



Grace

A Place for Truth

Jeffrey Stivason, editor



ALLIANCE OF CONFESSING EVANGELICALS

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1. Grace

An Interview with Sean Lucas

Jonathan Master:¹ J. Gresham Machen once said that "the very center and core of the whole Bible is the doctrine of the grace of God." Do you think that's true?

Sean Lucas:² I do. The theme of God's grace—as shown to us in Jesus—is really the center of the Bible. As He was walking with the disciples on the road to Emmaus, Jesus showed that Moses and the prophets spoke of Him (Lk. 24). If Jesus is at the center of the Bible, then the grace of God—which is displayed to us in Jesus—is also at the center of the Bible. I do think there is a "golden thread of grace," a line of God's undeserved favor towards human beings that spans from Genesis to Revelation.

JM: How would you define "grace"?

SL: First, I think (as Sinclair Ferguson wisely reminds us) that grace isn't a thing or substance; it's always connected to a person. But the word "grace" itself means "favor," and here particularly God's undeserved favor displayed towards us in connection to the person of Jesus Christ, "God with us," the One who is full of grace and truth (Jn. 1:14). Grace is favor, but it's always favor that comes to us in and through Jesus as Lord and Savior.

JM: Why is this teaching—that God is a God of grace—so hard for us to accept?

SL: I think that's partly because the default religion of our hearts is (what I like to call) "experiential moralism." We long for inspirational experiences that will help us fly right and do better; we long for those things because we really think that there are

things that we can do in order to *gain* God's favor, as if God's favor must be deserved in some way. A great example of that is found in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:10–14):

"Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

We really are like the Pharisee, a kind of moralist that believes he has some claim upon the grace of God. As Jesus tells us, the tax collector is truly the one justified; he that God is the judge, that he himself is a sinner and that he desperately needs grace.

The grace of God in Jesus Christ turns-over the religious state of our hearts. We have to forsake this idea that we can somehow gain favor, that we can ascend to God in order to save ourselves. Grace comes to us and says, "No, actually you're desperate and, unless God shows you favor, you are without hope and lost in this world."

JM: That really undercuts any pride or self-righteousness that we have. But how does an appreciation for God's grace not lead to some kind of license? Paul says that this grace teaches us "to renounce ungodliness... and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives" (Titus 2:12). But I think many people perceive an emphasis on God's grace as something that will let them lead people away from following God's commands.

SL: A sort of tagline at my church is that "Grace Transforms." I'll frequently say that God's favor not only forgives, but actually changes us. That's because at the center of this grace we find our union with Christ. As the Holy Spirit effectually calls us and draws us to the Savior, He unites us to Christ, and (to use Calvin's term) the "double-grace" of justification and sanctification is ours. Both of these flow from our union to the Savior. Both are distinguishable,

but they are not separable. It's not possible to be declared right with God without taking on newness of life.

This grace, which comes to us entirely from Christ as the Spirit unites us to Him, inevitably leads to sanctification. Every aspect of our life is altered, from the way we act as a spouse and parent, to the way we engage outsiders in the community, the way we go about our daily work. Each of these categories has been changed because we have been made alive, raised with Christ. These benefits come to us by union with Christ.

JM: What about the relationship between law and grace? How would you describe that?

SL: As you look at the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20, it's striking that the movement is actually from grace to law. In the prologue, God first reminds His people that He has brought them out of Egypt, "out of the house of slavery" (v. 1). For that reason, He now gives them His law as a guide for their lives. He has redeemed them and made them His own, "a people holy to the LORD... a people for his treasured possession" (Deut. 7:6).

"Because I've done this," God says, "This is the way you should live." Yet as we try to live according to God's law, we find actually cannot. We falter and fail, and we have "this cinder" of sin remaining in us (borrowing again from Calvin). Because we fail to keep the law at every point, the law actually drives us back to the grace we find in Jesus Christ and our union to Him. We see that He's a great Savior, and that our sins are forgiven. That grace then leads us back to the law, creating a certain grace/law dynamic in the Christian until we are fully and finally glorified. Then, it will be all grace, from beginning to end.

2. Grace Alone

Tim Bertolet³

Many Christians recognize that their salvation has been accomplished and given to them by the grace of God. However, it is insufficient to hold that salvation comes through the grace of God. The real hallmark of a Christian moving to deeper maturity is whether or not they understand the salvation is by grace *alone*.

