

When is Grace not Grace?

by Pastor George D. Cutler

Grace Gospel Ministry

Many of God's people do not fully comprehend what GRACE is, which results in the conveyance of diver's classifications in the utilization of its terminology. In this sense, numerous adjectives are employed preceding it in an attempt to invoke an array of definitions to its meaning. Hence there are a plethora of expressions referencing GRACE as: "pure grace," "unadulterated grace," "unmixed grace," "prevalent grace," "preeminent grace," "prevenient grace, etc. In spite of these continuants of qualifications erroneously being attached to it, the Grace of God is His unqualified and unconditional love for and to His elect. Whenever GRACE is preached or taught, it must not be mitigated by the foray of human intuitions, in that merit in no form, no matter how minute or infinitesimal it may seem; should ever be assessed in explicating its signification. In fact, no reference to GRACE in any manner should ever be encumbered with semblances of participation and involvement from mankind.

When mankind is viewed as completely extricated from the operation of GRACE, some will immediately reply: "oh, this is downright Antinomianism." This is the cry that was raised against Martin Luther when he preached "full free justification by grace through faith without the deeds of the law." Even more reflective of this is the cry that was raised against the Apostle Paul that he made void the law that he stated, "sin might abound that grace might super-abound." Now regardless of the opposition to zero limitations in its application, Grace without any qualifications attached to it whatsoever is absolutely scriptural. Unless the Gospel of Grace is univocally (having one meaning only) presented, it brings out thoughts that are "another gospel" than what Paul preached (II Corinthians 11:4; Galatians 1:6-7). The Gospel of Grace soberly reveals that all humans, including all of God's people not just some of them, have "Antinomian" or God-dishonoring natures, thus there is no adequate performance of the flesh," that is conducive to meritorious input.

Those who espouse "legal living" in any forum, have distorted conceptions of their abilities to live pleasing to God in the flesh. While abstinence from gross immoral acts, honesty and respectability is certainly within the boundary line of ones identification with Christ, such expressions of separation from the world's evil communications and their denying of self, do not come close to qualifying with the righteousness of God's standard. In this sense, these expressions only exhibit false "pietism" and other extremes of legal practices that only serve to mitigate ones understanding of their need for God's GRACE to stand acceptable before Him.

In response to the scriptural statement that it is through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ alone that one is brought into a living relationship with God, some will readily quote from the writings of the Apostle James: "Faith without works is dead" (James 2:26) and say "we must have works." This is reflective of their misunderstanding that the Gospel of Grace as revealed to the Apostle Paul; is void of all such conditions and ones gift of faith only coincides manifestation-wise in testimony to the Holy Spirit's workings in the identification of designated ones. Just a cursory inquiry about the works of men reveals that they have very distorted ideas of what constitutes perfected holiness. Their misconception of grace functions in this manner: "Do the very best you can by the help of grace and then wherever you fail, grace will step in and make up the difference."

Titus 2:11 explicitly states that it is exclusively the Grace of God that has accomplished salvation but the synergist's view of grace takes on this shape: "Oh yes, we believe in the precious blood of Christ and only faith can save but this is precisely the point that the Bible makes that you must

exercise your faith, which is the determinant factor as there is not now nor has there ever been an easy road to heaven." Here they purport that those who espouse unqualified grace propagate a "short cut to Heaven" in which one can live on good terms with the world and worldly men. They have mistaken notion of GRACE in that it does not even embrace living on the "righteous" terms of religious men or making oneself comfortable in the flesh in any manner. The idea is to live in the world but not be conformed to the world system (Romans 12:2; II Corinthians 1:12).

Grace does not engender the priority of acquiring a name, honor and riches nor endearing oneself to the comforts of this world but the grace of God teaches: "that having denied ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live sensibly and righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of the great God, even our Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:12). It was exclusively through the accommodations of the GRACE of God that salvation was granted to God's elect (Titus 2:11). Any antithetical persuasion from this cogitation proves that such proponent knows very little about what GRACE enthalls. "Unmerited" favor denotes "NO" merit, which denotes no input of righteousness by human works (active nor passive) from mankind but all impute from God through Jesus Christ!

