

Grace Upon Grace

The Proper Use of Grace

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Continuing the series of sermons on grace, we began to see in last week's sermon that the apostles took an ordinary Greek word, *charis*—and that word has been translated into English as grace—but they turned it into a word of very profound theological and spiritual significance.

The word all by itself, as it would be used in secular Greek, is "gratifying in manner," or we might say, "that which causes delight." It is the causing of it that gives the word its distinctive usage. The emphasis of the word is on the causes. It has the delight that we receive. The apostles used this word to indicate unearned or unmerited favor. It always has the idea of something completely undeserved, something that we could never have achieved by ourselves.

For example, I gave you that example out of John 1:14, that God came to earth to live and to die, and that is not something which humanity could manipulate or deserve because we earned it. It was something that He freely did. He gave of Himself. Men did not have this in mind, that God would come here and demand that this occur because we are so good and we need to be saved. God, on His own, decided that He would use this means to introduce Himself into the flow of life on earth and provide man with a savior.

In addition to this, the word also has the idea of beauty contained within it. Its opposite, its antonym, in the Greek is *erga*, which is translated into the English "work." Now "work" or *erga* carries the connotation of something deserved because it has been earned by conduct or activity.

So you have these two opposites, these two contrasts. Grace on the one side, something that is given and provides delight, favor that is unearned. On the other side, we have *erga*—work—something that is earned. It is merited because of things that we have done.

In addition to that, in that context there in John 1, we were introduced to the concept of grace for grace, or grace upon grace, or, in more modern English—paraphrasing it—grace to meet every need. In other words, grace piled on top of grace. Like there is one grace given, then another, then another and another. This grace is given for this purpose. This grace is given for that purpose. The third one is given for this other purpose. The fourth one is given for this other purpose. *Every single one* of them, unearned and unmerited, but all coming from the same Source. Grace upon grace. Grace to meet every need.

It is this that we are going to be looking into more thoroughly so we can see that the grace of God does not just involve the forgiveness of sin. That's not the only thing that He has given us that is unearned and unmerited. But we are going to see that this thing reaches into every aspect of the salvation process and everything, and I mean *everything*, is given. All we do is respond to the gift. That is it. We respond to the gift.

Grace denotes God's benevolence. It is the giving of Himself in some way to bring about our salvation. We can really limit its application in the Bible if we think of it only as the unearned pardon of sin. It is much, much more.

We are going to go to Acts 20 and begin there. If you're familiar with this chapter, you know that this is where Paul gave his farewell address to the Ephesian elders. It is the chapter in which Paul said, as our Savior said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." It is so interesting that that phrase appears right after the word *grace*. We will see this in verse 32.

Acts 20:32 So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

Acts 20:24 But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

That verse introduces the addition of the word grace in verse 32, and then that section is more or less concluded by verse 35 where he said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

The "word of grace" in this context is most specifically the whole gospel. Notice especially that he says (in his reference to it to modify what he says to help us to understand what he means) that he is committing us to the word of his grace which is able **to build us up**. It is something that is able to edify. That's what edify means—to build us up.

It is something that **matures** us, if we just change the context a little bit. You think of building in terms of something building a muscle. We think of building in terms of erecting a structure. We think of maturity, though, which is a building of personality, building of character, a growth from childhood and all of its weaknesses to something that is mature. So the word of grace is able to mature us. It builds us in that way. Another way of putting it would be, "The word of grace enables us to go on to perfection."

You see what is beginning to open up here is something very beautiful. Grace does not end when God forgives us. The grace of God continues to add to what was originally given, because if He stopped giving things with the forgiveness of sin, that would be the end of growth, as we are going to begin to see. It would stop right there. What we are beginning to see is that forgiveness is only the beginning portion of a process and that God keeps giving us grace to enable us to mature; to enable us to grow in the grace and knowledge; to enable us to grow to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. We would never get there unless God continued to pour out His grace to you and me.

Grace is shown by the apostle Paul to be something that is dynamic and active. Remember Jesus said, "The words that I speak unto [the word of grace] they are spirit and *they are power*." That is what we are talking about here.

