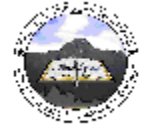




On The Frontier



“For The Glory of God and the furtherance of the Gospel”

Vol XI No.6

November/December 2003

Amazed By Grace

Among the manifold attributes of God’s goodness, the number of which are incalculable, one in particular continues to call me back to concrete perspective. And that is grace. The concept of which both allures and evades most men. It seems we mortals continually press toward improvement of self via self. Thus successfully repudiating the grace of God.

Some things, like salvation, can only be had by God’s grace. Since works are void in this regard, it matters little which are pursued. You cannot have it both ways, either you thankfully accept the grace of God or foolishly embrace the works of man.

Some employ their “own” works while others willingly accept and implement the works of “others.” Be that as it may, work is work and grace is grace. As water is to oil they are immiscible. That is, they do not (and never will) mix. We see this most clearly in the following passage:

Ephesians 2:1-10

And you *hath he quickened*, who were dead in trespasses and sins;

Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:

Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the

desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.

But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us,

Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)

And hath raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus:

That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of *his* grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God:

Not of works, lest any man should boast.

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

That we are saved by grace and not works is incontrovertible! One need not be a Bible scholar to see this as the above passage is abundantly explicit and needs nothing in the way of commentary.

Verse 5: . . . (by grace ye are saved;)

We are saved by grace!

Verse 7: . . . the exceeding riches of *his* grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

His grace transcends richness itself! It is vastly beyond being what one would deem “opulent.”

Verse 8: For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not [*ou*] of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God:

Saved by grace, not of ourselves, because salvation is the GIFT of God!

Verse 9: Not [*ou*] of works, lest [*hina me*] any man should boast.

The structure of verses 8 and 9 is extraordinarily strong and comprehensive in the Greek. For instance; the word *ou* used in verse 8 expresses the absolute negative. This negative proclaims full, direct and absolute negativity. There are no conditions either expressed or implied by the use of this negative that would change its meaning. In other words, there is nothing that we can do in and of ourselves to obtain our salvation. Furthermore, it is not faith that we are saved by. Faith is the passage, if you will, through which God’s saving grace proceeds.

It’s this simple: I receive information concerning salvation from God’s revealed Word. I have confidence and trust in the information and the source (God and His Word) is quite credible to me, so much so that I (by my freedom of will) accept that which God by His grace makes available – namely SALVATION. Since God will never overstep my freedom to choose, I must

accept what He makes available. This is not work on my part and certainly not dependent upon my goodness. It is the simplicity of saying yes to God rather than no. Some do say no as that is their prerogative. But in either case salvation remains contingent upon grace and not the individual or their faith. If salvation were available by faith alone (since I can have faith) grace would be dispensable.

The emphasis God has placed on this truth is astonishing. In verse 9 the word *not* is again translated from the Greek *ou* confirming absolute negativity, i.e., absolutely not. God has communicated this in a magnificent way! Not even the backward need error here. Additionally, what is not readily seen in the English is elucidated in the Greek. Here the single English word "lest" has been translated from two Greek words – *hina me*. In keeping with the contextual concept these would be better if translated as "in order that no one boast."

The Greek negative *me* used here is to be understood subjectively as a supposition which prohibits and forbids. This completely covers the gamut of this theme. There is absolutely nothing relevant to salvation that we do and that includes every single one of us. There is not even one man (other than the man Christ Jesus) who can do or will do anything at any time to secure salvation for himself. **NOT ANYONE! NOT, NOW, NOT EVER!**

The ASV gives it this way:

... not of works, that no man should glory.

I reiterate: **ABSOLUTELY NOT OF WORKS!**

The mere supposition that any man could conceivably do anything is both forbidden and rejected!

NO MAN SHOULD GLORY!

Having said the above it is most important that we recognize God's purpose in this for us. That is found, in part, in verse 10:

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

He has prepared good works for us to walk in, but these are only available to us after we have received His grace. The grace is our "wherewithal." It's important that we understand this because there are those who will have us to believe that we must do good works in order to receive His grace. Honestly, prior to receiving His grace we are incapable as we are ill-equipped. We must not forget whose workmanship is being recognized here. Clearly, the workman is God and not us.

Galatians 2:16-21

Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, *is* therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid.

For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor.

For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God.

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness *come* by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.

Romans 3:19-27

Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.

Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin.

But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets;

Even the righteousness of God *which is* by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference:

For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;

Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:

Whom God hath set forth *to be* a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;

To declare, *I say*, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith.

