Kirk Brothers

WHEN GRACE APPEARED

John 1:17–18; Titus 2:11–14

One Main Thing

Grace is "favor bestowed when wrath is owed" (Jack Cottrell). God gave a new definition of grace through the life and death of Jesus Christ.

Introduction

The world can never be the same once it has been introduced to a Plato, Beethoven, Vincent van Gogh, Florence Nightingale, Abraham Lincoln, Marie Curie, Amelia Earhart, C.S. Lewis, Alexander Graham Bell, Rosa Parks, Michael Jordan, Bill Gates, or Elvis Presley. Certain individuals introduce the world to thoughts, feelings, sights, concepts, beauty, ministries, scientific discoveries, and technologies that transform life. No human being has changed the world the way Jesus, the Son of God, has. One area in which he brought change was in our understanding of grace.

Going Deeper

In the Old Testament, the main Hebrew word for "showing grace/favor" is *ḥānan*. About this word, Jack Cottrell notes that it "seems to be God's favorable attitude that moves him to bless and answer prayer."[1] In the New Testament, the Greek noun often translated "grace" is *charis*, which can have a variety of definitions, ranging from "grace" to "gratitude" to "generosity" to "beauty." But in Jesus Christ, God reveals realms of grace unanticipated by such definitions.

John 1 focuses on who Jesus is (God, Creator, man, Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, etc.). Though he is co-Creator of all that is (vv. 1–4), he became a human being ("flesh") and "lived among us" (v. 14). He brought the glory of God to earth and was "full of grace and truth." The term translated "full" (*pleres*) can have the idea of "all that it will hold," or, on the other hand, "complete" in the sense of "lacking nothing."[2] John 1:17 says, "For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ." While the general idea of favor/grace was present in the Old Testament, we need to remember that this favor could be based on someone's worthiness. In contrast, as Jesus, who is "full" of grace

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[1] Jack Cottrell, *God: The Redeemer*, What the Bible Says Series (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1987), 364.

[2] Frederick W. Danker, et al., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (3rd ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 826–27.

(1:14), came and showed us the Father (cf. John 1:18), we saw a new concept of grace. In John 1:16, John the apostle described Jesus has having "grace upon grace." The idea is a continual supply of grace. When one supply of grace ends, another comes . . . "grace upon grace." The one who is full of grace and brings a never-ending supply of grace, shows us what true grace is.

The apostle, Paul, referred to the coming of Jesus as "when grace appeared" (Titus 2:11). Verses 11–14 form one long sentence in Greek. In the preceding section, Paul has described what healthy teaching and living looks like for older men, older women, younger women, younger men, and slaves (2:1-10). "For" at the beginning of verse 11 ties the following verses back to the preceding. He is giving the reasons for why Titus should teach these things and all Christians should practice them. Paul accomplished this by focusing on two "appearings" (Titus 2:11-15). One is the appearing of grace. This refers to the first coming of Jesus (when Jesus "became flesh"; John 1:14). This appearing of grace brought salvation to humanity (Titus 2:11). This was only made possible because Jesus "gave himself for us to redeem us" (2:14).

This phrase can serve to turn our attention to God's definition of grace. We noted earlier that Jesus brought

a new understanding of grace. What is this new understanding? Remember that in the Greek culture, charis referred to favor bestowed on another and could have the idea that this favor was unforced or uncoerced. The grace of God, which appeared with the coming and death of Jesus, is a more intense grace than that which was seen in the Greek culture. God's grace was not just unforced favor, but it was also undeserved favor. In fact, Paul says that Jesus, the one undeserving of death, gave his life to save us, the ones undeserving of life. Jack Cottrell notes,

> Such words as unmerited, unworthy, and undeserved do apply to the concept of grace, but they are not really strong enough to reveal the full extremity of grace. The fact is that grace is not merely undeserved or unmerited; it is the very opposite of what is deserved or merited. We are not just unworthy of God's forgiveness; we are actually worthy of its opposite.[3]

In light of this, Cottrell defines grace as "favor bestowed when wrath is owed." This is my favorite definition of grace. God gave salvation to people who deserved destruction, freedom to individuals who deserved imprisonment, and life to sinners who deserved death. This was a richer and deeper definition of grace than

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[3] Cottrell, *God: The Redeemer*, 376.

existed in the Greek culture. The divine definition of grace was not found in a Greek lexicon, it was found in the life and death of Jesus Christ.

Application

Paul told Titus that the coming of grace not only brought something (salvation), it taught something (sensible living). It taught humanity to "deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously, and godly, in the present age" (Titus 2:12). The word translated as "instructing" in verse 12, is *paideúo*. It means "to provide instruction for informed and responsible living." The "fullness of grace" which we see in Jesus also teaches us how to live. If grace is favor bestowed upon us in spite of what we deserve based on our actions, we might conclude that our actions do not matter at all. This would be a false assumption (cf. Rom 6:1–2). My goodness can never earn salvation. This is because I am not good. Paul told the Roman Christians, "There is none righteous, no not one" (Rom 3:10). Though my actions cannot earn God's grace, they always flow from it. Titus 2:14 tells us that Jesus came not only to redeem us, but to purify us. He did not just come to save us but to sanctify us. Sanctification is the process of becoming holy, of becoming like Christ (cf. 2 Cor 3:18). Those touched by God's grace should seek to live righteously every day. As Jesus came to earth to reveal God and the fullness of grace, so we should live to display God and grace in our lives.

Conclusion

Paul also tells Titus that as we live the righteous lives that the coming of grace has taught us to live, we are able to look with confident expectation toward the second appearing that is mentioned in Titus 2, the appearing of glory (2:14). When he comes in glory, those of us who have accepted his grace will share in his glory. This is in stark contrast to Heb 10:27, which describes those who continue to sin willfully without repentance after having received a knowledge of truth. They have a "terrifying expectation of judgment." The Christian is able to live looking up, to live looking forward to the moment Christ returns. I have often said, "I live for the levitation." First Thessalonians 4 says we will meet him in the air at the second coming (the appearing of glory). I live and long for that moment when my feet will leave the ground. In that moment I will know that all my worries are over. That is one of the gifts that grace gives us. When grace appeared, the hope of glory appeared. This hope can buoy us in our darkest hours of trial. Paul says that the appearing of grace brought salvation, the hope of the appearing of glory brings us strength, and the result should be a life of godliness. May we accept his grace, live his grace, and look expectantly for the ultimate gift of his grace, sharing his glory.

Discussion

1. Describe someone who entered your life and taught you something that changed you forever.
2. How is God's concept of grace in Christ different from what we see in the Old Testament?
3. How is God's concept of grace in Christ different from what we see in the Greek culture?
4. What do you think it means to live "sensibly"?
5. What is the most valuable thing you have learned from this lesson?