

Grace—God Joining to and Mingling with Man

- 1 Grace! 'tis a charming sound,
Harmonious to the ear;
Heav'n with the echo shall resound,
And all the earth shall hear.
All sufficient grace!
Never powerless!
It is Christ who lives in me,
In His exhaustlessness.
- 2 'Twas grace that wrote my name
In life's eternal book;
'Twas grace that gave me to the Lamb,
Who all my sorrows took.
- 3 Grace taught my wandering feet
To tread the pilgrim road;
And new supplies each hour I meet
While pressing on to God.
- 4 Grace taught my heart to pray,
And made my eyes o'erflow;
'Tis grace which kept me to this day,
And will not let me go.
- 5 Grace all the work shall crown
Through everlasting days;
It lays in love the topmost stone,
And well deserves the praise.
- 6 Oh, let that grace inspire
My heart with strength divine;
May all my powers to Thee aspire,
And all my days be Thine. (*Hymns*, #312)

This hymn breaks forth with a joyful affirmation of the beauty and charm of grace. “Grace,” we are informed, is “a charming sound, / Harmonious to the ear.” The Greek word *charis* translated “grace” in the New Testament indicates joy and happiness. Richard C. Trench in his *Synonyms of the New Testament* writes concerning the Greek word,

There has often been occasion to observe the manner in which Greek words taken up into Christian use are glorified and transformed, seeming to have waited for this adoption of them, to come to their full rights, and to reveal all the depth and the riches of meaning which they contained, or might be made to contain. *Χάρις* [grace] is

one of these. It is hardly too much to say that the Greek mind has in no word uttered itself and all that was at its heart more distinctly than in this...[It] is first of all that property in a thing which causes it to give joy to the hearers or beholders of it,...and then, seeing that to a Greek there was nothing so joy-inspiring as grace or beauty, it implied the presence of this...*Χάρις* after a while came to signify not necessarily the grace or beauty of a thing, as a quality appertaining to it; but the gracious or beautiful thing, act, thought, speech, or person it might be, itself—the grace embodying and uttering itself, where there was room or call for this, in gracious outcomings toward such as might be its objects. (166-167)

Clearly, this hymn's description of grace as a charming sound is very appropriate to the Greek word—it gives joy to the hearers or beholders of it, and in its ultimate sense this grace is personified in Christ Himself as God coming to us to be our enjoyment and to supply our every need. The apostle John writes, “Grace and reality came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17). The law was *given*; grace *came*. When Christ came, grace came. Christ is not merely the One who brings grace, but Christ is grace itself coming to us. Grace *is* a charming sound.

Kenneth S. Wuest in his *Word Studies* spends some time reviewing the meaning of grace based upon Trench's *Synonyms*, Herman Cremer's *Biblico-Theological Lexicon of the New Testament Greek*, and his own appreciation of the meaning of the word. He writes concerning Trench's comments pertaining to the Greek word *charis*:

In the case of the use of the same word in the Greek New Testament, we can repeat this Greek scholar's words, substituting the word “God” for the word “Greek.” *It is hardly too much to say that the mind of God has in no word uttered itself and all that was in His heart more distinctly than in this.* (15)

In another place Wuest summarizes his own comprehension of the meaning of *charis* in the New Testament:

Charis is used in the N.T., of that spontaneous act of God that came from the infinite love in His heart, in which He stepped down from His judgment throne to take upon Himself the guilt and penalty of human sin, thus satisfying

His justice, maintaining His government, and making possible the bestowal of salvation upon the sinner who receives it by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ who became a Sin-offering for him on the Cross (Rom. 3:24). (138-139)

Charis also refers to the salvation which God provides, which salvation includes justification, sanctification, and glorification (Tit. 2:11). In Rom. 3:24 it is justifying grace. In Eph. 1:2 it is sanctifying grace, the enabling grace of God in the operation of the Holy Spirit in the life of the yielded saint. (139)

By his understanding of grace Wuest distinguishes two basic items: the act of God through incarnation, becoming the vicarious Substitute for our sins and freely bestowing His saving grace upon those who receive it, and salvation itself provided by the operation of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers in justification, sanctification, and glorification. His understanding is helpful, but it fails to fully appreciate the personified nature of grace. Grace is not merely something given to us, done for us, or acting upon us; grace is God Himself in the incarnated, crucified, and resurrected Son as the Spirit becoming intimately involved in and mingled with our person and action.

