

Empowered by Grace

The Gospel Truth – Part VII

Romans 1:7b

Introduction

The following story has been told in a variety of forms, and is, without a doubt, apocryphal. If you have heard it, you have most likely never forgotten it; if you have not heard it, it is time you did. The analogy of the story to our own salvation is powerful and unforgettable.

There once was a very wealthy man who owned a vast estate and had the necessary household staff, from butlers to gardeners, to keep it in beautiful condition. He was a widower with only one son, who had left years earlier to fight in the king's army. To console himself, this wealthy widower had his son's portrait hung over the mantle and often sat there by the fire in the evenings and simply remembered. Every time visitors came to his estate, he would introduce them to that portrait, before showing any of his rare paintings by masters, such as Rembrandt. When news came that his son had died in battle, it broke his heart. A few months after the terrible news of his son's death, the old man died.

The man's attorney announced that, since there was no heir to the estate, an auction would take place. All of the paintings, property, and furniture would be auctioned. The day of the auction arrived and hundreds of influential and wealthy people gathered. They were excited about having an opportunity to purchase one of the old man's rare paintings for themselves, as well as a piece of hand-carved furniture, one of the exquisite silver table settings, or a hand-woven imported rug. The crowd was instructed to be seated, while the auctioneer stood on the landing of a long, sweeping stairway.

Next to the auctioneer, on the landing, was a painting. It was the rather simple portrait of the man's son, painted by an unknown artist, that had once graced the mantle above the fireplace. The auctioneer pounded his gavel and said, "We will start the auction with bidding on this portrait. Who will make a bid for the painting?"

There was silence. Then a voice in the back of the room called out, "We want to see the rare paintings. Skip this one."

The auctioneer persisted, however, "Will someone bid for this painting? Who will start the bidding at one hundred dollars, two hundred dollars, or more?"

Another voice shouted angrily, "Nobody wants that common thing, we came to buy valuable things. Now, let's get on with it."

The auctioneer, however, continued still, saying, "The portrait of the son . . . the son. Who will bid for the son?"

The crowd was growing angrier and more restless by the moment. Then, a voice came from the very back of the room, "Excuse me."

It was the voice of the family gardener, who had worked on the estate for nearly twenty five years. He had entered unnoticed, on his way to another room, and had stopped to listen and watch. He was a middle-aged man, with sons of his own, and had grieved with his master by the fireplace over the death of his master's only son. The gardener could not imagine the portrait belittled, or worse, discarded. It had meant so much to his old employer and friend.

So, he said, "I can bid for it, but I don't have any money to offer."

A woman said, "Let him have it for free. None of us want it anyway."

The auctioneer said, "Certainly, if no one bids for it, then your desire alone will be payment enough."

A man yelled out, "Just give it to him and let's move on."

The crowd was becoming angry and impatient. They had traveled from miles away for the worthy, expensive investments for their own estates and collections. The auctioneer pounded the gavel, "Going once, twice, gone to the gardener."

A man sitting near the first step of that grand stairway shouted at the auctioneer, "Now, let's get on with the collection."

The auctioneer laid down his gavel and said, "I'm sorry, the auction is closed."

The crowd cried out in disbelief, "Over? What do you mean?"

The auctioneer stepped away from the podium, as the estate's attorney stepped forward. He quieted the angry crowd and said, "We conducted this auction, knowing there was a secret stipulation in the will. We were not allowed, however, to reveal that stipulation until this moment. Our instructions were that only the painting of the son would be auctioned. Whoever bought that painting would inherit the entire estate, including all of its furnishings. The deceased owner wanted his entire estate to go to the person who cared enough about his son to want his portrait. The stipulation in the will had read, 'Whoever chooses the son gets everything.'"

In our study, thus far, of Romans, chapter 1, I have expounded on the gospel truth as introduced by the apostle Paul, the bondservant of Jesus Christ. The gospel, Paul declared, in verse 1, was originated and initiated by God. The gospel truth was also something that had been announced, centuries earlier, by the prophets in the Old Testament scriptures. The central character of the gospel, Paul continued to tell us, in verse 3, was the Son of David, the rightful physical heir to the throne, and also, in verse 4, the Son of God, who revealed His divine power and nature by His resurrection from the dead. Paul's passion to deliver this gospel was revealed in verse 5, where he defined true faith in the gospel as something that will reveal itself in and through the life of the true believer.