First, we should never abstract the concept of grace from the working of the gracious Triune God. We are not praising and worshiping the concept of grace, but rather the wonderful Triune God who gives us unmerited grace and favor. Grace is a character trait that flows richly from God. On Mt. Sinai, He reveals himself to Moses: "The LORD, the LORD a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love."

The working of the Triune God in the accomplishment and application of redemption is to "the praise of his glorious grace" (Eph. 1:6) and "according to the riches of his grace" (Eph. 1:7). It is insufficient for me to recognize aspects of God's grace if I fail to recognize that salvation comes from God by grace alone from start to finish.

Outside of rank Pelagianism, every doctrinal perspective within the Christian tradition from Roman Catholicism, to Eastern Orthodoxy, to Wesleyanism, Arminianism, and Calvinism all recognize the grace of God in the accomplishment of salvation. Roman Catholicism recognizes the cross of Christ in the accomplishment of redemption and understands that God is gracious, yet humans must appropriate and have the grace of God inwardly imparted to them through their act of participation in sacraments.

It is not the concept of grace that distinguishes but rather grace alone that from start to finish distinguishes all of God's dealings with me. Grace alone is connected to the doctrine of faith alone.

Paul describes this grace in Ephesians 2. We were dead in our sins and by nature children of wrath. In this deadness we lived out our sinful estate enjoying our rebellion and actively thumbing our noses at God. Not only did we not have a will or inclination for God, we thoroughly enjoyed living contrary to God and in opposition to him. We were not passively waiting for God to rescue us; we were actively revolting against Him. Then, we have from Paul some of the sweetest words in all of Scripture:

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, (Eph. 2:4-6)

This is what it means when the Bible says we have been saved by grace. It means that God extended mercy upon those undeserving. It means that God showed us love out of the freedom and goodness of His own decision to act. He was not motivated to respond to us because we were lovable, worthy, or even capable of living up to what He determined to give us. He took us from deadness and made us alive. Notice that in this great act of grace, we contributed nothing.

God did not coax us back to life, slowly warm us like a doctor might pump a heart hoping the heart will respond and perhaps now assisted it may start up again. Rather God imparted life where there was nothing but death, rot, and filth. If that was not enough, God raised up the believer in Jesus Christ so that we might share in the glory and the riches of the kingdom.

God did not give us life and make us mere attendants in the kingdom but He imparted life and made us adopted sons with all the rights and privileges. Put another way: God's grace does not set us at neutral and see how we might respond or what we might achieve. Instead, God's grace installs us as full and active inheritors

of all the riches and glories that God has given the humanity of the Son in his resurrection and reign.

The biggest personal impact from the doctrine of grace alone is boasting; if salvation is by grace alone then boasting can be directed at God alone. Why does God elect people to salvation? Why does God raise up the dead sinner? Why does God do this through gospel preaching which the world finds silly and foolish? Paul tells us: "so that no human being might boast in the presence of God" (1 Cor. 1:29) The corollary of this (which Paul gets to in 1 Cor. 1:31) is even when I boast in the presence of men I have nothing to boast about save the unmerited and gracious favor found only in God. I cannot run around before others clamor for status and prestige as I puff myself—I have only God to boast in before others.

The recovery of the doctrine of salvation by grace alone is one of the hallmarks of the Reformation but woe to us in our day if our seeking to stand upon it does not make us more humble in our walk before God and in our presence before our neighbors. What have I done for my salvation? Nothing. Even my receiving it through faith alone in Christ alone was not my act of reaching up and pulling heaven down to me. The Holy Spirit called me and I but opened my arms to grace because He first opened my heart. What do I have that I have not received? And if I received why do I boast as if it was not a gift given (to paraphrase Paul in 1 Cor. 4:7).

We live in a day where the spirit of the age teaches us to boast. It is practically a prerequisite for the successful American life. Yet it is contrary to Christian conduct. Even more, it is antithetical to the doctrine of salvation by grace alone. We need not only in believers of the Reformational doctrines but practitioners of them as well. Those of us who follow the Reformation are sadly at times not the most humble. We too can be lured by desires for self-promotion, popularity, and boasting. Yet the doctrine of grace alone should teach us to exalt the Lord alone and boast only in Him.

