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A CAREFUL DEFINITION OF THE GRACE OF GOD

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS
NUMBER 15
EPHESIANS 2:5-6

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EPHESIANS 2:5-6 "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:"

"By grace ye are saved" is the last phrase of verse 5 and is one of the most important statements in the Bible. God designed a perfect plan in eternity past and he wants to share that perfect plan with us. God wants to share perfect happiness with all of us. He wants us under his perfect plan, and that plan is GRACE. So let us attempt to understand this word "grace" by looking at the doctrine of grace.

THE DOCTRINE OF GRACE

1. The definition.

Grace is all that God is free to do for man on the basis of the cross. Please notice that it is God who is doing it and God is the subject of the action.

Grace is the work of God on behalf of man. Therefore, since grace is the work of God on behalf of man, grace is the title of God's plan for man, so we call it "Operation Grace".

Now if instead of operating on grace we operate on some superficial system like emotion or pseudo-spirituality, then we will never really understand the meaning of grace.

God's plan for man is divided into three phases---

Phase 1--salvation.

Phase 2--The believer in time.

Phase 3--The believer in eternity.

Now we live by grace in all three phases of God's plan. We enter God's plan by salvation, and this is grace. Then during our lifetime as Christians we live by grace. Then when we die, we die by grace.

2. A Concept Of Grace.

Grace depends on who and what God is. Grace depends on the character of God, and never on who and what man is. Grace never depends on us or on any human quality. (Once I heard a speaker who said "It all depends on me", and then he went on at great length to show how that if we ever accomplish anything really worthwhile, it had to depend on our efforts. Nothing can be farther from the truth.) In grace it never depends on us. God can get along without any of us at any time. Remember, we are all here today by the grace of God. Grace never depends on human character, but on God's character and God's provision.

3. The Real Issue In Grace.

Here is the real conflict. We call it grace versus legalism. In grace God does the doing and man simply receives in a non-meritorious way the results of the work of God. Legalism, which is the Devil's system, is man doing the work with the idea that God is supposed to receive the credit. On this system God is supposed to bless man on the basis of what he has done. Under grace God is glorified and under legalism man is glorified. This is the great conflict. The greatest issue in the human race is grace

versus legalism, or grace versus religion. Remember our definition of religion--Religion is man by man's effort seeking to gain the approbation of God. In this sense Christianity is not a religion, for Christianity is man's redemption wrought out by Christ on the cross and appropriated by man by faith. The greatest enemy to grace is religion, and not morality or some anti-social activity or reform. Religion completely disorients one to the grace of God.

4. How Grace Is Related To Sanctification.

Now sanctification means "set apart unto God". Now the greatest thing God can do for any person is to make that person exactly like his Son. He accomplishes this in three categories.

- a. Positional sanctification. When we are saved we are positionally equal to Christ. That is the meaning of Ephesians 2:6.
- b. Experiential sanctification. Through the filling of the Holy Spirit we produce divine good and in this way we become imitators of God. This is sanctification as it works out in our experience.
- c. Ultimate sanctification. This will not come to us until we die and at which time we lose our old sin nature and we receive a resurrection body minus all human good. In this perfect state we will live with God forever and forever. Remember, our resurrection body will be exactly like Christ's.

5. Every Believer Has Tasted The Grace Of God At Least Once.

At the point of salvation we taste the grace of God.

I PETER 2:3 "If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious." Now we may associate many silly things with salvation, things like emotion or tears or raising our hands or walking down an aisle, or some other overt activity on our part. But what we do has no part in salvation. Christ does it all in salvation and we simply receive the result of what he did for us on the cross. Our receiving what he did is a non-meritorious act on our part and all the credit goes to him. There is no merit in anything we do in salvation. No matter how confused we were about some of these things at the time of our salvation, nothing we did at the point of salvation had any part in the saving process.

Now God can't cry out and say "Everybody, look this way. I love you!" and the reason he can't do this is because of his righteousness and justice. God's character is involved in salvation and the perfection of his character is to be considered. But sovereignty found a way to save us and still not violate the righteousness and justice of God. Now remember, when you believed in Jesus Christ you tasted grace, and you passed the point of propitiation and therefore God is free to love you on the basis of the cross. We do not have freedom to love, but God does. And once you taste grace, you have it forever.