The true believer is called to belong to Christ, he is beloved of God, and he has the place of a saint,

which further reveals itself in his living like a saint. These are they whom God has chosen and who have chosen God's Son as their Lord and Savior.

From heaven's perspective God has chosen us; from our limited, finite perspective, we have chosen Him. And, the one who chooses the Son, gets everything. The one who wants the Son above everything else, even though he has nothing to offer to Him, in the end, inherits everything.

The world would say, "Look, let's get on with the really important stuff of life. Let's live more; let's make more; let's play more; let's build more; let's travel more; let's have more . . . Who wants the Son?"

Have they not heard what Mark tells us, in chapter 8, verse 36?

For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?"

In the end, that man loses everything!

However, there are those among us, ". . . not many mighty, not many noble . . .", not many well-connected, as I Corinthians, chapter 1, verse 26, says, but largely the butlers and the gardeners of this world, who have slipped into the presence of the divine Auctioneer and whispered, "I have nothing to offer but my desire, I will take the Son."

To that one, Paul announces the stunning news, paraphrased from Romans, chapter 1, verse 7, "Look at what you also get – grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

That is another way of saying, "You inherit everything that matters in life – grace and peace."

Let us take a closer look at verse 7.

to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Greek construction of the last phrase of verse 7 is ordered in a way which reveals equality between these two persons. It could be read in this way, "God, who is our Father, and God, who is Jehovah, or the Lord, Jesus Christ."

You have God the Father and God Jehovah side by side. They are distinct in personality, yet equal in essence. They are not two gods, but two persons of the one triune God.

This opening sentence of the apostle Paul's letter to the Romans, happens to be approximately ninety five words, depending on the translation, and is the longest opening sentence of any book in the Bible. In fact, you begin to wonder if Paul had something

against periods. Did he ever take a breath? In this sentence, Paul informs those who have chosen the person of the Son of God, who is fully God and fully man and is equal to God the Father and God the Spirit, that they have inherited everything of eternal value; they have become the possessors of grace and peace.

Today we will look at the first word related to the inheritance of the true believer who has accepted the gospel truth. Paul writes,

... *Grace to you* ...

The Meaning of Grace

Now, just what is this grace?

“For many people,” one author wrote, “grace is just something you say before a meal. ‘Let’s say grace.’ For others, grace is a word they use to define the bearing of some dignitary, or the skill and fluid movements of an ice skater on the ice. ‘What grace,’ they would say.”

Certainly, the word has a broad spectrum of meaning. In the Old and New Testaments, the meaning fundamentally refers to “kindness to the undeserving”.

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word is “chen” or “chesed,” which are often translated, “kindness or grace”. In the New Testament, the primary word translated “grace,” is “charis”.

Several author definitions of grace include:

- Dr. Snaith, who defined it as,
... kindness shown by a superior to an inferior when there is no obligation on the part of the superior to show it; it means to condescend in favor, to bend or stoop.
- John MacArthur, who defined it as,
The free and benevolent influence of a holy God operating sovereignly in the lives of undeserving sinners.
- Donald Barnhouse, who wrote,
Love that goes upward is worship; love that goes outward is affection; love that stoops is grace.

The most developed illustration of “grace that stoops” is probably the one in the Old Testament book of II Samuel. David has taken the throne, finally, as Saul and his son Jonathan have been killed in a battle against the Philistines. You may remember that Jonathan was the dear friend of David.

David is now King and he establishes his reign in Israel. In II Samuel, chapter 9, he surprises everyone by asking, in verse 1,

... Is there yet anyone left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness [grace] for Jonathan’s sake?

Finally, they locate an old servant of Saul’s, named Ziba, and David asks him, in verse 3,

Is there not yet anyone of the house of Saul to whom I may show the kindness [grace, “chesed”] of God? And Ziba said, “There is still a son of Jonathan who is crippled in both feet.”