What is the gospel? It is words. That is all it is. It is words. It is good news, but it is a word of power. It is a word that confers a blessing that is unique. It is a word that enable us to mature spiritually. Words (any words) have the

power to build or to destroy. They have the power to encourage or discourage. Words can either be true or they can be lies. Words can inspire or they can sadden and depress. It all depends on how they are used, the attitude in which they are used, and how they are arranged.

The gospel is an arrangement of true words that fill us with purpose for living and shows us how that purpose can be obtained. It comes completely as a gift. We are favored. It brings delight and salvation—an arrangement of words given in a loving attitude by a loving God.

Turn to I Corinthians 2 to another area that we are quite familiar with. I want to have us look at this in the context of this word grace, that we have received. Here we have the information about the spirit in man and the Holy Spirit, as they are compared and contrasted with one another.

I Corinthians 2:6-10 However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him." But God has *revealed* them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.

Is not that plain? What we have—he is talking about the gospel here—is a revelation. Now this—the subject of verse 10, that God has revealed—has to be tied to the word mystery, to the word wisdom.

But let us consider mystery in verse 7. Mystery in English does not mean exactly the same thing as mystery in Greek does. Mystery in English means a puzzle that is difficult to solve. But in Greek, it means a secret that is impossible to penetrate. So, the word of God, His purpose and plan, is a mystery. It is a secret that is *impossible* to penetrate. He is saying that man would *never* find out what it is, but God gave it to us. He revealed it to us.

What we have in this way is in no way earned. What we have, we have because *it pleased God* to give it to us. He has withheld it from others, but He has given it to you and me. God is in no way beholden to us as if He owed us something. He does not owe us anything. We could dig in His word our entire lifetime and we would never come to what He freely gave to us for His purposes, for His own reasons.

Brilliant men have done this through the centuries. They have dug into God's word, like Adam Clark. I understand that it took him forty years to produce that commentary. It really is, considering the man was unconverted, a magnificent work, done with all sincerity and dedication, yet at the end of it he did not know what God was doing and what God is still doing. A brilliant man, a brilliant work, and yet he came out the other end not understanding the purpose God gave to you without you ever earning it. It is very likely that many of you never cracked the pages of a Bible before God began to open your mind. Some have, some have not. But it came to you in that way.

Now Paul gives an analogy in verse 11 that is kind of interesting.

I Corinthians 2:11 For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.

What he is saying is that there are feelings in each and every one of us that are so personal and private and intimate that nobody knows them except the person himself. And nobody can know these feelings unless the person himself decides to reveal them. Nobody can know these feelings unless the person decides to give them.

What he is saying here is that only God can tell us about Himself. That's why no man could ever find it. God has to tell us who He is and what He is like. Do you want confirmation of that? Did not Jesus say in John 6:44, "No one can come to the Son except the Spirit of the Father draw him and I will raise him up at the last day"? Paul is just confirming here what Jesus had already said. So unless God chooses to make that known, we are never going to find out, neither is anybody ever going to find out.

Here is one more confirming scripture that is not used very frequently:

Matthew 16:13-17 When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" So they [reported to Him that people had all kinds of ideas about him] said, "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah . . .

That means favored! Grace has been given to you, if I can just insert other words. "Grace has been given to you, Simon Bar-Jonah."

Matthew 16:17 . . . for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.

Let us move on and just move away from that particular area so that we can begin to expand into other areas in which the grace of God is shown. Here's another very familiar scripture that we want to consider in the light of grace.

Romans 3:23 For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Now there we are. If we wanted to go back a little bit earlier into this chapter, Paul begins by quoting one of the psalms. He says, "There is none righteous, no, not one. There is none who seeks after God" (verse 10). How in the world could the apostle make that statement, that nobody seeks after God? It is easy. Nobody knows what to look for because God Himself has to reveal Himself. People are seeking after a god, but every god they seek after is a god of their own imagination. God has to reveal Himself.