6. Even Though You Tasted Grace Once, You May Not Be Living On It Now.

God's grace means he loves us, and grace means he loves us with maximum love, but we can't love him back unless we are oriented to grace.

ISAIAH 30:18-19 "And therefore will the Lord wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the Lord is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for him. For the people shall dwell in Zion at Jerusalem: thou shalt weep no more: he will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry; when he shall hear it, he will answer thee."

In the Hebrew this passage says that God is just sitting there anxious to give us his grace, just patting his foot waiting on us to get ready to receive his grace. He has maximum love and blessings to give us but so often we make it impossible for God.

7. Disorientation To Grace Is The Believer's Greatest Occupational Hazard.
HEBREWS 12:15 "Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled;"
GALATIANS 5:4 "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace."

8. The Principle of Grace in Salvation, Phase 1
EPHESIANS 2:5 "Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)"
PSALMS 103:8-12 "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us."
ROMANS 3:23-24 "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:"
 And Romans 4:4 says that the harder you work for salvation the further you are removed from it.
ROMANS 5:20 "Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound:"

9. Look At Grace In Time, Phase 2.
 - a. Prayer
HEBREWS 4:16 "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."
 Prayer is directed to the throne of grace.
 - b. Suffering.
2 CORINTHIANS 12:9-10 "And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong."
 - c. Releasing Power Through Grace.
2 TIMOTHY 2:1 "Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus."
 - d. Grace Is Involved In Growth.
2 PETER 3:18 "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever."
 - e. Grace Is Involved In Stability.
1 PETER 5:12 "By Silvanus, a faithful brother unto you, as I suppose, I have written briefly, exhorting, and testifying that this is the true grace of God wherein ye stand."

- f. Grace Is Involved In Our Production Of Divine Good.
I CORINTHIANS 15:10 "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me."
EPHESIANS 2:10 "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."

10. The Implications of Grace.

- a. God is perfect so his plan is perfect.
- b. A perfect plan can only come from a perfect God.
- c. If a man can do anything meritorious in the plan of God, then that plan is no more perfect, for man isn't perfect.
- d. A plan is no stronger than its weakest link, and that's why grace excludes human merit.
- e. It is impossible for a believer to get out of the sphere of grace. Even when you are carnal you are still in the sphere of grace. He will bless you in grace and discipline you in grace.

11. There Are Four Areas Of Pride That Exclude And Reject Grace.

- a. The pride of believers who reject eternal security. Just imagine a man believing that he can commit a sin that is too big for the plan of God!
- b. The pride of a believer who succumbs to the pressures of adversity. This man thinks his suffering and his problems are greater than the grace of God.
- c. The pride of pseudo-spirituality. This man thinks his emotionalism and his activity is more important than the filling of the Holy Spirit. He puts his emotions, his little taboos, his speaking in tongues of greater value than the filling of the Holy Spirit.
- d. The pride of the emotional believer. He thinks his feelings or experiences or ecstasies are greater than the grace of God. This is the pride of emotionalism.

Now if we fall into any of these categories we are disoriented to the grace of God.

"By grace" we are saved. Here are two verbs used together and both are in the perfect tense. "Ye are" is the perfect, active, indicative of the word "eimi" and means a permanent concept. Saved is a perfect, passive, participle of "sozo". So this means that we are saved at the point of our faith in Christ, and we are kept in salvation forever. The passive voice here means you receive salvation as a gift, and the participle modifies this little verb "eimi" and means an absolute status quo. Something that happens in the past and goes on forever. The basis for such an event is grace and you can't earn it or work for it but it comes to you by faith. The object of faith has the merit.

EPHESIANS 2:6 "And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:" Here we see the result of grace and this is union with Christ. Here we are higher than angels and this is what makes the Devil really gnash his teeth.

"Raised us up" is from "sun egeiro". And when we believe on him we are immediately positionally higher than angels. Now we are physically inferior to angels, but positionally higher and this means a permanent relationship. It is a permanent guarantee of a permanent contract. We are loved by a perfect God with a perfect love forever. In our next study we will see how we are oriented to this relationship.