Now, you may remember that when the news came of Saul’s and Jonathan’s deaths, the nurse of Jonathan’s son ran, carrying him, to hide him. She assumed David would do what other kings normally did, which was to kill any descendant of the previous king who might threaten their reign. However, as the nurse fled with little five-year-old Mephibosheth, she accidentally dropped him, which caused him to be crippled in both feet.

We do not know if she dropped him down a stairway, or accidentally dropped him from a wagon, or what occurred. Perhaps his legs were both broken and did not mend properly while in hiding. They were perhaps, too afraid to summon a physician. We do not know the details, we only know that this crippled young man now lived in Lo-Debar, which literally means, “barren, desolate wasteland”.

Continuing in verse 5,

Then King David sent for Mephibosheth and brought him to the palace.

Verse 6 informs us that when Mephibosheth came to David, he immediately fell down before him, expecting the worst to happen. But, in verse 7,

David said to him, “Do not fear, for I will surely show kindness [grace] to you for the sake of your father Jonathan, . . . and you shall eat at my table regularly.”

What an incredible demonstration of grace. What better illustration could we have of what we, as children of God, have received from God on behalf of Christ.

One author, so wonderfully captured the analogies between the grace of David to Mephibosheth and the grace of God toward us, that all I want to do is read them to you. He wrote:

- When disaster struck, fear came, and Mephibosheth suffered a fall that crippled

him for the rest of his life. Similarly, when sin came, humanity suffered a fall, which has left us permanently crippled.

- Out of love for his friend Jonathan, David sought out anyone to whom he might extend his grace. So also, God the Father, because of His love for His Son, seeks those to whom He might extend His grace.
- The crippled man was destitute and undeserving. All he could do was accept the king's favor. So also, we, as sinners, are undeserving and without hope. In no way are we worthy of our King's favor. All we can do is humbly accept His grace.
- The king took the crippled Mephibosheth from a barren wasteland and seated him at the royal banquet table in the palace. God, our Father, has rescued us from our own wasteland of sin and has seated us in the place of spiritual nourishment and intimacy.
- Mephibosheth's limp was a constant reminder of David's grace. So also, our feebleness keeps us from ever forgetting that where sin abounds, grace abounds that much more.
- When Mephibosheth sat at the king's table, he was treated with the same respect and given the same privileges as David's own sons. And when we, one day, attend the great wedding feast of the Lamb, the same will be true for us as well. We will sit with prophets and priests, apostles and evangelists, pastors and missionaries. We will dine with everyone from the apostle Peter to Corrie ten Boom. And we will be there with them because that same tablecloth of grace covers all of our feet.¹

One anonymous author created an acrostic to define grace. Grace is:

- G – God's
- R – Riches
- A – At
- C – Christ's
- E – Expense

That nearly says it all. And it is another way of saying, "When you have the Son, you inherit everything."

Paul wrote in Romans, chapter 1, verse 7,

... *Grace to you* ...

I believe he was referring to the overall benefits of God's kindness granted to them, as beloved sons and daughters of God.

The Model of Grace

Different Kinds of Grace

Now, there are actually several different kinds of grace that we need to distinguish in our study.

Common grace

1. Theologians refer to common grace as that grace of God which affects all of mankind.

God's common grace restrains the total expression of sin and imposes moral constraint on people's behavior. Common grace enforces a sense of right and wrong through conscience and civil government. Common grace allows unbelievers the ability to appreciate and enjoy beauty and goodness.

Matthew, chapter 5, verse 45, says that,

... [God] causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

That is common grace.

Special or saving grace

2. Then there is, secondly, special or saving grace.

This grace saves, sanctifies, and brings the soul to glory. In fact, the term "grace," in the New Testament, is often used as a synonym for the entire process of salvation.

Paul was so caught up in the gracious redemptive work of Christ that he used the word "grace" to refer to the entire saving process. He wrote in Ephesians, chapter 2, verse 8,

For by grace you have been saved through faith ...

In I Corinthians, chapter 1, verse 4, Paul wrote,

I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus

Special, saving grace is effectual in the life of the believer only. It is a word that holds within it, the sum and substance of Christ's redemptive work.

