

The Love of God Manifested in Grace

by Richard H. Talbot

Introduction

God's love, as manifested in grace, is excellently described for us by the Holy Spirit in 1 John 3:1 - 'Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.' Grace is something more than bestowing favour on the undeserving: it is bringing a rebel sinner into the family of God and bestowing on him the title and privileges of sonship. It is placing him in the position of younger brother to the Lord Jesus Christ in His humanity. Such a sinner becomes joint-heir with Him, legally perfect through His righteousness, and comely in the eyes of God. No greater honour could be bestowed on him than this. He is in Christ a child of glory.

Grace is the foundation of glory, and glory is the top stone of grace. Grace is God's heart unveiled, God's love in action. If a man has grace, he also has God; for God dwells in him in the Person of the Holy Spirit, who sheds the love of God abroad in his heart.

The Provision of Grace

Grace is provided for sinners by love, and the chief characteristic of love is to spend itself on the objects of its choice. In providing grace, God puts into operation His own dictum: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' (Acts 20:35).

(1) The Provision is Eternal.

According to Ephesians 1:4, it was made 'before the foundation of the world.' It is not the result of an afterthought or an oversight. It is not something God has done to make up what is defective in our love or obedience. Rather, it is part of a scheme by which God will show His love to the whole universe, according to an eternal purpose which He made in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Eph 3:10-11).

(2) The Provision is Sovereign.

This means that the provision of grace for sinners proceeded from no-one but God, who simply willed to love them. He was not prompted to love them by anything in them, but simply by His own love for them. 'The Lord did not set His love upon you, nor choose you,' He tells His people, 'because you were more in number than any people . . . but because the Lord loved you.' (Deut 7:7-8). God loves because He loves. The only motive He has in loving sinners is His own love. His provision, therefore, is sovereign because it proceeds from Himself alone, and is not conferred as a reward for any merit in those He loves.

(3) The Provision is Absolute.

By this we mean that no addition can be made to it. When God bestows grace, He bestows it completely. In Christ, the sinner is complete. Nothing is left to chance, nothing needs to be added to what He gives.

a. It is absolute in quality.

Whoever God loves, He grips with resistless force. It is the grip of an almighty conqueror whose only desire is to show favour to the conquered. He conquers by virtue of the sheer attractive beauty of His love. Grace is God's banqueting house, with His banner of love streaming over its guests. It is the great supper provided for His enemies. It is the expenditure of His eternal treasury on their behalf.

b. It is absolute in quantity.

All the needs of all the people of God are met in this store-house of love. God Himself told the apostle Paul, 'My grace is sufficient for thee.' (2 Cor 12:9). In turn, Paul told his readers, 'My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.' (Phil 4:19).

c. It is absolute in its object.

When God gives grace, He has an object in view. That object is His own glory, that no flesh should glory in His presence. This is why it is bestowed on the most unlikely people. It is not given to the holy angels, who never rebel against God's will, but it is lavished on those who detest His laws and break His commandments. It lays hold on the spiritually dead and the morally bankrupt. Indeed, it is shown to those whose sinful character only repels God in His holiness.

d. It is absolute in its permanence.

God says to those He loves, 'I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee.' (Jer 31:3). And it is written of Christ, 'Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end.' (John 13:1). Just as God is eternal, so His provision in grace is eternal. The life of a true believer is bound up with the life of Christ his Saviour, being hid with Him in God. (Col 3:3). It therefore lasts for ever.

The Substance of the Provision

First, the love of God is shown in what is called providence. This is the fore-knowing and beneficent care of God for His people. It includes His government, control, guidance and direction of them and His provision of all that they need. This providence is always through grace. At no time do they earn or deserve what they receive. All their blessings are freely bestowed, as a matter of favour.