In *Word Studies in the New Testament* Marvin R. Vincent states that the Greek word *grace* derives from the same root as *to rejoice*. It primarily indicates “*that which gives joy or pleasure; and hence outward beauty, loveliness, something which delights the beholder*” (259). Then in his fourth definition of the meaning of the term, Vincent suggests that grace in its

higher Christian signification, [is] based on the emphasis of *freeness* in the gift or favor, and, as commonly [used] in New Testament, denoting the free, spontaneous, absolute loving-kindness of God toward men, and so contrasted with *debt, law, works, sin*. (260)

Regrettably, this thought of the freeness of a gift being given without merit to others has become the prevailing understanding of most believers. The general understanding of grace by most Christians follows this latter definition, affirming grace to be free and unmerited favor from God. This understanding certainly is not wrong, but it fails to recognize the depths of the intrinsic significance of the New Testament revelation. According to the New Testament, grace superabounds to a sinner, bringing with it faith and love in Christ Jesus by infusing faith in Christ and imparting love toward the Lord into a former blasphemer and insulting person (1 Tim. 1:13-15). Grace also

is the all-sufficient supply and enjoyment that cause a suffering believer to be “well pleased in weaknesses, in insults, in necessities, in persecutions and distresses, on behalf of Christ,” thus imparting the realization that in his weakness he is made powerful (2 Cor. 12:9-10). Furthermore, grace is the energizing source that enabled the apostle to labor more abundantly than all others (1 Cor. 15:10), and it is the element that has appeared, bringing salvation to all men and training the believers to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present age (Titus 2:11-12). In none of these instances can we be satisfied with an understanding of grace as being merely unmerited favor from God. Something much more dynamic and personal is involved.

In its use in the New Testament, grace points to God as our enjoyment and our all-sufficient supply to meet all our needs. *Enjoyment* is implied in the word itself, as we have seen from the study of the Greek word. It is something that brings joy to the beholder. Our understanding of grace as God Himself with all that He is and all that He has accomplished for us is present in the use of the word throughout the entire New Testament.

We can apprehend a little more clearly this realization of grace in the utterance of Paul in Ephesians concerning the gospel of which he “became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God” (3:7). To

him, “less than the least of all saints, was this grace given to announce to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ as the gospel” (v. 8). A footnote in the Recovery Version of the Bible is helpful:

The grace of God is God Himself, especially as life, partaken of and enjoyed by us; the gift of grace is the ability and function produced out of the enjoyment of the grace of God. Grace implies life, and the gift is the ability that comes out of life. (v. 7, note 2)

The apostle preached not a doctrine or a ritual as the gospel but Christ with His unsearchable riches as the gospel. His ability and responsibility to become a minister of the gospel was the result of the gift of grace, which was Christ Himself assigning this function to the apostle and energizing him to carry it out. Paul in 1 Timothy speaks of “the healthy teaching, according to the gospel of the glory of the blessed God, with which I was entrusted. I give thanks to Him who empowers me, Christ Jesus our Lord, that He has counted me faithful, appointing me to the ministry” (1:10-12). Here it is the Lord who appointed him to and empowered him in the ministry. The gift of

In the understanding of most Christians, grace is free and unmerited favor from God, but in the New Testament, grace points to God as our enjoyment and our all-sufficient supply to meet all our needs.

grace experienced by Paul was just Christ Jesus our Lord coming to him as the appointing and empowering agent. Correspondingly, in 1 Corinthians 15:10 Paul testifies, “His grace unto me did not turn out to be in vain, but, on the contrary, I labored more abundantly than all of them, yet not I but the grace of God which is with me.” This utterance is strikingly similar to the word in Galatians 2:20: “I am crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me.” On one hand, *it is not I but the grace*; on the other hand, *it is not I but Christ*. It seems amply clear that grace is the functioning Christ, and Christ is grace functioning.