Not only does grace alone cut off my boasting, it makes a marked difference in how I relate to God. A voice to this radical difference is much needed in our world today. I recall watching a well known morning news program in which a particular correspondent was

examining the "power" of prayer. She interviewed scientists who had done brain scans upon people who regularly prayed or "connected with a higher power." Then she interviewed a group of teenagers with a very diverse religious and spiritual background. What struck me was that everyone from the Muslim, to the Christian or Roman Catholic, to the spiritualist just meditating to a higher power, all of them spoke of their "relationship with God". Everyone felt a relationship with God and felt comfortable with their ability to reach a god, being or higher power and commune with him/her/it.

It was evident that there is this common moralistic therapeutic deism at work, where all language of god & divine powers is basically equivocal. In this scheme, there is always the divine's general benevolence, but nothing like grace alone. Grace alone shatters this whole notion of a god made for my personal fulfillment. A yet many so-called preachers of grace make this the measure of God and the motivation for calling people to Him today.

The doctrine of grace alone assures to us that the living God of the Bible is unique. His dealings with His people are unique because they are rooted in the Trinitarian God and displayed in the operations of the God who is one God in three persons. Anyone can talk of a general grace and kindness of a divine and higher power. Christianity alone speaks of a God who comes to His people and reaches them because of the sheer goodness and love that is motivated by nothing other than His grace. He extends favor where only wrath is deserved. While the riches of salvation overwhelming me, they also leave me looking outside myself. In my self-conception I become smaller and He becomes bigger because my salvation is to the praise of His glory and the wonders of His grace alone.

3. Amazing Grace

Michael Roberts⁴

John Owen, the seventeenth-century English Puritan, wrote of an imagined reaction in heaven by the Son of God in response to the fall of Adam and Eve, and what he purposed to do in response:

Poor creature! how woful is thy condition! how deformed is thy appearance! What is become of the beauty, of the glory of that image of God wherein thou wast created? how hast thou taken on thee the monstrous shape and image of Satan? And yet thy present misery, thy entrance into dust and darkness, is no way to be compared with what is to ensue. Eternal distress lies at the door. But yet look up once more, and behold me, that thou mayest have some glimpse of what is in the designs of infinite wisdom, love, and grace. Come forth from thy vain shelter, thy hiding place. I will put myself into thy condition. I will undergo and bear that burden of guilt and punishment which should sink thee eternally into the bottom of hell. I will pay that which I never took; and be made temporally a curse for thee, that thou mayest attain unto eternal blessedness.⁵

Owen has clearly captured what we do well to remember and meditate regularly upon: the absolute horror of the spiritual condition and destiny into which everyone has fallen because of sin; and the utter glory and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ to do the unthinkable—to put himself in our place by suffering God's curse for us—in order that we might share in those eternal blessings in which we have no right to participate.

And yet, how often do we really meditate upon the absolute wonder of divine grace? J. I. Packer observed many years ago that for too many Christians grace is no longer amazing, but has instead become boring because we too often fail to fully appreciate the

glory of what God has done for us in Christ. Why is this? What has happened to cause this tragic shift in attitude toward this particular doctrine? There are a number of reasons, but let me offer up just three.

The first reason is that theology no longer excites us anymore. Like so much of Western culture, too many Christians have come to evaluate things through the myopic lens of the pragmatic. The church is then seen as being enamored with any program that will all but guarantee the solution to whatever practical problem is being faced. We become focused on the end result, driven by what is most likely to achieve the ends for which we are looking. And what gets left behind is the serious and careful study and reflection on the Christian faith that has nourished and sustained God's people for centuries. This is not to suggest that books on Christian living should be avoided; but it is to suggest that when we try to address these issues with little or no regard to who God is and how he has revealed himself to us in Christ, solutions to these practical concerns are necessarily going to be flawed and incomplete.

The second reason is the loss of the biblical doctrine of sin. How else can one describe the state of the church when it increasingly comes to allow and even adopt secular culture's views on basic issues of morality and ethics? Where there is a lack of serious interest in the knowledge of God and in his gracious dealings with humankind, a misunderstanding and redefining of sin cannot be far behind. And those churches and their traditions—whether liberal or evangelical—who have castrated themselves theologically have removed their ability to provide a robust faith to the next generation.