The proponents of "qualified" grace would pose the question: "how far does it pursue its potential respondents and how far should God's earthly people pursue those who are recalcitrant to His expressions of graciousness?" Such inquiries induce more potent questions: i.e., is there a cutoff point to God's grace? Does GRACE have a temporal terminus or does it extend in its proper sense even into the extreme depths of deliverance from mankind's Total Depravity in spite of his idiosyncrasies and inhibitions? Further extended, such proponents pose this question: if Divine GRACE undergoes a cutoff point due to persistent human rejection of it during ones earthly existence, then should human graciousness toward the recalcitrant ever experience a similar cutoff point within this life? In other words those who espouse "limited" grace intimately interject these interrogatives: "practically speaking is there a time when Christians should stop "casting their pearls before swine" (Matthews 7:6) and is it ever proper protocol for people of grace to "shake off the dust from their feet" (Matthews 10:14) toward the ungracious in any final sense during this life?"

A cursory review of these inquiries reveals that they are reeking with the uxorious scents of Synergism and Pietism. Those who endorse such exclaim: "how far should "practical" grace extend to "un-responding" or "calloused" individuals who reject the proffer of God's salvation?" Thus in their attempt to be spiritual, they exhibit unscriptural and even secular notions of what GRACE really is. Note that neither of these character interjections are registers of GRACE, in that each in its own way defies the definition of no merit. GRACE reaches out to undeserving ones with gracious overtures but not on the basis of the standards and abilities of mankind.

When they are analyzed and compared; both Synergism and Pietism revolt against everything that GRACE exudes even if they accommodate some perceived functions of human graciousness. In this sense, one can inquire: (1) is it actually GRACE (or something less) being extended in these two characters? and (2) how far are the proper extents of GRACE in light of the fact that all humans are recalcitrant rebel? The true character of GRACE within itself knows neither means nor bounds in its quest to manifestly apprehend those who were eternally decreed by God as His elect. In this view, there are no relevant conditions or circumstances that can alleviate nor deny the design and purpose of designated ones having been placed in the Body of Christ before the creation of the world.

Of all the subjects in theological themes, GRACE is the most crucial of all the workings of God in the achievement of salvation for His elect. As it apprehends the forces of evil and renders favor to select ones, it does not grapple with sin but supersedes it, even though it expressly condemns the darkness of mankind's deeds that are inherent in the depraved nature itself. Grace exudes a life that eternally began within God's Decree, is generally manifested in time and will never end. The recipient of Grace will never die, as the essence of God's goodness is that it is irrevocable and testifies how its possessors are unmoved by humanly contrived graciousness or the lack of it. Grace transcends the legality of the curse and penalty imposed by the Law and also the stereotype of the scribal drudge that

is laced with avidity. Grace does not approve of its draftees, as it furnishes a low-key counterpoint to the Law itself in qualifying them. Yet over the long haul, this meek-and-mild certification proves to be the most annoying and irksome nemesis of Legalism.

God's GRACE is employed to accomplish the humanly viewed perfunctory task of audacity, for no matter what the requirements or demands of righteousness are, such is provided through the propitiation of Christ's eternal sacrifice applied to its recipients. Thus this one supreme grant more than compensates for and complies with all demands. In seeking to exasperate what merit engenders, the legalists have increasingly employed every conceivable psychologically and socially approved tactics in their attempts to conform Grace to the normalcy of human requirements. God's graciousness commands, entreats coaxes, inquires and in short, leaves no stone unturned in its operation of confirming its object to bestowal respectability. In this sense, it extends not only to things men perceive as unrighteous but even excels above every confrontation imaginable. Hence, it accords the benefit of assuming that its recipients are totally unrighteous and conducive to failure. Consequently, Grace itself is the sole provider of suitability as its gracious overtures are limitless in its application.

In eternity, GRACE sort and discovered designated ones that it was dispatched to deliver. All of its recipients have been permanently son-positioned in the Body of Christ. Even more, humanness is rebuffed from seeking to associate in concert with GRACE as a co-partner or co-operator in the establishment of its accomplishments. The one consummate appeal of graciousness is that it does not go where it is invited but where it is dispatched to and make its home only where God receives exclusive glory and praise.

