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THE GRACE OF GOD

By the late: C. D. Cole

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 labored more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me".

There is a God, there is a Supreme Being who is creator and ruler to whom men must give account for their thoughts and deeds. To deny this is to act the part of a fool, for it is the fool who says, there is no God.

EVIDENCES OF GOD'S EXISTENCE

The general belief among all nations and in all ages that there is a Supreme Being is evidence of God's existence. Why this general belief if there is no God? Heathen writers have observed this fact: - Aristotle: "All men have a persuasion of Deity, or that there is a God."

Plutarch: "If you go over the earth, you may find cities without walls, letters, kings, houses, wealth and money; without theatres and schools; but a city without temples and gods, no man ever saw."

The very denial of God's existence is evidence that He does exist. If there is no God why so much denial and opposition among the infidels? Do infidels deny and rave against God because of their

interest in their fellow men? No, a thousand times, no! They are fighting the sense of God in their own conscience. They are trying to persuade themselves that there is no God. They are trying to get rid of the God in whom they live and move and have their being.

THE TRUE GOD CANNOT BE DISCOVERED

Men generally believe there is a God, but they cannot find Him. There is a sense of God in the human conscience, but the kind of a Being He is cannot be known by man's own reason. I Cor. 1:21, "For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." Man has made many discoveries in the realm of nature, but he cannot discover God. Where the Bible has not gone, or where the Bible is rejected, nobody knows the true God. The wisdom of the ancients grappled with the problem of knowing God and Paul said the world by wisdom knew not God.

THE TRUE GOD MUST REVEAL HIMSELF

God is Spirit and a Spirit being cannot be subjected to laboratory tests. God cannot be put into a test tube and analyzed. Man by searching cannot find God. The Bible speaks of God finding men, but never of men finding God.

A woman aviator denied God's existence because she had covered so much territory and she had never seen God. God must reveal Himself. I Sam.

3:21, "And the Lord appeared again in Shiloh: for the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the Lord." Matt. 11:27, "All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him."

Where is God's revelation of Himself to be found? There are two editions of God's revelation of Himself. Both are called the Word. One is the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ; the other is the written Word, the Bible. Both reveal the true God. A word is the method of revelation. By words men reveal themselves. Christ is called the Word of God because He reveals God: John 1:18, "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." John 14:9, "Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?" Col. 1:15, "Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature:"

The Bible and Christ agree in their revelation of God. What the Bible says about God was exemplified in Christ. The Bible says power belongs to God and Christ exemplified divine power in His miracles, even to the point of raising Himself from the dead. The Bible says that God is all wise. Christ is called the wisdom of God. He knew everything past, present and future. He knew what was in man and He could even read the thoughts of men. God is called the God of all grace. I Peter 5:10, "But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you." Christ exemplified the grace of God in His dealing with sinners. Nearly all the recorded cases of His saving power was in dealing with the worst of sinners. He saved a dying thief, a fallen woman at Jacob's well; a cruel jailer; Zachaeus the publican; and Saul of Tarsus. In His presence publicans and sinners went into the kingdom of God ahead of the self-righteous and self-important Scribes and Pharisees.

WHAT IS GRACE

Grace has been defined as the unmerited favor of God. Where men deserve or merit anything from God it cannot be of grace. This definition is established from many Scriptures:

It is contrasted with the works and debt in Romans 4:4, "Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt". If a man works and gets wages, his pay is not of grace but of debt. He gets what he earns.

It is contrasted with works in Ephesians 2:8,9, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God: "Not of works, lest any man should boast".

It is opposed to law in Romans 6:14, "For sin shall not have dominion over you for we are not under the law, but under grace".

So these passages justify our saying that grace is the unmerited favor of God to sinful men, grace is an attribute in God that causes Him to give men blessings they do not deserve. If there is one thing more than all others men do not deserve, it is salvation. Therefore, salvation is of grace.

THE MANIFOLD GRACE OF GOD

In I Peter 4:10 ("As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God") the grace of God is said to be manifold, that is, there are many different kinds of grace. The word grace is variously employed in the Bible.

The word grace is sometimes used for God's work for men by which their guilt is put away and they are declared justified. Romans 3:24. This is pardoning grace because the work of Christ was not merited. Who dares to claim that he deserved what was done for him by Christ on the cross?

The word grace is sometimes used of God's work in men which they are converted or become believers. This is the sense in which it is used in our text. Paul is explaining his change from a persecutor to a believer. His life had been revolutionized in thought and word and deed. He had changed his opinion of himself. He once thought he was righteous by his own obedience; he now sees that he is righteous through the obedience of Christ. He once believed in righteousness by law; he now believes in righteousness by faith. He had once thought Christ an imposter who ought to be killed; He now sees Him as Saviour to be trusted and Lord to be obeyed. He says this change was wrought in him by the grace of God. This is calling or regenerating grace. In Galatians 1:15, he says that God called him by his grace. This means that he did not cause his conversion.

It is sometimes used of God's work in men by which they perform their duty. Paul explains his labors for Christ on the ground of grace working in him. "I labored yet not I but the grace of God which was with me." He gave grace the glory for his conversion and also for his service. It was his duty to work for Christ as he did, but it was grace that enabled him to give his life for Christ.

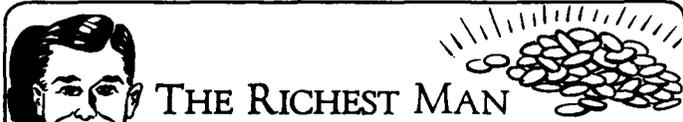
In writing to the Corinthians, he tells them of the grace of liberality bestowed upon the churches of

Macedonia. II Cor. 8:1, "Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia;" Liberal giving from the proper motive is the result of God's grace working in men. It is God who works in men to will and to do of His good pleasure. Men may give liberally apart from the grace of God in order to be seen and receive the praise of men, but to give to the glory of God is not done in the energy of the flesh but by the grace of God. To serve and live for Christ is performing grace.

The word grace is sometimes used of God's working in men by which they bear up under the trials of life. Paul had a thorn in the flesh for which he prayed three times that it might be removed. God answered by saying, "My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness." (II Cor. 12:9). No man behaves properly under the trials and vicissitudes of life apart from the grace of God. We are too weak to bear up under the trials of life, but God's strength is made perfect in weakness. Whenever God withdraws His sustaining grace, we fail, for without Him we can do nothing. To Timothy, Paul said, "Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." We are exhorted to cast all of our cares upon Him on the ground that He careth for us. Most of us have had sorrows that would have completely crushed us had it not been for God's sustaining grace.

We think of death with a kind of dread. We shrink from death as an enemy, which it is, but God's grace shall be sufficient, and when our feet come to its cold waters, He will be there to strengthen.

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." Psalms 23:4.



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