God’s grace transcends every circumstance and is able to meet every need. This flourishing source, called grace in the New Testament, far exceeds the definition of grace as the unmerited favor of God. Hence, we should joyfully sing of the charming sound which will cause heaven to resound with the echo and cause all the earth to hear. Stanza 1 opens with a rich poetic expression that portends the abundant supply of God’s grace to the believers that is explored in the rest of the hymn: “Grace! ’tis a charming sound, / Harmonious to the ear; / Heav’n with the echo shall resound, / And all the earth shall hear.” Beginning thus with the delights of heaven and earth in the “charming sound” of the grace of God, the hymn unfolds the multifaceted gift of God’s grace and its immeasurable efficacy to the believers both in this age and for eternity.

The hymn in its present form is the result of three different contributions. Philip Doddridge (1702-1751) originally penned the basic premise of the hymn—grace has turned our feet toward God, supplied us in our Christian walk, and will be the final crown of God’s work. Doddridge’s contribution includes stanzas 1, 3, and 5 of the hymn. Later, Augustus Montague Toplady (1740-1778) added verses 2, 4, and 6, expanding the functions of grace in the Christian life: from its beginnings grace has written our names in the Lamb’s book of life, and through its development to its ultimate consummation grace teaches our hearts to pray, and grace keeps us to the end and will not let us go. Stanza 6 concludes with the prayerful aspiration that our heart and strength may be stirred by grace to the uttermost cooperation with the personified Grace: “May all my powers to Thee aspire, / And all my days be Thine.”

The final contribution to the hymn came in the late 1960s when a chorus was added to the hymn in order to define grace as the all-inclusive Christ who lives in each believer

to be his unlimited supply. As we review the content and significance of the hymn in its application to our Christian experience, we will realize how this chorus has greatly enhanced the impact of the hymn by the addition of a clear definition—grace is Christ Himself indwelling His redeemed and regenerated elect to be their inexhaustible supply.

Stanza 2 explores the virtues of this all-sufficient grace as the direct initiating source of our salvation: “’Twas grace that wrote my name / In life’s eternal book.” It is significant that Toplady does not say that by grace his name was written in life’s book; rather, grace as a divine instrument “personally” has done the writing. The point here is that grace is the active agent by which salvation is applied; it is not simply unmerited favor as a description of an act of God. In the same way, “’Twas grace that gave me to the Lamb, / Who all my sorrows took” depicts the actions of personified grace carrying out the work of God to bring the sinner to the Lamb and to take away all the sorrows that plague the unregenerated man. This view

of grace matches the divine record in the Scriptures. Luke refers to the grace of God that was upon the Lord Jesus when He was a child (2:40) and to the words of grace that proceeded out of His mouth in His ministry (4:22). In the first chapter of the Gospel of John we are shown a particular vision of grace:

*Grace is the all-inclusive Christ
who lives in each believer to be
his unlimited supply. Grace is Christ
Himself indwelling His redeemed
and regenerated elect to be their
inexhaustible supply.*

The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us (and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only Begotten from the Father), full of grace and reality...For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and reality came through Jesus Christ. (vv. 14, 16-17)

The Son, who came in the glory of His Father, was full of grace and reality. We have received of His fullness, even grace upon grace. Moreover, the striking statement that gives a significant revelation of the origin and essence of grace is in verse 17: “Grace...came through Jesus Christ.” The law was given, but grace *came*. This suggests that the coming of Christ is the coming of grace; thus, as grace, Christ wrote our name in life’s book and gave us to Himself as the Lamb.