Second, God's love provides salvation, and all that this means. One aspect of it is deliverance from the guilt, dominion and ultimately the very presence of sin. Another aspect is receiving the inheritance of pardon, acceptance, holiness, comfort, assurance and eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. This too is all of grace. If it were merited, it would not be grace, but a reward. But since it is of grace, it must be received as the fruit of the obedience and sufferings of Jesus Christ. If we could work for it, salvation would be our wages. But since Christ has worked for it, it comes to us as a gift. 'The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.' (Rom 6:23). In short, this salvation is nothing less than Christ Himself, along with all the blessings He has earned for sinners.

The Freeness of the Provision

There are many places in the Bible where we may read that God's grace is free. We will mention only three of them.

After foretelling the sufferings of Christ for sinners, the prophet Isaiah wonderfully declares the freeness of the provision of God's grace: 'Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat; yea come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.' (Isa 55:1). Can anything be clearer than this? It is a call to the penniless, the hungry and the thirsty. They are called to come and take and enjoy the provision God has made, and all free of charge. And what is provided? That which is good, life for the soul, sure mercy and abundant pardon. (verses 3 and 7). To buy without money clearly implies that some-one else has already paid for these blessings.

In that world-renowned text, John 3:16, we have the freeness of this priceless treasure proclaimed again: 'God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.'

Thirdly, in the last message we have received from heaven before Christ comes again we read, 'The Spirit and the Bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.' (Rev 22:17).

How the Provision becomes Ours

The gracious provision of salvation made by God to sinners does not become ours automatically. It must be appropriated by faith and then professed. The Word of God tells us, 'If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.' (Rom 10:9-10). Here again, both the faith itself and our confession of Christ are the fruit of God's free grace.

(1) Grace meets our deepest need.

Now because God has provided such a salvation, of such a quality and at such great cost, there must be an expressed need. That need is mentioned by the Holy Spirit in God's Word in many places. It is to be delivered from sin. No sinner with the guilt of sin lying on him can come into the presence of God, and no sin can ever enter heaven. (Rev 21:27). Yet 'all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.' (Rom 3:23). Also, 'death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.' (Rom 5:12). Eternal death stares all men in the face. The jaws of hell are wide open to receive every sinner. Therefore sin has to be dealt with.

It is the glory of God's grace that He has dealt with sin. By punishing His dearly-beloved Son Jesus Christ in place of sinners, God has honoured His law, satisfied His justice and opened the flood-gates of mercy for His love to flow out to sinners. Our need has already been met in the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. For 'He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities.' (Isa 53:5).

(2) This grace springs from God's electing love.

When no-one could save himself or any of his fellow men, God said, 'I have found a Ransom.' This ransom was provided from all eternity.

Firstly, in eternity grace gave many sinners to the Lord Jesus Christ. In a wonderful prayer made to His Father He said, 'I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which Thou hast given Me; for they are Thine. And all Thine are Mine, and Mine are Thine; and I am glorified in them.' (John 17:9-10).

Secondly, election was 'in Christ.' This fact is emphasised by the apostle Paul, 'He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world.' This is the eternal union of the Saviour and the saint. Paul also states the aim of this union, 'that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.' (Eph 1:4).

Thirdly, electing love brought about a special creation from God. After telling us that 'by grace ye are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast,' Paul goes on to say, 'For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.' (Eph 2:8-10). Again, Paul writes, 'If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature, or creation.' (2 Cor 5:17). This miracle of grace is wrought in every believer by the Holy Spirit. He is born from above. He has passed from death to life. He is taken out of the kingdom of Satan and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son. And one day he will sing with all others who are bought by the precious blood of Christ, 'Unto Him that loved us, and

washed us from our sins in His own blood ... to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.' (Rev 1:5-6).

The apostle Paul, who was once a great sinner, experienced this love of God as it is manifested in grace. He found it so amazing that he exclaimed, 'O the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!' (Rom 11:33).

Also, after listing all the privileges he enjoyed as a learned and moral Jew, he cried out, 'But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection.' (Phil 3:7-10).

Our desire and prayer for all who read this booklet is that they would cry to God, in the name of Christ, for a saving knowledge of His love manifested in grace.

(Adapted)