, why do other definitions not give a human qualification? Well, because grace is entirely without works!

So it is viewed that there can be no human qualification. Grace excludes all works, they say, and I agree with that. It does. Grace and works are two opposite ways of getting things. It can't be some of both. It is one or the other (Rom. 11:6).

So when I give a human qualification, one might conclude that I am adding works. Yet, in my estimation, that is the missing element in every definition. I believe that if this element is not given in the definition of grace, then it needs to be given as the means of grace. Others give various means of grace but I do not find in those means that pleasing God is one of them.

So let me explain a matter that I feel is very important. There are two legitimate ways of getting the things we want. We can earn them, and this is called "works" in Scripture. Or they may be given to us. If they are freely given, then they are a gift.

So Ephesians 2:8-9 says this:

*8 For by grace you have been saved through faith,
and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,
9 not of works, lest anyone should boast.*

What is the divine element in salvation? Grace. What is the human element? Faith! Faith in salvation is never a gift. Let any honest student study these verses and any other verses and you will find that to be true. When faith is a gift, it is given to believers to edify others. Faith is never a gift given to non-believers to become a Christian.

In Ephesians 2:8-9 we see that Grace and works are contrasts. Now listen to Romans 11:6:

6 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.

So for one to supply the need of another by grace, no works can be involved. As soon as works are involved it is no longer grace. You see, grace is a means of getting things, but if it is worked for it is earned, not received by grace. And so one would naturally conclude that there is no human qualifying factor.

Insight for Living, a ministry of Chuck Swindoll, in an article by Steve Johnson titled, "Coming to Terms: Grace," says this: "But isn't there something we must do to receive God's saving grace? No. If God's rescue program had included our efforts grace would not be a free gift. Salvation is not of our doing."

So since grace excludes all works, one would naturally conclude that there can be no human requirement or qualification. But grace does not exclude any qualifications. It excludes works. It

is my view that man must qualify in order for God to extend grace to anyone.

Let me illustrate this matter of qualifying without works. Let us say a new store is opening in town. You can win a car if you enter the store on opening day. You put your name on a paper and put it into the draw box. And now, let us say your name is drawn. You get a new car but you did not work or pay for it. It was free. It cannot be said that you earned the car by going to the store. But if you wanted to win you had to qualify. If you did not enter the store and put your name in the box, neither could you qualify.

What I want to show is that there is a sense in which grace is like that. You have to qualify for what you want but you cannot work for it in any way at all. Grace is a way of receiving things freely. The reason you need grace is because you do not have the where-with-all to get what you need in any other way.

3. What it accomplishes

Now let me ask, just what does grace accomplish? It is the means by which the one in need gets what is needed from the one who can provide that need. We have seen already that there are two legitimate ways of getting things you need. You can earn them or get them freely. Since salvation cannot be earned, if we do not get it freely, then we won't get it. God, in His great love, provided a way in which we can be saved freely. When we define grace as unmerited favor, the unmerited part means it is free, it is not earned.

The difference between these two ways of getting things in salvation is the difference between grace and works. That is why grace is contrasted with keeping the law. If we were saved by keeping the law it would be by works.

We go now to Romans 6. No book speaks about the law as much as Romans and it contrasts grace with law. Romans 11:5-7 says this about how some of mankind become God's elect. The elect are the chosen ones who are saved. Verses 5-6 say this:

5 Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace.

6 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.

How does election take place? How does God choose some and not others? Election is by grace through faith! Let me say this: I believe every part of salvation in all its parts including election and predestination is by grace. It is a free gift. But the question is: How does one receive this gift? Is it given arbitrarily? No, there is qualifying factor. And we'll see that later.

The most common error among all of mankind when they realize they have sinned and will go to hell is to seek to do good to be saved. If I have failed to do what is deemed right by God, then I will change and do what is right. This is seeking to be saved by keeping the law. The law shows me what is right and from now on I will keep this law. We have seen there are two ways of getting the things we want. It is either by works or it is by grace, which means it has been given. So if it is of law, then it is not by grace.

