**GRACE (#1)**

***A Many Splendored Thing***

I’ve been studying every scripture I can on God’s grace. I’ve been reading a number of books on it. I desperately seek to understand this subject from a balanced point of view (i.e. a scriptural viewpoint). Books I’m studying include Chad Sychtysz’ *The Gospel of Grace*, Perry Hall’s *Grace Does That*? Aaron Erhardt’s *Grace*, Wilson Adams’ *God’s Amazing Grace*, Edwin Crozier and Dave Roberts’ *Grace: God’s Power To Overcome Sin*. These are all quality works written by my fellow gospel preachers that I highly recommend. There are other very good works I’ve studied from other authors that have also challenged my thinking and helped me focus on this breath-taking topic.

In our religious world the subject of God’s grace has faced wild swings of the pendulum. They have ranged from virtually no one being saved to almost anyone who breaths making it to heaven. There has to be a more balanced understanding than that. This week I want us to explore Grace so that we can find that “*peace that surpasses all understanding*” in order to quiet our troubled minds (Phil. 4:7).

Aaron Erhardt, in his excellent little book, opens with this story:

Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson went camping together. During the night Holmes nudged his friend awake and said, “Watson, look up and tell me what you see.” His trustworthy sidekick replied, “I can see millions of stars.” Holmes then asked, “And what does that tell you?” Thinking it was one of his test the famous detective always used to get to the facts of a case Watson said, “Astronomically, it means there are millions of galaxies with perhaps billions of planets. Horologically, I calculate that the time is about three AM. Astrologically, I notice that Saturn is in Leo. Theologically, I can see that God is infinite and we are insignificant. Meteorologically, I see tomorrow will be a beautiful day. So, what does it tell you Mr. Holmes?” Sherlock exclaimed, “Watson, you fool. Someone has stolen our tent!”

Overlooking the obvious, Dr. Watson didn’t see the forest for the trees. Neither do we concerning God’s grace. God wants me in heaven with Him far more than I even want to be there (and that’s saying something!). How can anyone, with just a smidgeon of spirituality, read Ephesians 2:4-10 and not feel God pulling us like gravity upward to heaven? Read this Slowly. Carefully. Prayerfully. Longingly.

**4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.**

This passage forever erases the age-old Renaissance paintings of God by Raphael, Michaelangelo, and others that picture Him as a white-bearded, hair-flowing, muscle-bound, stern-faced Dictator. Do an Internet search of that art by European masters in the 14th through 16th centuries and you will see what I mean. It is little wonder that by the time Jonathan Edwards preached his earth-shaking sermon “Sinners In The Hands Of An Angry God,” tens of thousands rushed to the mourner’s bench to be saved from God’s wrath. They indeed saw God as “angry” and “full of wrath.”

Let me hasten to add that the scriptures, both Old and New Testament, clearly teach us to “*fear God and keep His commandments*” (Eccl. 12:13). The very purpose of true Biblical repentance demands a sense of fear and awe of a holy and just God. Every one of the 3,000 on Pentecost who cried out, “*What must we do*?” was shaking from head to foot at the prospect of facing God after hearing they had killed His Son (Ac 2:36-37). When told to “*repent and be baptized*” – they rightly did so with fear and trembling (2:38-40), but also did so “*gladly*” (2:41). God is not to be trifled with!

But look again at our text of Ephesians 2:4-10. How would Raphael or Michaelangelo paint God now when they see Him in the following light:
1) Rich in *mercy* 2) Great *love* with which He loved us 3) Made us *alive* by grace
4) *Raised* us to *sit* in the heavenly places 5) Shows the exceeding riches of His grace in *kindness* 6) Grace is the *gift* of God (not of my boastful works)

How can anyone read such descriptions of God and conclude anything but that God has taken every possible step to secure our home in heaven? To put it bluntly, there is nothing more He can do to guarantee our eternal security.

Let me repeat, please look carefully at this word Grace. Our New Testament is called “*the gospel of grace*” (Ac 20:24); “*the word of His grace*” (Ac 14:3; 20:32); and “*the grace of God in truth*” (Col. 1:5-6). But I especially like the wording of Peter when he writes: “*As each one has received* ***a gift*** (*CHARISMA*), *minister it to one another, as good stewards of the* ***manifold grace*** (*POIKILOS CHARIS*) *of God*.”

When I was growing up I remember an Andy Williams album called *Love Songs*. The #1 hit from that 1967 album was *Love Is A Many Splendored Thing*. But the Bible says GRACE is a many splendored thing. God’s grace is *manifold* (“*great variety*” – NLT; “*varied*” – ESV; “*various forms*” – NIV). It is splendored (glorious, majestic) in a thousand ways. The idea is that it comes in all shapes, sizes and colors.

I have loved J. I. Packer’s description of grace and pray you will now treasure it too:

"I am graven on the palms of His hands. I am never out of His mind. All my knowledge of Him depends on His sustained initiative in knowing me. I know Him, because He first knew me, and continues to know me. He knows me as a friend, One who loves me; and there is no moment when His eye is off me, or His attention distracted for me, and no moment, therefore, when His care falters."

Grace is just another word for God’s love for me. Rest in peace. – Rick