All recipients of God's GRACE were gloriously rescued from the predicament of condemnation. This was accomplished through unimaginable overtures, as strict justice had demanded that such ones make no efforts at all because this would not only mitigate but terminate Grace's operation. So what are the recipients required to do? The answer is NOTHING! When God's repertoire of Grace is exercised, it evinces the fact that its recipient's efforts have all evacuated the premises. Rather than inflict legalistic measures upon its recipients to vacate the characteristics of depravity and envelop the righteous standard of God; Grace in effect surrenders to the unflinching and unrelenting statue of the merit and worth of Christ's blood to save. Based upon this point alone, justice dictates that the recipient's former predicament has experienced a complete release. But alas in this sense, the state of the new creation in Christ is completely devolved of condemnation from the old depraved nature. Hence, by no means is the former state held responsible for the removed enmity that no longer exists. In eternity, the transgression was carried off to extinction by Christ's propitiation and by His one act was dissolved despite all its old implications. In this light, nothing manifested in time can ever alter this gloriously redemptive blessing, in that this accomplishment is immutable.

Thus GRACE exudes the epitome of unyielding inflexibility in its quest of saving designed ones even though it is not loud, vociferous nor grossly contentious. GRACE offers no disputations, tirades, invectives, clenched fists or high-powered refutations but resilience, recalcitrant resignation and refusal to account due recompense of what its recipients truly deserve. GRACE defies traditionalism and the "divers" into the sea-depths of symbolism as it acknowledges the deeper, previously hidden significance of God's eternal workings in securing salvation. The culmination of grace's accomplishments exudes the unquestionable note of the broader theme of His eternal purpose of electing from humanity that which He foreordained to be undeservedly merged into His unequalled righteousness.

These operations therein are contours of the striking representation of spiritual truth; exuding measures of humility, which aligns itself with persistent adherence to God's graciousness. Here politeness, persuasiveness and advocacy all overrule the deficiency of depraved deaf ears, which is incapable of responding to the Divine demand of His righteousness. Without God's Sovereign Grace, which is void of any strings attached, none other could politely and pertinaciously rescue, as it is driven in postulating that which "compelled" that designated sinners were drawn into this glorious and eternal union in Him. In testimony to this, the verse was inspirationally penned: "Twas the same love

that spread the feast that sweetly forced us in; else we had still refused to taste, and perished in our sin."

The salvation of the elect is embedded in the resolute refusal of Divine Grace to manifestly duly assess what is deserved by the depraved nature but it is no less real and deeply entrenched. Indeed, a more realistic representative for providing the requirements of righteousness resides in the workings of God's graciousness. Here, two points are apropos: first, the imputation of Christ's righteousness to designated ones was and is the only adduce employable in the accomplishment of meeting the requirements thereof. This unmerited and unsolicited act is the appropriate reflector of God in His gracious overtures. God's demands of justice were fully accommodated by the gracious pleadings of the propitiation, which were even more unrelenting and yet unfettering in the alleviation of the stubborn captivity of the curse and penalty imposed upon mankind's sinfully depraved nature. Thus the release of sinful captives is exclusively owed to His eternally committed love through His kindness and graciousness of inflexibility in reserving to Himself those selected from creation to manifestly testify concerning His Grace, the manifold wisdom of God (Ephesians 3:10). Second, it was necessary that the proper extension of graciousness to the recalcitrant rebels of God was generously employed, in that it overpowered all efforts outside of it, as such is merely weak-willed works of the flesh.