So, all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the *gift* of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Is not that interesting? What we deserve if we received justice would be death. But God has determined on the basis of His own purpose, on the basis

of His own reason, that He is going to give us a gift. We do not have immortal life inherent within us. Immortal life, eternal life, has to be given to us. We do not deserve it. We deserve death. But for His own reasons, He determined to favor us and He says, "I am going to give you a gift. And here it is. It is eternal life."

The general subject here is the subject of justification—being made right. I should expand that out a little bit and say that justification means to be righteous. Let us put a word in there that sounds a little bit more religious or spiritual.

Galatians 2:17 But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners . . .

And we are. We just read that in Romans 3, that there are none righteous, no not one. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Galatians 2:17-21 . . . is Christ therefore a minister of sin?

Certainly not! For if I build again those things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God; *for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.*

If you remember the sermon on the "Justice of God," it showed that justification is clearly an act of God's grace, because what we deserve from what we have earned—that is, what we have done, the conduct of our lives, is death. There is none righteous, no not one. Since justification then cannot be claimed as a right because we have sinned, it must be received as a gift. It is its given-ness that makes it an act of grace.

Let me rephrase that and put it into a simple illustration. It is not our hanging on to Christ—that is, the keeping of the law—that saves us, but rather Christ hanging on to us. That is, it is not what we do, but it is what He does continuously as acts of grace, because we deserve death. If we can earn salvation through law keeping, Paul is saying in verse 21—let me read this

again, "I do not set aside the grace of God; for **if** righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain." If we can earn salvation through law keeping, then Christ's sinless life and agonizing death were not necessary, because we can do it ourselves.

Justification is not vindication. Let us make this clear. Justification is not vindication. Justification is not exoneration. Both of those words have the connotation that a person was right all along, but the true facts were hidden from those who were doing the judging. In some cases with men, vindication is possible because people are judging unrighteously. They are not judging righteous judgment.

But God never judges unrighteously! He knows all the facts. He knows our heart. He knows everything about us. He knows everything about every situation that we have been in, and so He cannot vindicate us because we are not clear of guilt. He cannot exonerate us because we are not free of guilt. Justification is more than that. It is setting us right or calling us righteous where it does not even exist. This is *awesome*, brethren.

Let's go back to the book of Job 9:2. I just want to pick up a couple of thoughts that Job had. One was Job and I believe the other was Bildad. But they expressed pretty much the same thing in a little bit different context.

Job 9:2-3 Then Job answered and said: Truly I know it is so [now look at this last statement], but how can a man be righteous before God? If one wished to contend with Him, he could not answer Him.

Who is going to call God into account for His judgment of somebody? It is ridiculous. God knows everything. Job had the spiritual insight and the humility to understand that in reality neither he nor anybody could ever call God into account for any judgment that He gives because all of God's judgments are righteous judgments. Who then can argue with God and say, "God, you were wrong. These are my facts"? Nobody can do it.

A little bit later in chapter 25, Bildad the Shuhite answered:

Job 25:2-4 Dominion and fear belong to Him; He makes peace in His high places. Is there any number to His armies? Upon whom does His light not rise? How then can man be righteous before God? Or how can he be pure who is born of a woman?

All of us sin, so who can escape the condemnation of Him who sees all and knows all? There is no vindication before God. There is no exoneration before Him. If He wanted to He could name all of our sins and if He determined to execute justice, no one could call Him into account. I will tell you, if you are not impressed with God's gift after thinking on that, then there is something wrong.

Justification is righteousness. God simply declares us innocent. He simply declares us righteous. He does it legally on the basis of Christ's sacrifice.

Romans 5:6 For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.

When he says "without strength," he means powerless. We had no way to appeal to God for vindication. That is what he is talking about here. We cannot stand before him, just like Job and Bildad said. God has all the cards in His favor. So we are powerless before Him.

Romans 5:7-9 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners [not that we had earned so many stripes that earned us forgiveness], Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.

And so, He justifies us legally on the basis of Christ's sacrifice because He has determined that Christ's sacrifice will fulfill the requirement of His law—the wages of sin is death.

There is another theological aspect of this and that is another gift—the imputing of righteousness to us.

Romans 4:5-8 But to him who does not work [*erga*; earn something] but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly [us], his faith is accounted for righteousness, just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works. "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man to whom the LORD shall not impute sin."