Cheap grace

3. Finally, there is cheap grace.

This is a term coined by a pastor, named Dietrich Bonhoeffer, many years ago. He was a Lutheran pastor in Germany, who was hanged by SS guards in 1945. His writings were made available prior to his death. Much of Bonhoeffer's mystical teaching is correctly rejected by the evangelical church, but Bonhoeffer made a wonderful contribution by warning the church of the pull of secularization and worldliness.

He wrote,

Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, communion without confession, baptism without church discipline. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross. In such a church the world finds a cheap covering for its sins; no contrition is required, still less any real desire to be delivered from sin. Let the Christian live like the rest of the world, let him model himself on the world's standards in every sphere of life, and not aspire to live a different life under grace from his old life under sin.

Another author adds,

Cheap grace is a supernatural "Get Out of Jail FREE" ticket – a no strings-attached, open-ended package of amnesty, indulgence, forbearance, leniency, immunity, approval, tolerance and self-awarded privilege divorced from any moral demands.

This is the pseudo-Christianity of which Peter warned, when he said, in I Peter, chapter 2, verse 16,

. . . do not use your freedom as a covering for evil . . .

In other words they talk about their freedom in Christ, and then excuse their sin; they talk about grace, but grace has become the façade they hide behind as they continue to live in sin and compromise. As we will see in a moment, grace was given so that you could pursue holiness and purity, not so that you could have fire insurance from hell and then, live as if you were belonged there.

This kind of grace is not true saving grace, it is a cheap counterfeit, by which many, I fear, are deceived.

What Grace Does In and Through the Believer's Life

How do you know if you have the genuine item? What does biblical grace in the life of a believer look like? How does grace act? How does grace live and shine through the life of a true believer? Let me give you six ways.

Grace enables a believer to suffer with contentment

1. Grace enables a true believer to suffer with contentment.

Paul wrote to the Corinthian believers, in II Corinthians, chapter 12, verses 7 through 10,

Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me – to keep me from exalting myself! Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

In other words, the believer who is allowing the grace of God to permeate and envelope them will ultimately content themselves with the sovereignty of God and His design for them, even though it may mean suffering and difficulty.

It is God's grace that empowers the suffering believer to remain submissive and contented before their heavenly Father. And if you have, as I have many times, walked out of a hospital room, or from a meeting with a believer whom I thought I would need to encourage, but they instead, have unknowingly encouraged me and convicted me by their demeanor of grace and trust in their Lord, then you have seen grace at work in the life of a suffering saint.

Grace enables a believer to speak with clarity

2. Secondly, grace not only empowers a believer to suffer with contentment, but it also enables the believer to speak with clarity.

Paul wrote to the Colossians, in chapter 4, verses 5 and 6,

Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person.

What is it in the life of the believer that enables him to speak as he should to the outsider (the unbeliever)? It is grace.

In the same way you would pass the salt, so you should also pass the grace, as it were, and sprinkle it on your lips. Tactfulness is a work of grace. Someone said that tact is, "making someone feel at home, when you really wished they were".

Gracious tact and spiritual verbal diplomacy are proofs of grace at work in your life.

Grace enables a believer to stand with conviction

3. Third, grace enables a believer to stand with conviction.

Look at Romans, chapter 5, verses 1 and 2.

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand . . .

Another verse that refers to our doctrinal standing is in Hebrews, chapter 13, verse 9.

Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings; for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace . . .

We not only have doctrinal standing by grace but, Paul wrote in Titus, chapter 2, verses 11 and 12,

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us . . .

(notice, the grace of God instructs us),

. . . to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age

Many today, would say that grace enables a believer to live in sin, "Don't worry about that man . . . grace!"

The Bible actually reveals that true grace in the life of the genuine believer enables that man or woman not to live in sin, but to live without sin. So, grace enables the believer to stand with both moral and theological conviction.

Grace enables a believer to surrender with compliance

4. Fourthly, grace enables a believer to surrender with compliance.

James wrote, in chapter 4, verse 6,

. . . God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

Peter wrote, in I Peter, chapter 5, verses 5b through 6,

. . . all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time

Surrendering to the will and plan of God, with contrition and humility, is the result of the in-working of grace.

Total surrender is a forgotten concept in Christianity today. I like this little story that illustrates the concept so well.