The Gospel of Grace certifies God's determinant purpose as its only motive, as it assured alignment of His will and Decree. Even an Old Testament Prophecy Scripture corroboratively exudes echo of that greater commitment to God's elect, as it asks, "How can I give you up (Hosea 11:8)? From the inception of creation, humanity has exasperatingly proved to be inadequately suited to exert what most believers perceive as being righteous and consistent with the attributes of God's nature. In this light, the chief character of compliance necessitates exclusion of all human input or involvement, whether active or passive. Hence, righteousness was extrapolated and attached solely through the surety procedure of God's workings rather than the assumption that one could transfer such morality from the blotches of Total Depravity. Human involvement in salvation in any form is horrid though it may seem fascinating. No flesh is different from any other, in that its true character inevitably, manifestly is virtually bereft of any decency, courtesy or even polite feelings, as it is portrayed as morose, self-circumscribed, uncompassionate and inhumane. Thus, Grace must abound over the ills of the sinful nature, which is an arrogant, detestable operant and for all practical purposes a sociopath, i.e., to the point of being devoid of conscience. In short, all human attributes are totally devoid of the "undeserved kindness" of God's Divine GRACE.

The demonstrativeness of God's graciousness is considerably one-dimensional as a winsome, attractive and solid model of admirable character. This is the fortunate results, in that depraved humanity can't simply be categorized as one "good guy" and the other as the "bad guy." In the circles of Christendom that is too often the way the merit of salvation is accessed however the sinful character should never be construed as lovable but pathetic. Grace is always generous to its recipients, as it keeps saying that no matter how seriously such recalcitrant rebels, Grace possess the ability to critique favorably observed ones; not in the virtue of their own but in their son-position in Christ, which encapsulates the tension-point of defusing face-to-face confrontations that are enviably detrimental in relation to their acceptability to God. Hence Grace is described as both pretty and plain and in every occasion makes its objects worthy of God's approval.

Grace epitomizes the frequenter of the pathetic sick entrenched in some bleak garret, burning with fever and without food or help but despite the facts of horrid conditions, never treats such as dirt. Justifiably so, all depraved humanity is deserving of being the object of the despiser of unrighteousness (Romans 2:2-6). But Grace was extended to its objects in having taking in the extremely sick and doctoring on same to the end that such is well. On the other hand, the Law is absolutely adamant against this, in its multitude of protestations and unyielding in its demands and penalty for those who can't accommodate its stipulations. Aside from selective favor to some, condemnation of the unrighteous is a potential bombshell to all. Not only does Grace embrace its

recipients as its own but it kicks out condemnation through propitiation and subsequent imputation. In this sense, no amount of effusive spluttering of the sinful nature can prevent what has been deemed this gesture worthy of deliverance because there were nor are absolutely no strings attached.

The modeling of the Grace of God from its Heavenly operation preempted manifestation of the tragic story of the plight of mankind's impending suicide. In this light, Grace is truly amazing in that it was foreordained to claim its designated recipients in the sphere of eternity. Nothing else is capacitated to reconcile the nature of humans with the righteous nature of God. The manifestation of the brutal tragedy of sinful creation testifies to the epitome of Grace in lavishing unmerited favor upon those so exceedingly ungracious and disgraceful. Hence, mankind is something merely depicted as a stupendous fool but the elect were from eternity favored in the manifold wisdom of God.

The consideration that impounds the review of Grace from appraising the merits of its subjects is expressive of the characteristics of Divine favor. Despite the culpableness of its recipients, Grace's lovability is often portrayed in versions of compassion that exhibit no regard in the way of its object's moral firmness. At best, Grace envisions and showcases un-obliged "favor" in the virtuosity of God's "loyal love," which combines softness with solidity, mercy with steadfastness, leniency with loyalty and tenderness with toughness. Properties of Grace don't exude too little or too much of its recipient's virtues nor is it simply a doormat for such to wallow in the mire of depravity of being kicked around by the whims of the flesh.

The Apostle Paul, the premier exemplar of grace, insisted that the Philippians' governing magistrates come and escort him from prison after they had abused his civil rights as a Roman citizen (Acts 16:35-40). This is demonstrative of the fact that the concept of receiving grace or being gracious in the face of recalcitrance must not be confused with the formulization of one being disgraced. Also it must be comprehended that the accomplishments of Grace do not evince merely a facile pronouncement of it as a model of scriptural graciousness and compassion but the motivation by which it does what it does. Why was Grace willing to sacrifice and forgive such unlovable and undesirable ones? The answer is because, above all else, God is purposeful in His entire plan for His creatures in creation. He can forgive because He is self-motivated by the attributes that reside within Him to exhibit all His effusive expressions toward selected objects of His affection (Romans 5:6-10).