Stanza 3 unveils grace as the training medium which trains us to walk in the way of life: “Grace taught my wandering feet / To tread the pilgrim road.” This training function of grace is clearly revealed in Titus 2:11-14:

The grace of God, bringing salvation to all men, has

appeared, training us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly and righteously and godly in the present age, awaiting the blessed hope, even the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from all lawlessness and purify to Himself a particular people as His unique possession, zealous of good works.

Grace is the key factor in God's salvation given to man, but this grace is not a passively bestowed gift; rather, it is an active element, a living agent, which operates in the recipients of God's salvation to train them in their living. Grace functions to train us to live soberly (in a self-restricting way), to live righteously (in a way that is right with both God and man), and to live godly (in a way that expresses God). The three terms *soberly*, *righteously*, and *godly* are virtues directed toward ourselves, toward others, and toward God, respectively. It is wonderful that grace is our trainer and not only discipline, pressure, hardship, or punishment. Although these seemingly unpleasant factors may all be present in the life of a believer and have their respective purposes under the tender hand of God, they cannot perfect us in the Christian life and walk.

Peter unveils the loving care of our Savior God in coordination with grace, calling Him the God of all grace: "The God of all grace, He who has called you into His eternal glory in Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a little while, will Himself perfect, establish, strengthen, and ground you" (1 Pet. 5:10). Peter realizes that the God of grace is personally and intimately involved in the perfecting of His dear children. Grace is the God of grace acting and moving in us. When we realize this function of grace in training and perfecting us, we are able to respond in faith and allow the God of all grace in His divine operation to supply us with the bountiful supply of His divine life to bring us into His full salvation. How marvelous it is to be under the perfecting work of grace! Only this grace is sufficient to purify us and make us God's unique possession prepared for glory.

The hymn continues to appraise the marvelous effect of grace in the believers; grace, as it teaches us to walk, also supplies us to live out our human life as His unique possession: "And new supplies each hour I meet / While pressing on to God." John tells us that we have received of Christ's fullness, even grace upon grace (John 1:16). This indicates that we are continually receiving the supply of grace. This supply is the abundance of grace revealed in Romans 5:17, which says, "Much more those

who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ." Verses 20 and 21 say, "Where sin abounded, grace has superabounded, in order that just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness unto eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." When we pray over these verses and consider the clear teaching of the Scriptures, we will realize that grace is God operating and moving in us to supply us with Himself as our life. As we give Him the ground to work in us, He as grace becomes the living factor in us to reign over sin and death and to deposit His very element as the rich supply of eternal life into us for our daily living. Thus, we reign in life through Him, and He lives in us to reign through us unto eternal life. What a marvelous Supply!

By the supply of grace we are "pressing on to God" as the apostle Paul did before us so that we may lay hold of that for which we have been laid hold of by Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:12). Forgetting the things which are behind and stretching forward to the things which are before, we are

aggressively urgent in our quest toward the goal for the prize to which God in Christ Jesus has called us upward (vv. 13-14). We are pursuing, pressing forward from grace to more grace, according to the riches of God's supplying gift.

Stanza 4 speaks of the experience of grace in prayer: "Grace taught my heart to

pray, / And made my eyes o'erflow; / 'Tis grace which kept me to this day, / And will not let me go." We need grace to bring us into a proper life of prayer, in which our prayer issues from our mingled spirit; this is the prayer of the Spirit with our spirit (Rom. 8:26-27). Such prayer comes from the throne of grace (Heb. 4:16), which is located in our human spirit that has been mingled with and indwelt by the Spirit. It is in our mingled spirit that God meets with His chosen people, just as He met with them in the Holy of Holies through the office of the priesthood in the Old Testament. In the New Testament all the believers are priests, and a new and living way into the Holy of Holies has been opened through the redemptive sacrifice of Christ. It is mercy that opens the veil into the Holy of Holies by way of the shed blood of the Lamb of God, but it is grace that bids us to enter with boldness. It is grace that teaches us to pray, and it is grace that can bring tears to our eyes as we join our great High Priest in His intercession for His own. He is the One who wept over Jerusalem because of their rejection of His loving and shepherding care (Luke 19:41), and He is the One who wept at the grave of Lazarus because of the unbelief of His disciples (John 11:35). As we come forward to the throne