God simply accounts righteousness, the righteousness of Christ, where the righteousness does not in reality exist. It means that when we are justified, He looks upon us as though we were sinless like His Son. That is awesome! Do we deserve that? Have we earned it?—that He should deal with us as though we were righteous and without sin?

We are dealing here with an accounting term, and the picture is as if a person was looking at a ledger and every figure was in the debit column. The person was hopelessly in debt. There was no way that he could figure out how to bring things into balance. He could never earn enough. His income was not great enough. There were no assets. Nothing could balance the account. In his despair he cried out to God and then he looked at his ledger and suddenly a figure appeared on the credit side that completely balanced the account and the debt was gone.

You see, it is not something that we earn. It is something that God, for His own reason, determines to favor us with.

Now why does He do this? God has His reasons. God has His motives and some of these are specified within His word. One of them is right here:

Romans 4:13-16 For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise made of no effect [hang onto that], because the law brings about wrath; for where

there is no law there is no transgression. Therefore, it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all.

God does it. He justifies us. He does it freely. One of His purposes is that the promises may be sure.

The Jews have a saying that goes like this: "How can a man enter into a right relationship with God so that he, too, may inherit the promises?" They understood the promises were made to Abraham and to his seed. They wanted to be able to participate in it and so they had this question. Here was their answer: "He must do so by acquiring merit in the sight of God through doing good works, which the law prescribes." That is to say, by one's own effort.

But you see, as Paul is describing here, that destroys the promises of God because no man can keep the law! If nobody can keep the law, because the giving of the promises depends on keeping the law—if they cannot keep it, if we cannot keep it, then God cannot give the promises, and nobody would ever qualify.

So God, wanting to make sure that the promises are given, justifies a person of His own free will (God does this.) He blesses us, so that we can qualify to receive the promises on the basis of His grace. You better be glad it is that way, or we would never inherit what Abraham is going to inherit.

Here's another reason why God does this:

I Corinthians 1:26 For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called [just to give you the context]

I Corinthians 1:29-31 that no flesh should glory in His presence. But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption [notice that—Christ became for us those things], that, as it is written, "He who glories, let him glory in the Lord."

Grace also eliminates for us the possibility of any boasting or any self-glory.

Regardless of our material accomplishments—no matter how many doctorate degrees we have, no matter how much money we have accumulated, no matter how many good deeds we have done—nobody can boast before God because, as verse 30 says, we are of Him. This is the key to understanding this. We are of Him. He is saying that in spiritual terms, all that we have accomplished has been accomplished **only** because of what He gave.

It all began when He gave us life, if we want to go back that far. But if we just want to go with spiritual life, we only have to go back as far as His calling. We would not have accomplished anything that we have accomplished spiritually, we would not be keeping the Sabbath and the Holy Days, except that it depends on that calling; except that God made us understand His truth; except that God led us to repentance; except that God pressed it on our minds so that we would understand that we needed to do these things. And on and on it goes. It begins piling up—grace upon grace. God is with us in this entire thing.

What we have spiritually is only possible because we are of Him, that is, what we have been given. This particular phrase is describing personal attachment—we are of Him. It is a personal attachment. It's like we are part of a living body, which we are. The church is a living, spiritual organism. The picture that is in the apostle's mind is that we are directly connected to Him, even as the toe is attached to the foot bone, the foot bone to the ankle bone. All of this is connected together and all of this received its strength, its life, its existence, its growth, its repair—everything comes because it is part of the body. Get the point here?

What does the toe have to boast for its part in playing its role in the body? You get the point? Nobody can boast before God because of grace. We only have what we have spiritually because He has given it.

Let us carry this a little bit further. If our growth is going to continue, if we are going to continue to live spiritually, we can only do this within this same

environment. You cut the toe off, it begins to die immediately. There is a degeneration that begins to occur. We apply the same analogy to our spiritual life.

So, there is no bragging, no boasting before God for anything that we have spiritually. We have it because of this personal attachment to the living Jesus Christ.