The third reason is related to the second. With the abandonment of the Bible's view of sin has come a loss of our true condition before God. We have lost what Luther called the *Anfechtungen*, the crippling fears of utter helplessness and condemnation before a holy God who must act in judgment against all that is contrary to his righteous nature. We no longer see ourselves as those who, to borrow from Jonathan Edwards, are hanging over the gaping pit of hell by the thinnest of strands, with only the sheer mercy of God

that keeps us from falling to our eternal and deserved doom. John Newton knew this, and what was true for him is true for us:

*Amazing grace!—how sweet the sound—that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see.
'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved;
how precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed!*

4. Coming to Grips with Grace

James Rich⁶

As one of the solas of the Reformation, the centrality of grace in the Christian life is hard to overstate. At the same time, it seems Christians struggle somewhat to understand exactly what it is and how it operates. To demonstrate this misunderstanding, here's a quick quiz,

(True or False) We are saved by faith. _____

Sounds insultingly easy, doesn't it? But if you answered "True" you get only partial credit. That's right. The statement "we are saved by faith" is true, but not completely. This is because it's actually shorthand for the Reformation's emphasis that a person can stand right before God only through trust in the Gospel of Christ, as opposed to Roman Catholicism's accent on participation in the sacraments.

You receive full credit if you answered "False" because the biblical formula for how a person is justified is spelled out in Ephesians 2:8 which says, "for by grace you have been saved through faith..." The apostle succinctly shows that our salvation is due first and foremost to the gracious work of God in Christ; faith works as an instrument by which we appropriate God's graciousness.

And speaking of "graciousness," believers also struggle with understanding just exactly what grace is. When Christians say, "I need God's grace," some of them seem to use the term almost as if grace is in some sense tangible or has substance. But it is essential to keep in mind that when Paul states that God's grace was given to him (Ephesians 3:2, 7-8), he wants us to understand that God has

assumed an attitude of favor that is seen in His kind actions toward His creation and His creatures.

The Reformers' commitment to *Sola Scriptura* as their sole authority for truth led them to the right view that grace is not an object; rather it is God's favorable disposition and benevolent actions toward those whom He chose before the foundation of the world. So when speak of God's "grace" what we are really referring to is God's "graciousness." And understood this way, grace really is amazing because the God who made and sustains every particle throughout the vast universe has chosen—of His own free and uncompelled desire—to show His immeasurable favor to us. This is amazing; speaking for myself, I am in no way deserving of even the minutest display of graciousness from God, let alone to be the recipient of such a lavish outpouring of grace as Paul ascribes to God in Ephesians 1:7-8.

That God would assume such an attitude and exhibit such actions toward His rebellious creatures is completely counter-intuitive to us. And this no doubt leads to another struggle we have with grace. Since in Adam we're wired to think that everyone should get what they deserve and that we have the innate ability to fix whatever we've broken, we're not naturally inclined to accept any outside help. But the Scriptures tell us this is foolishness. God's kind actions on our behalf, motivated by His favorable inclination toward us means that He does for us what we can't (and won't) do for ourselves.

The most obvious case in point is Adam (Genesis 3). After his transgression Adam tried but couldn't come up with a real solution to the problem of his changed status before God. His efforts to stitch together a makeshift covering for himself and his wife amounted to nothing more than a jury-rigged costume that was inadequate to cover, let alone remove, their guilt and shame. So God stepped in at this critical juncture, exercised His graciousness, and did for the man what Adam could not do for himself. Although Adam deserved death, the Lord assumed a kind disposition toward his fallen creatures and out of free benevolence He acted, giving a provision (a more substantive covering) and a promise, namely that He would send One who would not only fully and completely fix

what Adam had broken but would also give to His people far beyond what we lost in our original parents.

And even though we may struggle with allowing someone else to do something essential for us, we believers today can be profoundly grateful that the Lord Jesus continues to exercise His graciousness toward us. One important way is in His role as our Mediator and Advocate (1 John 2:1), representing us before the Father until we are finally delivered from sin, because we cannot stand on our own before Him.

5. The Covenant of Grace

Jeffrey Waddington⁷

The Bible represents God's relationship to His human creation in terms of a two covenant structure (nicely summed up in the Westminster Confession of Faith 7.3,5, and 6). God created Adam and Eve within a covenant structure called the covenant of works in which God commanded our first parents to refrain from eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:15-17). Implicit within the warning was a promise of confirmed blessed righteousness should Adam and Eve have obeyed God. Unfortunately as Genesis 3 reveals, Adam and Eve fell for the blandishments of Satan speaking through the serpent.

With the fall of our first parents, God immediately instituted the covenant of grace in the midst of the pronouncement of curses upon the serpent, Eve, and Adam (Genesis 3:14-19). God's replacing Adam and Eve's fig leaves with animal skin garments was symbolic of the necessity of blood-shedding for the forgiveness of sin (Genesis 3:21; Hebrews 9:22) and pointed forward to the consummate blood-shedding of Jesus Christ the Lamb of God.

