

# MISAIMINGS

## “Who concerning the Truth Have Misaimed” — 2 Tim. 2:18

### Misaiming concerning Grace

**Misaiming:** “The exact and discriminate meaning of the word grace should be crystal clear to every child of God...The word favor is the nearest biblical synonym for the word grace...Grace is favor, and favor is grace...Grace means pure unrecompensed kindness and favor” (*Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*, Autumn 1994, pp. 37-38).

**Truth:** While the author’s first statement is true, the abecedarian definition that follows is far from “exact” and “discriminate.” Adequately defining scriptural and spiritual terms is critical, not only to the believer’s understanding, but also to the corresponding depth of experience that follows. When “the eyes of our heart” are enlightened, we spontaneously yearn for personal appropriation of what we have seen. If we hope to know the “grace of Christ” in its profundity, we must know its deepest meaning and significance.

*Grace* is a mysterious word in the New Testament. On a superficial level, grace includes favor and unrecompensed kindness, a simplistic definition heavily influenced by its use in classical literature, which limits our experiential knowledge of grace to a marginal level. Early Bible scholars arrived at their definitions of grace by overemphasizing its ancient, extra-scriptural usage. But, as Wuest says in his New Testament word studies, grace in its biblical sense “takes an infinite step forward to a deeper, richer, more wonderful content of meaning” than in the Greek classics. While many scholars have not escaped the inordinate influence of pre-Christian writings, some have noted the deeper meaning of grace in Scripture: the dispensing of God in Christ to His believers as their enjoyment. For example, Trench states that grace is “a property of a thing that gives joy to the hearers or beholders of it.” Wuest, in his word studies of the New Testament, says that “this grace is unlimited in its resources,” and he would translate Romans 5:20 as follows: “grace existed in superabundance and then more grace added to this superabundance.” An unlimited divine supply is herein implied. Vincent, however, has the most thorough treatment of this divine term. Commenting on 2 Corinthians 7:15, he says that grace is a “divine bestowal;” remarking on 8:6, he refers to grace as an “act of love, the contribution;” and concerning verse 19, he says, “Charis [is] being used in the

sense of *benefaction* or *bounty*.” Additionally, Ephesians 3:8 states that grace was given to the apostle though he was “less than the least of all saints,” indicating that all the saints are qualified to receive this grace. In Ephesians 3:2 Paul speaks of “the stewardship of the grace.” *Stewardship* implies dispensing, that is, God’s giving and our enjoying the riches of His person and attainments.

The most discriminate light on the subject comes through an examination of the term *grace* in various contexts in the Bible. The first mention of this word, uplifted by its use in the Bible, occurs in the context of God’s coming in Christ through incarnation (Luke 1:28, 30). In John’s Gospel the connection between grace and the incarnation of Christ is even more direct: “The law was given through Moses; grace and reality became [lit.] through Jesus Christ” (1:17). According to these verses, when Christ comes, grace comes. If we have Christ, we have grace. These cannot be separated. Clearly, grace is God Himself coming in the person of Christ.

John 1:16 says, “For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace.” The fullness of Christ is dispensed to His believers in waves of grace. But what is this fullness? Colossians 2:9 says of Christ, “For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.” Grace is thus the continuous dispensing of God Himself in Christ. The Epistles make this very clear. In Galatians 2:20 Paul says, “It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me.” However, in the sister verse (1 Cor. 15:10), Paul replaces *Christ* with *grace*: “I labored...yet not I but the grace of God.” Grace here is equated with Christ and is in fact personified. Paul also personifies grace in Titus 2:11-12: “For the grace of God...has appeared, training us.” Grace is personified as a trainer. How shallow to think that mere favor or kindness could train us to live the Christian life! It is God in Christ as the Spirit, daily received and enjoyed, that trains us to live soberly in this age. In two more instances grace is synonymous with Christ. “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit” (Gal. 6:18). “The Lord be with your spirit” (2 Tim. 4:22). In addition, Ephesians 6:10 says, “Be empowered in the Lord,” and 2 Timothy 2:1 says, “Be empowered in the grace.” When we have Christ with our spirit, we have grace with our spirit, and when we are empowered in the Lord, we are empowered in grace.

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Paul's Epistles stress the believers' subjective and intimate experience of Christ. Whereas the Gospels and Acts mention grace six times and eleven times respectively, Paul's Epistles mention grace ninety-eight times. This emphasis corresponds to the central theme of his ministry, which is that God has come in Christ to be received by His believers to accomplish God's purpose.