Why is this important? Because it puts the relationship with God and fellow man into its proper perspective. There are many theologians who insist that what they derive from the Bible and from their own experience in life, is that carnally, the underlying drive or motivation in all relationships with God or men is self-assertion. I will rephrase that. The underlying motivation or drive is the desire for recognition, pride. We are talking about carnal here. We want to be known for what we have done, see? "*I have accomplished this.*" "*I have done that.*" "*I built that.*" "*This is my place.*" "*This is my wife.*" "*This is my husband.*" The empirical self basks in the glow of the fact that I am here. It is this drive for recognition. We want to be noticed. We want to be praised. We want to be rewarded and we want to be submitted to, because of who we are and what we feel we have done.

Now this has very bad ramification for things with God. Jesus' own counsel with His apostles was that **we are to go in the exact opposite direction and make ourselves of no repute. He said, "Become like a little child."** A child is of no value to society because he produces nothing, he cannot do anything, and in a way, many cultures look at them as being nothing more than a parasite. You see, without value.

But Jesus said, "You have to become converted and become like a little child." But on the other hand, Jesus did not just leave that the way it was. He said, "This is the way to real power. This is the way to gain the right kind of recognition." Jesus was looking toward the Kingdom of God and the promotion and recognition that God would give us. Not what we have earned on our own, but, rather, what God would give us.

Jesus' own life was an example of this.

Philippians 2:5-7 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation . . .

He became, as it were, a child, just like He advised the apostles there in Matthew 18.

Philippians 2:7-9 . . . taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him . . .

Pay attention to that. Jesus is not against greatness. He is not against having power, but He wants it to be given by God and God is going to give it to those who are in harmony with His law, with His government, with His way of life. And that begins with the right attitude toward Him and the right attitude toward others and the right attitude toward self.

Philippians 2:9-11 . . . and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Though He was God, He humbled Himself and He did what He has told us we have to do. He said, "Of Mine own self I can do nothing." He gave the glory to the Father. He was saying that He could do nothing involving spiritual powers except it was given to Him. That fits right into us and I Corinthians 1:29-31. Jesus walked the path before we did.

Now we can understand that grace lays upon us a responsibility. That responsibility is to humble ourselves before God, before His law, before His government. Because of this relationship (we are part of the body) we now have with Him, He then is our righteousness. That is just another way of saying He is our justification.

One of the reasons Paul's writings are so difficult, is that Paul does not use words consistently like most people do. He interchanges the words grace, righteousness, faith, and justification. He keeps moving them around in order for you and me to see that they are all part of the same process, even though they are not exactly, technically, the same thing.

We just saw in Acts 20 that he used "the word of grace." He could have said gospel there, but he used word of grace. Anybody who is reading his letters has to understand this, that it is the *modus operandi*, it is the way, it is the mind of the apostle Paul, and it is a wonderful teaching mechanism if we will just understand that is the way that he is using the words.

When he says, "He is our righteousness," it is just another way of saying that He is our justification. We read this in Romans 5:6-9. We are justified through His blood. So, He is our justification. We would not have it unless He initiated it through the relationship, by leading us into it. Therefore, He is our justification.

It also says that He is our sanctification. Sanctification has to do with continued growth. So the means of growing to real spiritual maturity, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, depends upon the continuation of the relationship—remaining a part of the body. Again, we would not have it except we are part of His body. Therefore, He is our sanctification.

He is also our redemption, because He was the price that was paid in order to buy us back from our bondage to Satan, to sin, and to this world. He was the price of redemption, therefore He is our redemption.

I said earlier that our part in this whole thing is to yield, to make use of the gifts that God gives to us. We have to exercise, **freely**, our will to yield to what God is leading us into. I might put it this way: It is our responsibility to be self-controlling, to be self-governing within the framework of God's laws, not allowing the world, sin or Satan to have their way. You know what? We're going to see He even gives us the power to do that. I will lead you to that. This next set of verses is really, keenly interesting.

I Corinthians 4:6-7 Now these things, brethren [the things that preceded this, especially those things in chapter 3], I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written [that is, in the Scripture], that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other. For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it [Paul answers his own rhetorical question], why do you boast [glory] as if you had not received it?