There could hardly be a more illustrative example of love than the capacity to justifiably overlook the shortcomings of those who fall face down constantly and conclusively possess the propensity of the depraved nature. In the actualization of God's Decree in eternity, all of mankind was pronounced dead and as such deemed creatures of pitiable behavior. But just because the elect has been graciously adulated through the imputation of God's righteousness, does not imply that in process of manifestation He allows such to get away with anything (Hebrew 12:8-14). God is the free Giver of *khah-rees* (grace) and *khahr-ees-mah* (giftedness). Here it is very important to recognize that none are capacitated or elevated beyond measure to the point of no moral accountability requirements (Romans 5:20-21; 6:1-23). These same scriptural applications should specifically serve as enlightenment with respect to all notions that "anything goes."

God's graciousness (in the form of His compassion) views His elect's recalcitrant decadence into the pigpen as being indicative of the humanly depraved nature. Contrariwise to the Law's function of conjoining its recipients by threatening, chasing or even pleading with the flesh to comply; by great contrast, Grace functions on the premise that its recipients lack the capability and suitability to conform to the standard of God's righteousness. In this sense, the approach of Grace to its constituents is "Just as I Am," as God's love is extended irrespective of the retreating elect. In spite of even the self-righteousness and selfishness of God's people, He has loved them from the beginning with Divine compassion that continues steadfastly.

Careful analyzation of even some Old Testament texts indicates that God's compassion is not dependant upon human response, e.g., "Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputes not iniquity and in whose spirit is no guile. When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the

day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah. I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah" (Psalms 32:2-5). Also, documentation of the Spirit's striving in Genesis 6:3 can be equated with the extension of Divine Grace; even though the general language of the Law avers that a definite cutoff ("not . . . forever") of that grace is envisioned as it also is in the Kingdom Gospel, wherein I Peter 3:20 represents basically this same idea.

But indeed in the Gospel of Grace, even in the very fact of death (Hebrews 9:27) and a biblical hell, there is never the call for a terminus point to Grace as extended in salvation (Hebrews 9:28). Unfortunately, there are those who would twist the Grace of God through mockery (Romans 5:20-21; 6:1-2) but the facts are, the Apostle Paul's Doctrinal teachings regarding lasciviousness are always made in reference to such activity being vehemently rebuffed, i.e., on at least three different occasions (II Corinthians 12:21; Galatians 5:19; Ephesians 4:19). There is great irony in the varied uninformed depictions of Grace as espousing the lives of God's people without godly virtue. This irony consists in how some definitively portray and paint their own character into the adoption of how they have perceived fashioning the possession of such a generous blessing. While Grace is portrayed by some as taciturn to the point of moroseness, it is scripturally described as; by far the most . . . balanced and tolerant portrait of love available.

The more one views the character of Grace, the more one will extol the wonders of its function as an antidote to the self-justification of disgraced and ungracious creatures. Though some may be theologically inclined to deliberately play on words to appraise their selfish motives, it doesn't mitigate the fact that we are "justified by His Grace" (Titus 3:7). Justifying Grace doesn't cause us to be ungracious or in disgrace but rather "Grace" is forever "instructing us that having denied ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live sensibly and righteously and godly in the present age" (Titus 2:12).

The empathetic character of Grace inevitably concludes that one is justified on the basis of bestowing its attributable charismarather than **khah-rees** (grace) which transforms such one from ungraciousness and disgracefulness. Grace says in effect: "Forgive them even though they absolutely do not deserve to be pardoned; on the exclusive basis of the merit that to them has been imputed the righteousness of Jesus Christ." Spiritual reality testifies: "NO, in the act of owning His elect, Christ did not endorse their sinful nature but in fact repudiated the works of the flesh." In this sense, Grace does not justify sin, although it justifies the elect. Hence the status of the just is certified by God as it is corroborated in the parable of the Publican and Pharisee in Luke 18:9-14 wherein one should never seek to justify ones sin or (supposed) righteousness at all. The God "who justifies the ungodly" (Romans 4:5), does not justify such in their wickedness but in spite of inherent depravity, justified because of the faithfulness of the only just One (Romans 5:1). Grace is not a form of divine injustice but justice has been exacted (Romans 3:26). Grace is not simply blind but selectively meted out to the elect.

