

THE NATURE OF GRACE

Grace is the undeserved, unearned, unmerited, FAVOR of God. Grace is all God's doing, and therefore, all the glory belongs to Him and Him alone. "For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen." (Rom. 11:36). The true gospel is, above all, "the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24; Gal. 1:6-9). Grace and works are mutually exclusive (Rom. 11:6). But grace works in harmony with faith. Romans 4:16 says, "Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace". Grace must be received (2 Cor. 6:1-2). Grace does not negate the reality of human response or human responsibility. There is mystery tension regarding God's sovereignty and human responsibility in salvation, but at the end of the day ALL the GLORY goes to God ALONE because salvation is totally of the LORD (Jonah 2:9).

Saved by the grace of Christ's crossWORK

God's GRACE stands against all the religions of the world, including the varied forms of compromised Christianity.

The GOSPEL OF GOD'S GRACE is the GOSPEL OF THE CROSS! Grace refers to "God's unmerited favor". GRACE truly is **G**od's **R**iches **A**t **C**hrist's **E**xpense. It was on the CROSS that Jesus paid the full sin debt of the world (cf. Jn. 1:29, 1 Pt. 2:24). Jesus ALONE died on the cross. He alone paid the penalty of sin. In His dying breath, He said, "**It is finished!**" (Jn. 19:30). Nothing can be added to it!!! It is done! "Jesus paid it all – all to Him we owe!" I call GRACE "the great exchange". Jesus got all our sin, and we get all His righteousness (cf. 2 Cor. 5:21). That is a GRACE deal!

In contrast to GRACE are the world's religions. Islam demands a system of good deeds, and for assurance, it demands *jihad* (dying as a martyr in "holy war"). Hinduism believes in *karma* which determines what form you will assume in the next life. Shintoism (nature or ancestor worship) demands that one appease the spirits. Buddhism seeks to overcome desire through meditation techniques and thus attain *nirvana* where one is free from all desire. And on and on.

Common to all these religions is an objective based on self-effort and self-achievement. They are all the antithesis of biblical GRACE!

However, even much of professing Christendom perverts the gospel of grace. One common way this is done is through *sacramentalism*. A majority of those who call themselves "Christian" hold to some form of this error that

contradicts the true gospel of GRACE. This error says that sacraments (e.g., baptism) are the means of receiving saving grace.

When I got out of Bible College and started doing some deep reading on my own, I was shocked to learn that **Martin Luther** did not really hold to “faith alone in Christ alone” in the same sense as I did. Yes, on the one hand, he said he did, but his theology was full of double talk, as I discovered was typical of the mainline Reformers on the issue of sacraments.

“Hence it is well described as a divine, blessed, fruitful, and gracious water, for through the Word Baptism receives the power to become the “washing of regeneration,” as St. Paul calls it in Titus 3:5. ... Thus faith clings to the water and believes it to be Baptism in which there is sheer salvation and life ...”-***The Large Catechism*** of Martin Luther, translated by Robert Fischer – p. 84

“Luther’s concept of baptism did not differ markedly from the Roman Catholic view; he retained much of the Roman ceremony connected with the rite. Luther taught that baptism is necessary to salvation and, in fact, produces regeneration in the person.” -***Paul Enns in the Moody Handbook of Theology***, p. 453

Q. 92. What is a sacrament? A sacrament is a holy ordinance instituted by Christ; wherein, by sensible signs, **Christ**, and the **benefits of the new covenant**, are represented, sealed, and **applied** to believers. (emphasis mine) – **Westminster Shorter Catechism**

In 2 Corinthians 5:21, Paul summarized the gospel of grace: “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” He then went on to plead with the reader “not to receive the grace of God in vain.” (6:1).

But how does one receive this grace? In 1 Corinthians 1:17, Paul says that “Christ did **not** send me to baptize, **but** to preach the gospel”. He then says that the “**message of the cross**” is the power of God to those who are being saved and that “it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached [THE CROSS] to save those who **believe**.” (1 Cor. 1:18, 21 – emphasis mine).

The CROSS is synonymous with the GOSPEL OF GRACE (2 Cor. 8:9; Gal. 1:6-9; 2:21). Saving faith is in the **FINISHED WORK** of Christ alone and not in any sacrament! The cross is the “means of grace” by which we are

saved (Gal. 2:20-21). The gospel of God's grace is that "Christ died for our sins...and that He rose again" (cf. 1 Cor. 15:3-4). Saving faith believes it! (Rom. 1:16)

"My theology now is found in four little words: 'Jesus died for me.' I don't say this is all I would preach if I were to be raised up again, but it is more than enough for me to die upon." – **Charles Spurgeon**