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The Manifold Grace of God

by T. Austin-Sparks

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"GRACE to you and peace be multiplied" (1 Pet. 1:2).

"Concerning which salvation the prophets sought and searched diligently, who prophesied of the GRACE that should come unto you" (1 Pet. 1:10).

"Wherefore girding up the loins of your mind, be sober and set your hope perfectly on the GRACE that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:13).

"For this is acceptable (GRACE, Gr.), if for conscience toward God a man endureth griefs, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye sin, and are buffeted for it, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye shall take it patiently, this is acceptable (GRACE) with God" (1 Pet. 2:19-20).

"...according as each hath received a gift, ministering it among yourselves, as good stewards of the manifold GRACE of God" (1 Pet. 4:10).

"Likewise, ye younger, be subject unto the elder. Yea, all of you gird yourselves with humility, to serve one another: for God resisteth the proud, but giveth GRACE to the humble" (1 Pet. 5:5).

"And the God of all GRACE, who called you unto his eternal glory in Christ, after that ye have suffered a little while, shall himself perfect, establish, strengthen you" (1 Pet. 5:10).

Thus we have the keynote to the whole letter found in the word *grace*. It is a word which has several different facets. Sometimes it is used in the sense of graciousness—graciousness of manner and attitude, a sense of beauty, causing pleasure to others. Sometimes, as in the great doctrine of the grace of God, it is that favour which is shown where there is nothing to warrant it—set over against a situation which is altogether unworthy of any kindness and goodness; the grace of God as favour unmerited in forgiving actual debt. That is the great doctrine of grace.

Then sometimes it is used, in a very simple form, of being in a state of grace. And then, finally, it is used in the sense of strength and support—"My grace is sufficient for thee: for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12:9). So it is a word used in the New Testament in these different ways, and here in this brief letter of Peter which we can read right through from beginning to end in a few minutes, we have all those aspects of grace brought before us.

Grace is the great theme of Peter, and that in itself is significant, when you think of Peter. If there is anybody who should have written about grace, it is Peter. He writes out of his heart. The first word in the second verse of the first chapter is like the spring. It is the spring of grace rising up. It is there inclusive. "Grace to you and peace be multiplied." That is general. As the spring becomes a stream through the letter, it seems to break out into these various aspects, having these different meanings.

Grace as a Ground of Confidence and Assurance

So you come to the two passages in the tenth and thirteenth verses of that first chapter. "Concerning which salvation the prophets sought and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you." "Set your hope perfectly on the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." Here we have grace as a great ground of expectation, of confidence, of assurance. It is unto us in this dispensation that the great grace of God, in its full content and full meaning and full purpose, is brought to light. The prophets knew that there was some tremendous thing in store for someone. It was fixed by God that some people should come into something very great; and here it says that we are those people, we are the people in the eternal counsels of God. A people in this dispensation were to come into the full meaning of Divine grace, and the full meaning is just glimpsed with the appearing of the Lord Jesus.

Here is grace as a great basis of confidence and assurance that the thing is fixed in its fulness in the dispensation in which we live, and the prophets were in a state of anticipation and not realisation. They had not the assurance that it was for their time, but it was for somebody sometime. We have that assurance. The grace of God has come and is coming to us in His fixed counsels in all the fulness of its meaning.

Grace in Conduct

Then you pass into chapter two, verses 19 and 20. Here we have a strange thing that the translators have done. It is very difficult to know why they have done it. They have twice translated exactly the same Greek word into the word 'acceptable.' Properly read, it should be—"For this is grace, if for conscience toward God a man endureth griefs, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye sin, and are buffeted for it, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye shall

take it patiently, this is grace with God." I suppose the translators thought that it sounded a little strange, and so they made the change. But there is the word. So here grace becomes a matter of our conduct. One of the outflowings of this grace is expressed in how we behave under trial, under adversity. The grace of God is to express itself in this way. How easily we take offence, get upset, retaliate, want our rights established, get under the weather, when we are misunderstood, when our motives are misinterpreted—when we meant well but it has been construed that we had some other motive—when something is brought upon us without any foundation at all. We can go down under that, or we can flare up under that, to get even and to establish ourselves; or we can quietly and humbly suffer inside and go on without showing any spleen at all—just go on. This is grace. And the great example is the Lord Jesus Himself—"...leaving you an example, that ye should follow his step: ...who, when he was reviled, reviled not again" (1 Pet. 2:23). He showed no retaliation in spirit. That is the grace of God. That is grace in the matter of conduct.

Grace in Character

We pass to the next two references. "As each hath received a gift, ministering it among yourselves, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." "Yea, all of you gird yourselves with humility, to serve one another: for God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble." Here grace touches down deep—deeper than our conduct. It goes down to our character; and here the opposites are the proud and the humble. Pride and humility are character factors. We may have a feigned humility that is not true humility. Humility is really something which is the very nature of Christ in us, and so grace here, becomes a matter of character, showing itself in humility. He gives grace to the humble and resists the proud.

The Source of All Grace

Then finally, chapter 5, verse 10: "The God of all grace, who called you unto his eternal glory in Christ, after that ye have suffered a little while, shall himself perfect, establish, strengthen you." "The God of all grace." In the light of all that the Apostle has been saying, the summing up in this phrase, "the God of all grace," is intended, I think, to provoke courage. God is the God of all grace. There is grace in God for everything. Do not give up, do not lose heart. There is grace for every situation. Be of good courage—He is the God of all grace.

That statement and chapter 2:12—"...having your behaviour seemly among the Gentiles; that, wherein they speak against you as evil-doers, they may by your good works, which they behold, glorify God in the day of visitation"—is in the light of the various difficulties and trials to which these believers and ourselves were and are being subjected. It is when faith is tried, when circumstances are difficult—they speak evil against you falsely, and other things are present which create a set of difficult circumstances—when you are suffering for conscience' sake, and when you are assaulted by the enemy who goes about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour (v. 8); then remember that the God of all grace called you, and so there is grace for everything, for all situations and all demands. It seems as though 1:2 is the spring, then there is the stream breaking out in its varied applications and meanings and values, and then it seems as though all converge into the sea—the God of all grace; the spring, the distribution over the whole land to meet every situation, and then the coming back and flowing into the great ocean—the God of all grace for all situations.