Romans 11:6

And if by grace, then *is it* no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if *it be* of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.

I have faith in God and His Word, don't you? I have confidence and trust in what His Word tells me. What He says was, was. What He says is, is. What He says will be, will be. Accordingly, I will do (literally act on His Word where required) what His Word says. My faith doesn't save me. But it is the way in which His saving grace becomes mine. When my heart says yes to God, I will believe His Word. I accept by faith the simplicity of His plan for salvation. It is mine by grace, His grace. Not by my works.

When it comes to salvation His grace and my works will forever be incapable of blending or achieving homogeneity.

The first mention of grace in God's exquisite Word relates to man's dire need.

Genesis 6:5-8

And GOD saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every imagination of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually.

And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart.

And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them.

But Noah found grace [*chen*] in the eyes of the LORD.

Ironically the name Noah means "rest." Lamech, Noah's father, named Noah with the following in mind:

Genesis 5:29

And he called his name Noah, saying, This *same* shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the LORD hath cursed.

Noah's life was certainly pivotal for mankind, more so than Lamech could have imagined. Continuance for man more so than rest was his portion. But far more significant than that was God's loving favor towards him. God's grace in Noah's life shows us how that God accepted Noah. Grace is a sign of God's acceptance. Why would we ever want to rescind grace?

In Hebrew the word *chen* = grace connotes a free willingness to bequeath good on him who is destitute of it, either in a way of benevolence or compassion. This word excludes all idea of merit in the object of free favor. The primary recipient in this case being Noah.

Perhaps man's need was never greater than it was in Noah's time. As bad as our world seems, it cannot yet be said that every imagination of the thoughts of men's hearts are continually evil. Yet they were in Noah's day. Nevertheless, there was grace to be found. This is amazing! It's also noteworthy that after, not before, Noah found grace he was given work. That work came in the form of

building the Ark. We are given work too and that after we "find" grace. But it's not an Ark we're building, it's the Body of Christ. This we do by sharing the wonderful Word of God. We tell others of the grace of God, that God may be glorified and they may be saved. We glory in His grace not our works.

I Timothy 2:1-4

I exhort therefore, that, first of all, **supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks,** be made for all men;

For kings, and *for* all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.

For this *is* good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour;

Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.

God wills that all men be saved! What ever could prompt this?

John 3:16,17

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

It was nothing less than His great love! I wouldn't have done it, would you?

Ezekiel 18:23, 32

Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord GOD: *and* not that he should return from his ways, and live?

For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord GOD: wherefore turn *yourselves*, and live ye.

God finds no joy in the death of anyone at anytime. His great desire is that all be saved.

Titus 2:11

For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,

Again we see clearly that God's grace is what brings mankind salvation. His great love made this available and that through the unspeakable gift of His Son.

I John 2:1,2

My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:

And he is the propitiation [atoning sacrifice and payment in full] for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for *the sins of* the whole world.

Imagine that! Jesus Christ is the payment in full for the sins of the whole world!!! And why? Because of God's great love. His love is what makes available not only His grace but also His mercy. Actually, you cannot have one without the other. What a magnificent God we have! His heart so yearned to relieve our misery that He withheld what judgement we truly had coming and gave us instead His undeserved favor. Thinking how He gifted us with His only begotten Son's life, leaves one breathless! That this is of God is altogether undeniable. This could never be man's doing, man could not nor would not even conceive of such a thing. Mankind is first to condemn,

first to crucify and first to demand payment. Men scream for judgement! Men demand works! Give the offender their just deserts. Grace from men? Hardly! Grace, mercy and love originate with God. His concepts, His nature. The nature of Adam opposes this and cries for punishment. Make them work, make them sweat, make them bleed. This is the anthem of mankind.

Ephesians 2:4-9

But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us,

Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)

And hath raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus:

That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in *his* kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God:

Not of works, lest any man should boast.

But boast we must, so we demand work and reject grace. How swiftly we forget! How quickly we can become as the religious Judeans of Paul's time:

Acts 15:1-11

And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, *and said*, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.

When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they

determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.

And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren.

And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them.

But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command *them* to keep the law of Moses.

And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter.

And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men *and* brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe.

And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as *he did* unto us;

And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.

Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?

But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.

Since I have no wish to “tempt God,” I’ll continue to concur with the grace of God as pertains to salvation. How about you?

The following passage comprehensively addresses the proper perspective and action:

Titus 3:1-7

Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work,

To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, *but* gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men.

For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, *and* hating one another.