Furthermore, in 1 Corinthians 15, a chapter dealing with Christ being the "life-giving Spirit" in resurrection, Paul stresses that "by the grace of God I am what I am." Paul's inward constitution and daily deportment were by grace, that is, by the dispensing of God in Christ in resurrection as the Spirit to be his enjoyment.

Grace is much more than the unrestricted kindness or favor of God. It is actually the unrestricted dispensing of God Himself in Christ as the Spirit, received and enjoyed by His believers to be everything to them. With this perspective, Paul, in a single chapter (2 Cor. 8), refers to grace as "the grace of God" (v. 1) and "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 9), and beseeches the believers to "abound in this grace also" (v. 7). From all this we see that far from being mere favor, grace is the Triune God in Christ dispensed into His believers for their experience and enjoyment.

#### **Misaiming concerning "Sons by Adoption"**

**Misaiming:** "Though we are 'sons' of the Most High, we are not sons by nature, but by adoption (Galatians 4:5-8). Only Christ Himself can be said to have the nature of God" (Hank Hanegraff, *Christianity in Crisis*, p. 115).

**Truth:** By making such an inaccurate statement, Hanegraff annuls one of the most precious truths revealed in the Bible. The Bible clearly and unequivocally states that the believers in Christ are "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:4) and have been "begotten of God" (John 1:13). We are not merely adopted by God to have a legal relationship with Him positionally; we are begotten of God, "born anew," to have a personal relationship with Him organically.

The Greek word which some translated "adoption" is *huioi* (a son) plus *thesis* (a placing). It is more accurately translated "sonship" (see Vine, Vincent, Wuest, et al.). It is a particular Roman legal term referring to the bestowal of all the rights and privileges of sonship upon one who previously did not possess them. For this reason it is never applied to Christ, who is the only begotten Son of God from eternity. But because we believers, before our regeneration, were under God's judicial condemnation, we needed the Holy Spirit both to beget us and to bestow on us the legal status of "sonship." We were begotten by God

in order to receive the divine nature, and we were given the divine sonship in order to receive the rights of inheritance. "Adoption" (sonship) does not annul this begetting; rather, it enhances it. As those begotten of God, we enjoy an organic relationship with God based on the imparting of the divine nature; we also enjoy the full positional rights bestowed on sons. We are sons of God (positionally) and children of God (by the divine nature). It is for this reason that the Bible uses both terms. In Romans 8:14 we are told, "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God." Then in verse 16 we are told, "The Spirit Himself witnesses with our spirit that we are children of God." But in Hanegraff's view adoption seems to have superseded this divine begetting instead of enriching it. According to the Bible, the value of our vital position as children of God appreciates by virtue of our legal position as sons of God.

Peter was not trying to be vague and mysterious when he said we are "partakers of the divine nature." The Scriptures state emphatically that Christ is in us (Col. 1:27; 2 Cor. 13:5; Rom. 8:10). Is Christ in us apart from His divine nature? Did He leave the divine nature at the throne when He regenerated us? Certainly not. Believers have the divine nature in them because, and only because, they have Christ in them. The Bible also says that Christ lives in us (Gal. 2:20), that He is gained by us (Phil. 3:8), and that He is magnified in us (1:20). Does Christ live in us without His divine nature? Can we gain Christ without also gaining His divine nature? Can we magnify Christ without magnifying His divine attributes? Certainly not, for such a claim would not only be contrary to Scripture but would also be illogical.

In denying the divine sonship of the believers, Hanegraff is endeavoring to refute erroneous teachings which go to the heretical extreme of positing that Christians can become equal with God in the Godhead. His motives are commendable. Nevertheless, in his attempt at refutation he has gone to another extreme and has annulled the large body of Scripture which reveals our organic relationship with God. He thereby separates the believer from God in all but position. The truth regarding our divine birth is well stated by Kenneth Wuest in his *Word Studies*: "The Spirit of adoption is therefore the legal representative of God, so to speak, imparting to us the divine nature and placing us in the family of God" (Vol. 3, p. 92).

#### **Misaiming concerning the Nature of the Sons of God**

**Misaiming:** "Only Christ Himself can be said to have the nature of God. Christ is the only-begotten, unique, one-of-a-kind (Greek *monogenes*, one generation or

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nature) Son of God (John 1:14)” (Hank Hanegraff, *Christianity in Crisis*, p. 115).