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of grace in our mingled spirit, grace teaches us to stand with Him on the earth today as He intercedes in the heavens. “Lord, grant us Yourself as grace so that we may pray.”

Stanza 5 affirms that grace will complete the work of God’s New Testament economy even to the topstone being laid upon the completed building. If we understand the goal of God’s economy, we will treasure the thought that the purpose of God will be finally fulfilled by grace even to the laying in love of that topmost stone. Grace is both the initiator and the consummator of God’s building work. God begins by appointing us to His own work according to His purpose and grace, which was given to us before the times of the ages (2 Tim. 1:9), and grace will crown the work. After the lofty, magnificent, and culminating revelation of the New Jerusalem as the consummation of the eternal economy of God, the final word is: “The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen” (Rev. 22:21). Grace as the incarnate God working out the final details of His awe-inspiring purpose is yet inexhaustible, rich, and available even for eternity; He “well deserves the praise.”

The final stanza is the cry of a heart that has been touched by the vision of the amazing grace of God: “Oh, let that grace inspire / My heart with strength divine; / May all my powers to Thee aspire, / And all my days be Thine.” As we consider God’s eternal purpose, which is to be intimately and intricately joined to and mingled with man, our hearts must surely respond with such a request to our Lord. We must once again be drawn to such scriptural admonitions as presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1). We belong to the God of all grace, and we owe Him our full allegiance and consecration. We gladly desire to surrender our entire being to Him for His great plan. Our hearts would utter our deep longing: “O Lord, be in me as Grace to energize and motivate my

entire body, soul, and spirit to lovingly yield to Your every desire for Your eternal satisfaction.” As Paul before us, we also would be determined “to gain the honor of being well pleasing to Him” (2 Cor. 5:9).

The chorus is the crowning utterance of this inspiring hymn: “All sufficient grace! / Never powerless! / It is Christ who lives in me, / In His exhaustlessness.” Throughout our review we have drawn upon this vision of grace as the only plausible understanding of what the grace of God actually is—it is Christ! But it is not Christ in His ineffable glory handing out His gifts of unmerited favor. It is Christ who lives in us! He Himself as the divine life is being dispensed into us day by day and hour by hour to carry out His full salvation in us. Grace is Christ Himself who is the inexhaustible supply moving in and living through us for the completion of His divine purpose. We need to learn to take grace that we may search out, enter into, and participate in all the things that God in His economy has planned and prepared for us.

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Footnotes from the Recovery Version of the Bible

“But by the **grace** of God I am what I am; and His grace unto me did not turn out to be in vain, but, on the contrary, I labored more abundantly than all of them, yet **not** I but the grace of God which is with me” (1 Cor. 15:10).

grace: Grace, mentioned three times in this verse, is the resurrected Christ becoming the life-giving Spirit (v. 45) to bring the processed Triune God in resurrection into us to be our life and life supply that we may live in resurrection. Thus, grace is the Triune God becoming life and everything to us...It is by this grace that Saul of Tarsus, the foremost of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15-16), became the foremost apostle, laboring more abundantly than all the apostles. His ministry and living by this grace are an undeniable testimony to Christ’s resurrection.

not: *Not I but the grace of God equals no longer...I but...Christ* in Gal. 2:20. The grace that motivated the apostle and operated in him was not some matter or some thing but a living person, the resurrected Christ, the embodiment of God the Father who became the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit, who dwelt in the apostle as his everything.