

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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The Grace of God That Brings Salvation

Nothing is more clearly revealed in the Scriptures than our dependence on God's grace for redemption. Paul said to the saints at Ephesus, "(by grace are ye saved)." (Eph. 2:5). Everyone who is permitted to enter heaven will be there by grace.

Today there are teachers, even in the church, who have warped conceptions of grace. Some seem to feel that grace is the big "cover-up" for whatever they want to allow that is not taught in the Bible. There is endless speculation about what grace may do. Having no desire to join the ranks of the conjecturers, I offer the following facts revealed in God's Word.

1. Grace does not circumvent Jesus Christ.

It is folly to imagine that God's saving grace may somehow take a circuitous route that by-passes Jesus Christ. "For the law was given, by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." (John 1:17). God demonstrated His loving-kindness for sinful man in the gift of His Son. In Christ "we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his

grace." (Eph. 1:7). Saving grace is found in Jesus, not out of Him. Paul said to the Corinthian Christians, "I thank my God always on your behalf for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ." (1 Cor. 1:4). The grace that saves comes to man by or through, not apart from, Jesus Christ.

2. Grace does not ignore the Gospel.

The good news of justification through Christ is referred to as "the gospel of the grace of God" and "the word of his grace." (Acts 20:24,32). To preach the gospel is to distribute saving grace. The saints at Colosse were reminded of "the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel; which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth." (Col. 1:5, 6). It was not until the gospel was preached in Antioch that people turned to the Lord and the grace of God was "seen" in that locality. (Acts 11:19-23).

3. Grace does not permit access apart from faith.

"Access" is that which gives admittance, entrance, or introduction. One must show faith in Jesus Christ in order to gain access into saving grace. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Romans 5:1-2). Since faith comes by hearing God's word (Romans 10:17), one must hear the gospel to enter God's favor. "For by grace are ye saved through faith . . ." (Ephesians 2:8). God provides salvation through undeserved favor; man accepts that provision of grace by means of faith.

4. Grace does not rule against baptism for the remission of sins.

The faith which gives access into grace is active trust-confidence expressed in cheerful obedience. God requires that we show faith by being baptized, and that demonstration of faith is unto the remission of sins. "Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead" (Colossians 2:12). Peter preached repentance and baptism "for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38). But he acknowledged that it is "through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ" that we shall be saved (Acts 15:11). Salvation by grace requires faith, and faith requires baptism unto the forgiveness of sins.

5. Grace does not give license to sin.

The law of Moses was given to show the exceeding sinfulness of sin. Under the law sin abounded. "But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. . ." (Romans 5:20). Does this mean that the more men sin, the more grace will be shown? Or, as Paul worded the question, "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?" He answered, "God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" (Romans 6:1-2). The triumph of God's grace over sin is not to be interpreted as a license for the Christian to indulge in unrighteousness. "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof" (Romans 6:12). "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly . . ." (Titus 2:11-12).

6. Grace does not offer unconditional security.

Just as our entrance into saving grace is conditioned on our willingness to show faith in Jesus Christ, our remaining in that grace is conditioned on our willingness to continue in faith. The Hebrew writer warns us that one may "fail" or "come short" of the grace of God (Hebrews 2:15). The Galatians were called "into the grace of Christ" but afterward accepted false teaching that "removed" them (Galatians 1:6-7). Paul wrote to them, "ye are fallen from grace" (Galatians 5:4). This explodes the theory of once in grace, always in grace.

7. Grace does not save on the basis of human merit.

The Bible sometimes uses the word "work" to convey the thought of activity that earns, or effort that deserves reward. In this sense Paul used the word when he wrote, "Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt" (Romans 4:4). Our salvation is based on faith, not something earned or deserved, "that it might be by grace" (Romans 4:16). This is why boasting is excluded. "Not of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:9). Actions in exercise of faith are sometimes called "works" (James 2:24), but they are not in the category of efforts that earn or merit. No man deserves salvation. God's grace saves and shows our inability to reach heaven by our own might, ingenuity, or deserving. God owes us nothing; we owe Him everything.

I have used this negative approach to show some of the revealed limitations which God places on grace. Hopefully, this will point out that God's saving grace is not a mystical catch-all for

whatever odds and ends. the speculators in theology may wish to conceal. And let us stay with revelation, giving no honor to speculation.

— Irvin Himmel

AIDING AND ABETTING

Play an imaginary game with me for a moment. Let's imagine that we live in another time and place, and that we have different friends and acquaintances than we do now.

What would it say about you if you lived in Germany in 1940 and one of your friends was Hermann Goering? What if you lived in Russia in the 1920's and you counted as one of your friends Joseph Stalin? What if you lived in California in the 1960's and one of your friends was Charlie Manson?

"Now wait a moment," you might protest. "Just because we were friends doesn't mean I was guilty of the evil things they did!" And you're right. But friendship with those people would still say something about your character, wouldn't it? Like it or not, our friendships say a lot about us.

"You adulterous people," James declares, "don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God?" (James 4:4).

When there is a war going on, it is hard to remain friends with both sides. In our imaginary world, being friends with Winston Churchill would probably put a strain on your relationship with the

ubiquitous Mr. and Mrs. Goering. And vice versa. There must have been Christians hi James' day who felt they could remain on friendly terms with the "world" and retain their relationship with God.

Being friends with the world has nothing to do with whether or not you are an environmentalist; it refers to society to the extent that it is antagonistic toward God. There is a war going on, and there are casualties. The "body bags" are being brought home all the time; and we speak here, not of something so temporary as physical death, but of spiritual loss. These casualties affect eternity! Little children are led astray by our compromises. Teenagers are influenced by our lack of commitment to Christ. Weak and young Christians are confused by our insistence on fraternizing with the enemy. Is it possible that even we are being unwittingly affected and weakened?

You can't "aid and abet" the enemy in a time of war and expect your own side to look kindly on it. The problem is that we so easily forget what is at stake, and the enemy is very successful at convincing us that we are not at war.

So, who are your friends?

- Stan Mitchell

THIS WEEK'S LESSONS: Sunday morning: *"If You Have Judged Me to be Faithful!"* (text: Acts 16:11-15); Sunday evening: *"Who Is Hurt by My Unfaithfulness?"* (text: Luke 18:1-8).

OUR GOSPEL MEETING: July 27 – Aug. 1, Sunday through Friday, with Jeremy Paschall preaching. Sunday at our regularly scheduled times, and Monday through Friday at 7:00 p.m.