It is in this sense that favor toward selected ones appears to the uninformed to be less than healthy and less than an accurate mirror of God's grace. But if "grace . . . came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17), so did truth. Also, if Jesus is the perfect reflector of God's character (John 1:18) then the record of Christ's life provides a documentation of God's grace. Yet Jesus is anything but a candidate to be viewed as tolerant of the sinful acts of the depraved nature. In prophesy and the Kingdom Gospel, the same One who "was led (meekly) as a lamb to the slaughter" (Isaiah 53:7), defied all perception of leniency with His self-made whip in the temple precincts (John 2:15). Also the same Jesus who "as a sheep before its shearers is silent" (Isaiah 53:7), opened His mouth in Matthew 23 to excoriate the Scribes and Pharisees with words that cut to the very core of condemning the flawed perception of human righteousness.

Thus we must conclude from Jesus, our Paradigm, that: (1) God's Grace, i.e., His graciousness is required for on every occasion of interfacing in the affairs of mankind and (2) Grace exudes scripter discipline in its enactment; overriding the rougher guises of hypocritical legalism in the Law. At any

rate, Grace's treatment of its recipients (who exhibit the combination of both the calloused condition of the Pharisee with the fleshly appetites of the Publican) is all encompassing unconditional forgiveness in light of its Embodiment.

Conclusion

Grace does not toil with the doctrines of religious legalism but it only goes about its mission of apprehending and sustaining its recipients (God's elect), who are possessors of the imputed righteousness of Christ. Grace does not endorse the personal opinions or private assessments of religious proponents nor does it seek to condemn the recalcitrant, as it overrules the inadequacies and failures of depraved human nature. In this sense, it does not exude the syndrome of holding the unrighteous accountable, in effect to "withhold pearls from swine" (Matthew 7:6) nor to "shake dust off one's feet" (Luke 10:10-11). Therein is no campaign for condemnatory renunciation or repudiation but nor does it function as an apologetic for extremism or liberalism; as Grace is not "all-tolerant" but "all-temperate. Practitioners of God's grace then, do not exhibit stridency (Matthew 12:18-20) nor placate belligerence, brutishness or brusqueness; but gentleness (Ephesians 4:32); as this is what exudes genuine graciousness.

In Titus 2:10, Paul's states, "that they may adorn the teaching of God our Savior in all things." Here the Greek word ***kos•mo•seen*** rendered "adorn," literally means "to put in order," hence the embellishment of Grace also includes the consonant need to "exhort and rebuke with all authority" (Titus 2:15). The Grace of God, above all its meritorious functions, demonstrates His love for the elect, hence there is nothing incongruous in its policy of admonishing, as Paul instructs Timothy, "preach the word, stand upon when convenient, inconvenient, reprove, rebuke, exhort, in all patience and teaching (II Timothy 4:2). Those of us who are benefactors of God's Grace must be always loving and never prone to condemn or cut off relationships with adamant non-believers or the seemingly apostate but to stand firm in the operation of its delicacy and discretionary pleadings. Indeed, without the documentation of Scriptural testimony, some unquestionably might have branded the pre-manifested Saul (Paul) as beyond the pale of grace.

The entire question surrounding the functions and implications of Grace can be best concluded with an anecdote attributable to a powerfully gentle giant whose sole purpose is to bestow kindness upon undeserving designated ones but yet possesses the capacity to set in order all that opposes it characterization of such. Accordingly, Grace does not embroider borderline grouping or labeling based on human appraisers of righteousness, as such does not come close to exhibiting the standard of God's, and the display of such can only serve to document **when Grace is not Grace!**