Do you know what these people were doing? Very simply, they were using the gifts—that God gave to them—to divide the church. They were setting themselves into cliques, one against the other and getting people in the congregation to say, "I am of Paul, I am of Apollos, I am of Peter [and so forth] because Peter represents this, Paul represents this and what Paul has is greater and better than this, and what Peter has is better and greater than this and he is not teaching this, and Paul is teaching that"—and they were using those things to divide the congregation. The apostle was saying, "Look, we all have our gifts. There is not one of us that did not receive what we have."

Consider this right within the framework of I Corinthians 1:29-31. Paul is hammering away at these people because they were so proud, so puffed up, about what God had given them as if it belonged to themselves, as if they had done this without God.

I Corinthians 3:9-10 For we are God's fellow workers [Remember chapter 4? He's talking about Apollos and himself, primarily, but in one sense everybody is included within this]; you are God's field, you are God's building. [How?] according to the grace of God which was given to me as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another [the implication is, first of all, Apollos, who apparently was the pastor of the church] builds on it. But let each one [including everybody, going beyond Apollos] take heed how he builds on it.

If God places us within an office in the church—let us say like an elder or a deacon - it must be looked upon as a blessing that is a responsibility, not a reward! It is given. He did not have to do it. Paul even had his office as apostle because it was given. Paul's office and what is implied here is that all the powers to perform it were also given. That is what he used to lay the foundation.

Everybody else is the same way. The important thing is for each one of us to use our gifts to build. He said, "Be careful how you build." Everybody builds on the same foundation. That foundation in this era of the Church of God was laid by Mr. Herbert Armstrong. There is the foundation that was laid. That foundation is Jesus Christ. When we begin to expand it out, it consist of the apostles and the prophets as well. It means the things that they wrote, the examples that they set. **Everybody is to build on the same foundation! Everybody is given gifts to enable them to be able to do it.**

To some, God gives gifts to be apostles, others God gives gifts to be an evangelist, pastor, teacher, or whatever. It is given, though, and every time God gives an office He gives everything that is needed for the person to fulfill the office as well—including overcoming sin. We will see that in just a little bit.

So, the Bible consistently teaches that an office is not a place from which to exercise power (remember Matthew 20). It is not a place from which to exercise power, but a place from which to exercise service. The authority is there. God gives it. He always gives the authority to go with the office, but it does mean that the elder or deacon better have the right perspective on how to use the office that he has been given. The office is given, not earned.

Jude 4 For certain men have crept in unnoticed [it means into the church], who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into licentious [lawlessness] and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Licentiousness is not a sin of weakness. Licentiousness is willful disobedience, things that are really wild. I do not think that any of you within the sound of my voice are guilty of licentiousness. But there are those not understanding, who look upon God's grace, maybe I can say His kindness, as an excuse to sin. They are saying, in effect, that God's kindness does away with law and that we are free to do as we please, that somehow or another the government of God is done away. But what do the scriptures say?

Let's go back into that wonderful book of Romans once again.

Romans 6:11 Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We are attached to him (I Corinthians 1:29). We are to reckon ourselves in Christ and to be dead to sin.

Romans 6:12 Therefore [that's a concluding statement, a summarizing statement] do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts.

Is not that plain? Paul is not saying the law is done away. He is not saying that grace gives us the right to go out from under the government of God. He really nails this down.

Romans 6:13-14 And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not have dominion over you . . .

That's a command! Why? Why should not sin have any dominion over us? Because we are under grace (the end of the verse)! Do you see what Paul is saying? Contrary to what these people were saying, that grace does away with law, **Paul is saying that the very fact that you are under grace is what nails you to the floor, that you have *got* to obey the law!** You know why? Because grace puts us in a situation of obligation that is so deep that we better obey. Because our own acts, our conduct, has brought upon us the

need for grace. The very fact that God has given it obligates us to keep His law.

Romans 6:15 What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not!