To be under the law means to seek to be saved by keeping the law. If one does that, one is under the law. One is bound to keep all the law and that is where everyone will find him or herself coming short. But both justification and sanctification are by grace through faith!

So grace is contrasted to law. That is because we either seek to find favor with God by works, or we

seek it from Him by faith. Seeking God by works was the failure of Israel and that is what Romans 9-11 is all about.

Let me say this about law and grace: One, there never was a way of salvation by law. Two, there never will be a way of salvation by law. Three, salvation has always been, still is, and always will be by grace through faith only!

II. PERSONAL VIEW OF GRACE DEFENDED

A. Justification is by Faith

I want to now give a defence for the definition I have given both in salvation and justification. I have said man must qualify to experience the grace or favor of God. I believe that in most cases where the word grace occurs, one would get a better understanding of what is meant by using the word *favor*. The KJV and NKJV use grace and favor interchangeably. Here is the question before us now. Can a lost sinner ever please God? I believe he can and he must if he is to experience God's grace. So let me now give how a lost sinner can please God. Here is what he can do to please God and God will grant him salvation. It is this: Faith! We are talking about the grace of God in salvation. Salvation requires repentance and faith. Both humble man, and faith is what causes God to give salvation to man!

So let me read the definition once more:

"The grace of God is that favorable disposition in God toward fallen man which is caused by something in them that pleases Him, and this favorable disposition causes Him to freely grant them what they desire."

Grace is the means by which one freely receives the things one desires from another who can give what is desired and this is achieved by finding favor with the one who can give what one desires. And my proposition is that man finds favor with God when he exercises faith!

Turn to Genesis 6. Now let me mention something here. I have read numerous times of Bible scholars of years ago who hold to what is called, "The law of first mention." The idea is this, if you want to find the meaning of a word or doctrine in Scripture, go to where it is first mentioned in Scripture to find what it means there. This is key to understanding that word or doctrine. I am not learned enough to verify that, but we are going to Genesis 6 to find where the word grace is mentioned for the very first time.

We begin in verse 5. We are now some 1700 years after creation. The evil of man had progressed past the point where we are now in America. It was evil to the extreme. With millions of people alive, one man and his family was all that was left that was godly.

Verse 5:

5 Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

6 And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.

7 So the LORD said, "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them."

The entire earth and all that was in it was to be destroyed. But now look at this most incredible next verse:

8 But Noah found grace <02580 chen> in the eyes of the LORD.

Noah's deliverance from the flood is a picture of salvation. And how was he saved from the flood? You can practice a Hebrew word now. Grace is *chen*. Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. Man was in desperate need. God could fulfill that need. Noah went to the

throne of grace, and there he found grace in the eyes of the LORD.

Now notice that Noah "found" grace. There is the human element. Noah sought grace and found it. What was it he sought? He wanted to be delivered from the destruction of mankind. And he found grace. Now what does that mean? That means that he came in a way that pleased God and that is why God granted him his request. You see, we call grace "unmerited favor." That favor is God's favor. When we find favor with God that means God is pleased. The way Noah came pleased God and God delivered Noah and his family!

When it says he found grace, the indication is that he sought for it and found it. In the Septuagint the Jews translated the word "to find" by the Greek word *eure*. This is an active verb. Noah actively sought favor and found it. He sought and found 'favor' or 'grace' in the eyes of the Lord. That is the word 'chen' which in the NT is 'charis,' which we translate as *grace*. The words, "found grace" occur 7 times in the OT in the KJV. And the phrase, "found favor" which is exactly the same word in Hebrew occurs 28 times. So this Hebrew phrase occurs 35 times.