**Truth:** John 1:14 tells us that from eternity Christ is the “only Begotten from the Father,” and John 3:16 evinces God’s love toward us in sacrificing His “only begotten” on our behalf. But after His resurrection Christ did not remain in that solitary status. The Scriptures refer to Christ (after His resurrection) as the “Firstborn among many brothers,” who are also begotten of God in His love (Rom. 8:29). Christ’s post-resurrection designation as firstborn Son is, necessarily, a contrast to His being the only begotten Son. One cannot be the firstborn if there are not also other-born. Hanegraff isolates Christ’s ante-resurrection designation as God’s “only begotten” to aver that only Christ is God’s Son according to the divine nature and that He alone has “the essence or nature of God” (p. 116). Actually, numerous passages of Scripture affirm the precious biblical truth that the believers in Christ are also sons of God (Rom. 8:14) and brothers of Christ who possess the divine nature by virtue of the divine birth. (Clearly we do not share any position in the Godhead, as Christ does. In this sense, Christ remains the “only Begotten” from and for eternity.) The Lord Himself revealed that after His resurrection He would no longer abide alone; rather, as a grain of wheat falling into the ground to die, He would duplicate Himself in His believers who, identical to Himself in life and nature, are the many grains (John 12:24).

Hebrews 2:11-12 unveils the extent of our fraternal relationship with Christ: “For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of One, for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying, ‘I will declare Your name to My brothers.’” Christ is not ashamed to call us brothers because, due to our divine regeneration, we are of the same paternal source as He. If Christ is not ashamed to call us His brothers, then we should not be ashamed to call ourselves the same. Certainly Christ alone owns the unique position as the only begotten Son of God *from eternity*; He also is the Redeemer, the Savior, the Lord, the Head of the church, and the embodiment of the fullness of the Godhead. But Hanegraff’s zeal in defending this majesty and uniqueness of Christ has impelled him to the unscriptural extreme of denying the believers’ vital, organic, life relationship with their Elder Brother. The Bible reveals that we and Christ our Savior have been begotten of the same Father and that His believers are being sanctified by partaking of the divine life and the divine nature (John 3:36a; 2 Pet. 1:4).

### Misaiming concerning the Time and Place of the Kingdom Reward

**Misaiming:** “There will be no equality in heaven. If there

were, then the whole doctrine of rewards would mean absolutely nothing, and it would be utterly stupid for Paul to say, ‘I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others I myself should become disqualified’ (1 Cor. 9:27)....In other words, if you don’t know how to steward the resources I’ve given you now, how will I let you steward eternal things? So you have disqualified yourself from what could have been a significant position of service as a co-ruler with Jesus Christ in the life to come” (*Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*, Spring 1995, pp. 135, 137).

**Truth:** While it is clear in the Bible that eternal life is the gift of God in Christ Jesus (Rom. 6:23) and that it cannot be earned by good works (Titus 3:5), numerous biblical passages refer to a coming reward for faithful service and spiritual maturity (Matt. 25). By definition, a reward is earned, not given as a gift; it must be deserved and not merely bestowed as the result of a benefactor’s mercy. Christ undeniably intends to reward His faithful slaves with certain particular benefits, many of which He enumerates in Revelation 2 and 3 following His repeated call: “To him who overcomes, I will give.” The question here is not *whether* there will be a reward, but *when* it will be given. The citation above contends that this will take place in heaven in eternity future. However, this interpretation is a departure from scriptural truth.

The Bible reveals that when Christ returns to earth, prior to the new heaven, new earth, and New Jerusalem, He will inaugurate His one-thousand-year kingdom (Rev. 20:4). Reigning with Him in the kingdom is the reward offered in Revelation 2:26-27: “He who overcomes and he who keeps My works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations; and he will shepherd them with an iron rod, as vessels of pottery are broken in pieces.” If this reward is to be fulfilled in heaven, as the author maintains, how could the unruly nations be present? Is there the need of an iron rod in heaven? In heaven will there be the breaking in pieces of “vessels of pottery”? On the contrary, the Word of God reveals that heaven cannot be the sphere of reward. The Lord’s own words remove all doubt: “Well done, good slave. Because you have become faithful in the least, have authority over ten cities” (Luke 19:17). Are there cities in heaven? And if there were, would it be necessary for believers to take dominion over them in order to institute authority? It is not only biblical but also logical to conclude that the reward to the overcomers will be conferred during the earthly millennial kingdom of Christ wherein they will shepherd and rule the nations. All believers will enjoy the tree and river of life for eternity (Rev. 22:1, 14), but only the faithful, overcoming ones will be rewarded with the privilege of co-reigning with Christ on the earth during the preceding one-thousand-year kingdom.