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GRACE IN THE EXODUS

Exodus 34:6

One Main Thing

It is not man's favor to man, but rather God's grace and favor toward man that is our polar star. God is the origin of grace and favor and we must strive to imitate him. God is our example in grace and favor and not man.

Introduction

Grace is used so many times in the Bible that it is almost overwhelming. The Old Testament contains more than 120 references to "grace," or variations of the word.[1] There is a close blending of Hebrew words meaning grace, mercy, favor, gracious, and sometimes the word "goodness."

[1]On the various Hebrew and Greek words translated "grace," see this volume's Introduction.

We understand that grace is often defined as "underserved favor." There is also a sense of pity, compassion, and mercy contained in grace. When someone shows grace, they also show mercy. They show kindness and they demonstrate love.

In this study of Exodus 33:12–19, the focus is on the use of grace and favor. As we study this passage, we see it uses several terms for grace. Here the words 'mercy' and goodness are used as well as the term 'grace.' The passage reads as follows:

> And Moses said unto the LORD, See, thou sayest unto me, bring up this people: and thou hast not let me know whom thou wilt send with me. Yet thou hast said, I know thee by name, and thou hast also found **grace** in my sight. Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found **grace** in thy sight, shew me now thy way, that I may know thee, that I may find **grace** in thy sight: and consider that this nation is thy people. And he said, My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest. And he said unto him, if thy presence goes not with me, carry us not up hence. For wherein shall it be known here that I and thy people have found **grace** in thy sight? is it not in that thou goest with us? so shall we be separated, I and thy people, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth. And the LORD said unto Moses, I will do this thing also that thou hast spoken: for thou hast found **grace** in my sight,

> and I know thee by name. And he said, I beseech thee, shew me thy glory. And he said, I will make all my **goodness** pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee; and will be **gracious** to whom I will be **gracious** and will shew **mercy** on whom I will shew **mercy**.[2]

Every appearance of "grace" or "gracious" in these verses comes from the Hebrew word ḥēn,[3] while the word "mercy" comes from raḥam and "goodness" in v. 19 is from tuv. All of these qualities of God are summed up in God's self-revelation quoted at the beginning of this chapter (Exod 34:6), which uses the same word "gracious,"[4] as well as "merciful" (raḥum), and the important word ḥesed, translated there "goodness."

Going Deeper

In Exodus 33:12–19 Moses found favor in God's sight. We do not know how this favor was found. We would normally think that Moses did something good to find this favor. Indeed, he had already done many good things by taking God's people from Egypt. But before the exodus, Moses had done more things wrong than right. The biggest thing was the murdering of an Egyptian and his attempt to cover the act up by running

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[2] All scripture references are from the KJV, unless otherwise specified.

[3] The "gracious" statements in v. 19 are actually from the related verb ḥanan.

[4] It is actually the adjectival form, ḥannun.

away, revealing his guilt. For forty years he lived in the desert—a seeming failure. However, he approached the burning bush and discovered Jehovah. If we think that Moses had deserved any of this special treatment, then we are mistaken. Here we begin to see where the meaning of the word 'favor' leads us.

In this text the use of the word 'favor' (ḥēn) signals that Moses is inferior to God. We understand that a man is dependent upon God. Moses was greatly in need of God's favor and God had the power to help. He decided to give this grace to Moses as a favor, though he was not obligated to do so. The beauty of God's grace is that it is an attribute of him who changes not—taught throughout the Old and New Testament.

The only thing that changed about God is the way in which he revealed his grace. God is equally as gracious in the Old Testament as he is in the New Testament. However, one must focus harder to see God's grace in the Old Testament. In the New Testament grace is more easily recognized because Jesus is the focal point of God's grace. The Bible is very clear about the unchanging nature of God. James declares that every good gift "cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." Hebrews 13:8 tells us that Jesus Christ is "the same yesterday, and today, and forever." If that is true, it

follows that there has not been a change, nor could ever be, any change in God's character.

In Exodus 4:27–31, God demonstrated grace. The children of Israel had done nothing to warrant favor from God, yet God initiated contact with them in response to their cries about their bondage. God reached out to a group of people that was unable to reach out to him. God selected Moses and Aaron to be his mouthpiece so that the children of Israel could focus on God's work and to witness the favor he was about to show. God proved he was willing and able to liberate the children of Israel from their bondage before the people provided any merits proving worthiness. This is echoed in the New Testament passage of Romans 5:8, as the Apostle wrote: "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." This theme is throughout the old Testament and shows that God revealed his grace and favor through action, even when the people did not deserve it. All the grace and favor shown by God has do with salvation. Remember Moses' words as Israel was about to cross the Red Sea:

> And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will show to you today: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen today, ye shall see them again no more forever. (Exod 14:13).

Exodus was written to celebrate God's gracious deliverance of Israel from the Egyptian slavery. This brought them into a covenant relationship with him. Throughout the book of Exodus, the celebration of grace and kindness is shown toward them in this deliverance—this salvation.

Application

In a similar way the book of Exodus leads New Testament Christians to celebrate God's grace and his glorious deliverance of his spiritual Israel from the slavery of sin into a covenant relationship and fellowship with him and his dear son Jesus Christ. Since God is the same in the Old Testament as in the New Testament, and there is "no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17), we can count on God's grace being the same toward us as it was toward ancient Israel. The way God reveals his grace is the only thing that has changed about him. It is still the same grace as it has always been and still does the same job it has always done. It is still unearned grace and favor from God as with Israel, so it is today for Christians. As God gave grace to Israel while they were in a sinful state, his response toward us was "while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8). There is still an action we must perform to receive this gift given of God—not to earn it, but to receive it. We must either accept it or reject it: that is the action we must perform to receive this gift from God.

In the English New Testament, the word "grace" is always a translation of *charis*, a word that occurs in the Greek text more than 170 times. Grace is often discussed in relation to salvation:

> This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. (Rom 3:22–24)

A question arises from this text. What does "to all who believe" mean? Biblically a believer is one who not only gives mental assent, but one who responds with an action after giving mental assent. See the examples of this in Hebrews 11. Sixteen times the phrase "by faith" or "through faith" was immediately followed by an action on the part of the person who acted upon their faith. After the action was performed, God gave his favor. Think of this in this way—if a person falls overboard from a seagoing vessel and someone throws him or her a lifeline, the person is not saved until pulled to safety. The one who threw the lifeline was not obligated to throw the line, but by grace he or she threw it. Now the person who was pulled to safety had to do something even though the line was given through the grace of the person who threw it. The one in the water had to decide to take hold of the line and continue holding on until he or she was safe. That is the

way God's grace works. He has extended it to all, but only those who decide to do what it takes to receive it will enjoy the grace that is freely given of God. "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men" (Titus 2:11). The grace is there, and it can be freely received or rejected. The choice ours.

Conclusion

Christians gain confidence in the grace of God upon studying Exodus, because of the repeated use of grace towards Moses and Israel. Neither Moses nor Israel had earned God's grace, yet God showered his grace upon them, even while they were in a sinful state. Since God never changes, he will respond accordingly toward us today.

> And for this cause, he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance. (Heb 9:15)

> For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. (Acts 2:39)

Israel was called by the word of God through the prophets and we are called by the word of God, as recorded on the written pages which are given by

inspiration of God. We will receive God's grace and favor if we keep a penitent heart and continue to trust in him and his holy word.

Discussion

1. Does God owe us his grace because of our righteousness?
2. How are grace, mercy, favor, and kindness equal in the Bible?
3. How was grace in the book of Exodus connected to Salvation?
4. Is grace connected to salvation in the New Testament?