Why did God give Noah what he wanted? His faith pleased God! How does man find grace or favor in the eyes of God? Can man do this? Yes! A thousand times, Yes! Now I ask you, how did Noah find grace with the LORD, with Jehovah God? Well, go to Hebrews 11. Noah found grace in the eyes of Jehovah God the same way anyone can find grace with Him. We begin in verse 1:

1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

2 For by it the elders obtained a good testimony.

3 By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.

4 *By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.*

5 *By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, "and was not found, because God had taken him"; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God.*

Now note these next words:

6 *But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.*

7 *By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.*

How did Noah get deliverance from the flood? By faith! In order to get what we wish from the Lord we must find favor with Him and we find it when we exercise faith in Him! Here is the human element. Here is the human qualification. Neither repentance nor faith are works. When we define grace as unmerited favor, favor is looked at from the divine side. Finding it is the human part. If one does not find favor with God one does not get anything, period!

So listen now to Ephesians 2:8-9, that passage quoted so often. It says:

8 *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,*

9 *not of works, lest anyone should boast.*

How do we get saved? How are we justified before God? By grace through faith! Scripture could not be more clear. When we come in repentance and faith, no one is rejected!

B. Sanctification is by Faith

So justification, initial salvation, is by faith and I want to add that sanctification is by faith as well. When you study other theologians you find that there are descriptions of grace in sanctification. Is the grace for sanctification different from the grace for justification? No! It is exactly the same. Go now to Hebrews 4.

Here we find more qualifications but they all have to do with finding favor with God by faith. Justification is by faith. Election is by faith. Predestination is by faith. Salvation is by grace through faith, through and through. In Hebrews 4 we are talking, not about being justified, but we are talking about believers and how they get things from God when they are in need.

So let us notice the qualifications that end up by faith in Hebrews 4:15-16:

1. Come to the throne of grace

Verse 15:

15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.

The Lord knows we are but dust. He knows how powerless we are. He knows we will be in need time after time as we grow in grace. Verse 16:

16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Notice first that we are to come to the throne of grace. Now you see, coming to the throne of grace is not works. When you go to ask someone for help, going there is not earning anything. And when we have come to the throne of grace, there is no list of requirements. It is not: If you say the Rosaria 30 times you will get the bicycle you want. It is not this: If you pray for 10 minutes you can get

this. If you pray for 50 minutes you can get this, etc. No we have to come to the throne of grace. Scripture says, "You have not because you ask not." You have to come to the throne of grace to get what you want from God by asking.

Now one of the things everyone needs is salvation, but there is no possible way to earn this, it must be given or we won't receive it at all. But how does one qualify for salvation? Or does God just indiscriminately give salvation to some and not others? God forbid. That makes Him a monster because then He damned the majority of mankind.

But the Christian is in need of many things if he will gain the victory over sin, and he can get these by coming to the throne of grace.

2. Ask for whatever it is you need

The second qualification is that you have to ask. James 4:2 says we do not have because we do not ask. We don't just go to the throne of grace and sit there and wait for something to happen when we are in need. We go there to receive and to receive we must ask. We learned in Ephesians 6 that we must ask specifically if we want specific things.

Now Hebrews 4:16 says we go to the throne of grace to receive mercy and find grace *in time of need*. We go to the throne of grace to obtain mercy. We go there to obtain, to receive, to get what it is we need. Receiving mercy is receiving that which we need.

Look at verse 16 again:

16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help

When we obtain mercy we obtain the very thing we need. In this verse it is help in the time of need.

Now listen to the Mirriam/Webster definition of grace. Grace is:

1a: unmerited divine assistance given to humans for their regeneration or sanctification

c: a state of sanctification enjoyed through divine assistance

I was amazed to see that in a dictionary.

3. Come to the throne in an appropriate manner

Furthermore, I recommend that when we come to the throne of grace, in order to qualify for any grace at all, we must come in the appropriate manner. Turn to 1 Peter 1. In Hebrews 4, the reason we come to the throne of grace is to obtain mercy. The mercy we need is whatever it happens to be that we need at the time we come to the throne of grace.

Consider now 1 Peter 5:5-7 which speaks about how we come to the throne of grace:

5 Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble."

6 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time,

7 casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.