But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared,

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;

Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour;

That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Frankly speaking, if God did not smile upon us with His grace we would have no chance of ever being redeemed. We couldn’t afford it.

Psalms 49:6-9

They that trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches;

None of *them* can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him:

(For the redemption of their soul *is* precious, and it ceaseth for ever:)

That he should still live for ever, *and* not see corruption.

Man may think that he has the “means” but it’s grace and grace alone that makes redemption possible. None of us could ever muster payment, individually or collectively. Were it not for God’s grace redemption would be forever unobtainable.

Verses 10-15:

For he seeth *that* wise men die, likewise the fool and the brutish person perish, and leave their wealth to others.

Their inward thought *is, that* their houses *shall continue* for ever, *and* their dwelling places to all generations; they call *their* lands after their own names.

Nevertheless man *being* in honour abideth not: he is like the beasts *that* perish.

This their way is their folly: yet their posterity approve their sayings. Selah.

Like sheep they are laid in the grave; death shall feed on them; and the upright shall have dominion over them in the morning; and their beauty shall consume in the grave from their dwelling.

But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave: for he shall receive me. Selah.

God will redeem us from the power of the grave. Praise God! What a wonderful reality. Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but by grace alone. Amazing!

AMAZING GRACE

by John Newton

Amazing grace! (how sweet the sound)
That sav'd a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears reliev'd;
How precious did that grace appear,
The hour I first believ'd!

Thro' many dangers, toils and snares,
I have already come; 'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home.

The Lord has promis'd good to me,
His word my hope secures;
He will my shield and portion be,
As long as life endures.

Yes, when this flesh and heart shall fail,
And mortal life shall cease;
I shall possess, within the veil,
A life of joy and peace.

The earth shall soon dissolve like snow,
The sun forbear to shine;
But God, who call'd me here below,
Will be forever mine.

The above is one of the most popular and revered hymns of all time. And no wonder considering the content. The author, an admitted miscreant, was lost but then found. Saved by amazing grace. John Newton was a military deserter who became the abused servant of a slave trader. He was rescued from this only to become a slaver himself. But his life took a turn when at sea a violent storm was thrust upon him. It was then that he asked the

Lord God Almighty for help. He begged God for mercy and did so receive it. For the rest of his life he observed the anniversary of May 10, 1748 as the day of his conversion, a day of humiliation in which he subjected his life and safe keeping into the Hand that guides the universe. Ultimately he became a minister and conducted many Church Services and weekly prayer meetings. It was for these that he set the goal of writing one new hymn per week. As a result we and so many others are moved in a marvelous way upon every hearing of his most popular – Amazing Grace. Much as been written and discussed regarding this great hymn and its content. It has become the mainstay for memorials and celebrations alike. But nothing can make it so great as the five lettered English word grace and the concept it pronounces. Were the depth of God's grace truly understood new libraries would need to be built to contain the new literature that would almost surely be written. This can never be said of man's works nor the meager attempts man makes at justifying himself. We may work and expect a wage as that may be due us. But God's gift to us is forever free. Salvation doesn't cost us anything because it cost God everything. His Son, His perfect Son! Amazing!!!

John 1:14 -17

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.

For the law was given by Moses, *but* grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

As wonderful as the Mosaic Law was, those under it were unable to live up to its precepts. Thanks to God's grace we establish it.

Romans 5:12-21

Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:

(For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law.

Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come.

But not as the offence, so also *is* the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, *which is* by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many.

And not as *it was* by one that sinned, *so is* the gift: for the judgment *was* by one to condemnation, but the free gift *is* of many offences unto justification.

For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.)

Therefore as by the offence of one *judgment came* upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one *the free gift came* upon all men unto justification of life.

For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.

Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound:

That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.

To help our feeble minds grasp this truth even more firmly, His Word describes the contrast:

Romans 6:23

For the wages of sin *is* death; but the gift of God *is* eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

We consistently acknowledge a wage as remuneration for work. If only we recognized the gift of God with similar regularity. Wages are earned, gifts are freely given. Certainly your paycheck is deserved and a statement of your meritorious weekly exploits. At the end of a 40 hour work week your reward is your wage. Grace is a different story. It's a gift and as such undeserved. No greater example of lack of worth can be given than that of Adam's race. Grace is and will always be, God's favor to undeserving man. After all these years I am as amazed as ever that God would save a wretch like me. No one knows better than I how unworthy I was (and at times still am) of His matchless grace. I pray God that I never forget this.

Revelation 22:21

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

God's grace is the final word on salvation!