A chicken and a pig both lived on the same farm. One day the farmer walked into the barnyard and told all the animals that the family wanted ham and eggs for breakfast. Were there any volunteers? The chicken nudged the pig and said, "C'mon, let's volunteer."

The pig declined saying, "That's easy for you to suggest. From you they want a little contribution. From me they want total commitment."

The truth is, commitment to Christ is more than a little contribution; it is a sacrificial surrender of everything to His will.

Grace enables a believer to sacrifice with celebration

5. Grace also enables a believer to sacrifice with celebration.

One of the things that a true believer does is invest his treasure in the work of God. Paul actually referred to the act of giving as an act of grace. And, proof that giving was done in the spirit of grace was the fact that joy accompanied the act.

Paul wrote, in II Corinthians, chapter 9, verses 7 and 8,

Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to

you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed

Giving is the result of God's grace at work in your life. Thanksgiving and joy accompany the act of true giving.

Paul wrote, in verse 7, “. . . God loves a cheerful giver.”

The word “cheerful” is the Greek word “hilaros,” from which we get our word, “hilarious”. This could literally, be read, “God loves a hilarious giver.”

Imagine that. The offering time in the local church should be the most hilarious moment in the service.

It does mean that in the church service, when the offering is received, if you are not thrilled about giving something to God, whatever you do, do not give. The church will make it another week; it will not fold, but realize that your lack of desire to give is the revelation that grace is not at work in your heart. And for those of you who desire to give, that desire which moves you to give something away, rather than hold on to it, is the work of God's amazing, life-altering grace.

So, grace enables the true believer to suffer with contentment; to speak with clarity; to stand with conviction; to surrender with compliance; and to sacrifice with celebration. Then, finally, there is one more result of grace.

Grace enables a believer to serve with confidence

6. Grace enables a believer to serve with confidence.

Do you think of the great apostle Paul as one who had it all together? Do you think that he was surely the one person who knew that he had the skills and background and ability to serve God?

Listen as he reveals to his friends in Corinth how he really feels. Look at I Corinthians, chapter 15, verses 8 through 10.

and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also. For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.

Do you ever feel you are not fit for the role you are in? Do you think you do not have what it takes? Guess what? You do not. But, the grace of God equips you, enables you, and empowers you to fulfill whatever role or task you find yourself in today.

So, stop running from the task. The truth is, *it is* too big for you. You *cannot* raise those children; you *cannot* accomplish that post of service; you *will never* stand for Christ on that campus; you *do not* know how to respond with clarity; you *will not* be able to suffer with the right attitude; you *will never* be able to keep those convictions, or sacrifice time and money for Christ. *You cannot do it.*

By the grace of God, however, you not only can, you *will*. How? As Philippians, chapter 4, verse 13, says,

I can do all things through [Christ] who strengthens me.

Remember, you chose Jesus Christ as your Savior, so everything about life that really matters belongs to you.

Conclusion

“. . . Grace to you . . .”, Paul wrote centuries ago to them, and to us. You have chosen the Son, and when you chose the Son, you received grace.

It was a hot afternoon in Dallas, Texas, on May 1951. A class of graduating students were listening to Dallas Seminary's founder and president, Lewis Sperry Chafer, deliver what would be his last lecture on the subject of grace. He had been teaching on the subject of grace for nearly fifty years. I remember personally sitting under men who had sat at the feet of Chafer. I heard them talk of the way Dr. Chafer would lecture on the subject of grace, then wheel himself out of the classroom, by then confined to his wheelchair, and leave behind a classroom of men weeping in awe of grace. Well, on this day, he pulled out his handkerchief and wiped the perspiration from his face. It would be his last lecture on his favorite subject – the grace of God. He closed his eyes as they filled with tears and his last words to them, and to the rest of the world, were, “Gentlemen, for half my life I have been teaching the grace of God, but I am just beginning to understand it. And gentlemen, it is magnificent . . . it is magnificent.”ⁱⁱ

My friends, when you choose the Son, you inherit grace . . . and when you have this magnificent grace of God, you have everything.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 11/12/2000 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ Charles Swindoll, Romans, p. 34.

ⁱⁱ R. Kent Hughes, 1001 Great Stories (Tyndale Publishers), p. 192.