To whom does God give grace? You see, there is a human factor involved in receiving grace. We cannot come to the throne of grace in pride, or while we live in sin, and expect to find grace. It will not happen. Humility is one of the greatest factors in pleasing God. Pride will NEVER do it.

Grace does not speak of what we get, unless it is used by metonymy. Grace speaks of how we get things from God. The human element is that we have to qualify and to qualify we have to please God. And

the natural response is that we cannot please God. But the facts are the lost can please God! How so? By repentance and faith!

So let me give you an example of grace used by metonymy. We go to Acts 11:23. Early in Acts the Christians began to be persecuted. These persecuted people then fled to other areas to find freedom from persecution. And what happened is that many people got converted. The Church at Jerusalem had heard how the Gospel was going to the Gentiles. And so they sent Barnabas to see what was actually happening and verse 23 says this:

23 When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord.

Now grace is not something you can see, but you can see the effects of it. And those effects speak by metonymy of what God's favor accomplished there. So seeing the grace of God means he saw what grace had done.

4. Search for grace

I recommend another qualification to receive grace from God. We must search for it. Forty one times the Bible says someone "found grace." Note that we come to the throne of grace to FIND grace. To *find* you have to *search* for it and you search for it at the throne of grace, which is the throne of God.

Listen to the verse again:

*16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and **find** grace to help in time of need.*

Now look at the word "find." We come to the throne of grace to look for, find help in time of need. You see, it means to search. At the throne of grace you search for what you are looking for. The word "to find" is used 174 times and simply means to *find*. Grace never hits you out of the blue. You

find it and you find it by looking for it in the right place in the right way! Do you remember that Noah found grace?

Now notice something else. It says that we come to the throne of grace that we "MAY" obtain mercy and that we "MAY" find grace. That verb is in the subjunctive mood, the mood of possibility or probability. It does not say, "And you will obtain mercy and you will find grace to help in time of need." Why would it be worded like that? Because if we do not come in the right way or if we do not please God with our request we will not receive what we ask for. We'll see more of this later.

And what is it one is searching for? That is our next point. It is to:

5. Find favor with giver

In order to get what we wish from the Lord we must find favor with Him. Here is the human element missing from all definitions. When we define grace as unmerited favor, the favor is from the divine side. Finding it is the human part. If one does not find favor with God one does not get anything, period! This is one of the most crucial points of grace.

Let me say this with fullest assurance: Any sinner can find grace with God for salvation if he will come in repentance and faith! Say Amen! You can count on it. When you ask God for a truck or car or house He may say no. When you ask Him to save someone it is contingent on many things, and may not happen. When anyone comes for salvation in repentance and faith, he will save them. I can say that with all certainty! It has the promise of Scripture!

Furthermore, one can never gain favor with God by doing good works. One can never find favor with God by spending much time in prayer, if one thinks that by much praying one will find favor. If one wants

to find favor with God one must come to Him in the way that pleases Him and with a request that pleases Him. One must exercise faith and humility. God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. There is the human element necessary to find grace or favor with God.

CONCL: So we conclude. I realize this is very brief but I trust because it is brief you can get hold of the main issue. Let me say in conclusion that receiving things by grace means it can never be of works. Second, one must qualify to receive grace, but this qualifying factor is not works either. It is faith. There are two things required of man to be saved; they are repentance and faith. Both require humility and these are things that must happen in man before God can ever be pleased with anyone. And repentance and faith and humility takes place by the Word of God. There can be no question about that!

Can anyone be saved? Anyone that receives the message of God can be saved if they will humble themselves and repent and believe. God so loved the world. That is not a select few; that is all of lost mankind. No lesser Calvinist than D. Martyn Lloyd Jones says that the word *world* refers to all of lost mankind (Eph. VII:259). Nothing should be plainer to anyone reading the Bible.

And here is the wonderful news about grace: God loved the entire world and paid a price sufficient for all of mankind to be saved! And if you will sincerely repent of your sins and put your faith in Him, He will save you! The Bible is very clear on that.