God forbid! the King James says. The apostle clearly shows that a Christian is to live a certain kind of life right in the teeth of the attack of human nature, of sin, of the world, of Satan. And the very reason we are to obey is because of grace. You know why? Another reason is, because of the grace of God, the man is for the first time in his life able to make the right choices. That is what obligates us. Before that he was the servant of sin. He was in bondage to Satan.

Let us continue this about why did God do it this way. Romans 8:20 says that God hopes and one of the things He hopes for, in doing it this way, is that this will put the right spin (to use a little bit of modern terminology here) on our thinking. It will put the right spin on our approach, our attitude in dealing with others and the way we think about ourselves.

He is hoping that at one and the same time it will humble us, putting us under a deep sense of obligation to the One paying the debt! That it will cause us to identify with Him personally and in His presence, and provide us with a deep sense of loyalty and devotion, and motivate us to use our free moral agency to make the choices in conforming with His law and way. To cause us to be self-controlling and self-governing if we're going to have any part at all in the future that God describes in His word, that is, the Kingdom of God.

That's what He's hoping for. That if He will just free us, we will repent and turn His way. We will turn our entire life. Not just repent for one sin. I'm talking about repenting as a way of life.

Hebrews 13:9 Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines. For it is good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them.

Establish—some modern translations say strengthen. Either word is correct. Food represents things that are a physical, ritual observance. God is the author of ritual as well, and they have their place. But I think what Paul is referring to here is the ritual observance of the ceremony of law of the Old Covenant. There was food involved with that. But over the years people came to have a superstitious attitude toward it, that if they would just eat of something that had been offered in sacrifice, that it would impart to them some spiritual strength. And of course it could not. We receive strength from spiritual things. We receive spiritual strength from spiritual things.

In Ephesians 2:8, where it says, "*By grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourself. It is the gift of God.*" Even the faith that saves us comes from God. I will tell you, God hems us in because He wants us to be humble and He wants us to make it. We are not going to make it any other way.

We'll read quickly through a portion of I Corinthians.

I Corinthians 12:1-11 Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant: You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led. Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit. There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But ONE and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He [God] wills.

Again I ask you, how can we boast before God? How can we use what we have except as He wants us to use it? The authority to do it is there because the gifts have been given. Everybody receives gifts from God by His Spirit.

They are given for the benefit of His people, so you can use the office that you have been given to serve and, I might add, make it into His kingdom. Everybody receives more than one gift. Everybody receives a multitude of gifts because God is generous. And I tell you this, He gives us far more than we need. He gets us boxed into a corner when we follow His logic.

Now let's go to Titus 2, beginning in verse 11:

Titus 2:11-15 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that denying [notice what grace teaches us] ungodliness and worldly lusts [sin], we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed [sin] and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works. Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you.

Grace here appears as the connotation of penetrating in the same way that light penetrates darkness. It does not just appear to darkness, but rather it penetrates it and disperses it. That is what grace does to a human being. It enters into a person's life, penetrates it, and begins dynamically to produce things.

This is what John 1 is about. God came to the earth and He penetrated it. The grace of God appeared to man in the person of Jesus. It can be translated that God's grace made its appearance, salvation bringing.

Grace can rescue man from the greatest possible evil. What could that possibly be? The greatest possible evil that anybody can face is God's curse. Men can curse you, but if God curses you, you have had it. That curse is sin—I should say the penalty of sin. That would be more specific.

But God counterbalanced that, and more, by giving us grace. So here, then, grace is seen as the power that teaches. It trains us. It disciplines us. It guides and leads us. It does not force us. In other places it can be seen as being used as counseling, comforting, encouraging, admonishing, guiding, convicting, rewarding, even restraining. It teaches us that we must deny

immorality, that we must give ourselves over to self-mastery, that is, controlling ourselves. We must give ourselves over to integrity and devotion right here and now. And all the while, expectantly and patiently looking forward to the return of Jesus Christ and the resurrection of the dead.

For the final scripture, let's go to Philippians 2.

Philippians 2:12-13 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

I think that we ought to be able to see now that the grace of God, as it is taught in the Bible, is dynamic. It is not just a passive forgiveness, but also empowerment, given freely of God, not that we might just merely be saved, but also that we might overcome and become like He is.