God was not surprised by these turns of events. God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit had entered into an agreement to redeem a people and the Son voluntarily undertook to become incarnate for the salvation of his own people. The Father sent the Son, and the Son came as the God-man Mediator, and the Spirit empowered the Son to perform His work, and became the gift given to the Son who then poured him out on the church (Acts 2:17). This pre-temporal agreement is sometimes called the *pactum salutis*, or the covenant of redemption or covenant of peace. Some theologians include this covenant within the covenant of grace, but it seems best to distinguish it from its temporal enactment in history.

Whenever Jesus' pre-existence is affirmed we have an implicit reference to the covenant of redemption. For instance, in His high priestly prayer Jesus prays to the Father that He would be glorified with the glory He had before He became incarnate (John 17:5).

The covenant of grace is descriptive of God's intent to save a people for Himself beginning with the fall in Eden and culminating in the new heavens and new earth (Revelation 22:21). As the Westminster Confession of Faith 7.5 & 6 points out, this covenant is administered differently in the old covenant era and the new covenant era. Actually, as we observe the one covenant of grace advancing through redemptive history we find it gaining in clarity and specificity.

After the first adumbration of the Gospel in Genesis 3:15 God enters into covenant with Noah after He brings Noah and his family and Noah's zoo through the universal deluge that destroyed all other life. In Genesis 8 & 9, God promises never again to destroy life by a flood. This covenant is often understood to be a common grace covenant made with all creatures. That appears to be correct. But it should be pointed out that this common grace covenant is given to further the progress of the covenant of grace. In other words, it does not exist for its own sake. Common grace subserves special grace.

Beginning with the introduction of Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 12, the covenant of grace makes great strides forward as God unfolds His plan of redemption. Repeatedly God tells Abraham that through him all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12, 15, 17, & 22). In Genesis 15:12-21 God puts Abraham asleep and appears as a flaming torch and smoking pot in a vision in which the pot and torch pass between pieces of severed animals in a covenant ratification ceremony. The upshot of this vision was that God was promising that He Himself would satisfy the demands of the covenant. Once more we get a glimpse of the coming sacrificial work of Christ.

Many years later when the descendants of Abraham had increased and relocated to Egypt and come under the hegemony of Pharaoh God heard the cries of His enslaved people and sent Moses to free them from bondage (Exodus 3). After a series of miraculous

displays of God's mighty power in ten plagues the children of Israel finally left Egypt and were led through the Red Sea on dry ground and camped at the base of Mount Sinai where God gave them His Ten Commandments explaining how He expected His redeemed people to behave in His presence (Exodus 20). Sadly the history of the people of Israel is a history of one season of disobedience followed by another. This is illustrated most clearly in Exodus 32 and the creation of the golden calf. While Moses was up on the mount receiving the ten words the people were down in the valley breaking all ten of God's commandments.

God furthered His covenant of grace with His promise to King David that He would build for him an everlasting dynasty (2nd Samuel 7). David had wanted to build God a permanent dwelling place in Jerusalem but God told him that privilege would fall to David's son Solomon. But God did promise David that he would always have a descendent to sit upon the throne of Israel. This promise was not fulfilled in Solomon but would be fulfilled in the ministry of David's greater Son Jesus Christ.

The ever disobedient people of Israel would find themselves in trouble throughout their history and finally, previously torn into two kingdoms, each would be crushed and taken into captivity. The northern kingdom would disappear from the pages of history but the southern kingdom would not be completely wiped off the map. Judah would be conquered by Babylon because of her idolatry. God constantly had to deal with His people's failure to internalize the law He had given at Sinai. God sent many prophets to His kings and the people over the years to call them to repentance and to return their God, the Holy One of Israel. Isaiah told of a Suffering Servant who would die for the sins of His people and who heal them of their sin (Isaiah 52:13-53:12). Jeremiah spoke of God giving His people law-engraved hearts so that they would do God's will. He spoke in terms of a new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34). Ezekiel, the exilic prophet spoke of God replacing His peoples' hearts of stone and replacing them with hearts of flesh (Ezekiel 36:22-38) and giving them the Spirit who would direct them in paths of obedience.

This new covenant would find its clear expression in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Jesus was the long-anticipated Messiah, He was the Suffering Servant and He was Himself the covenant between God and His people (Isaiah 49:8). Jesus picks up on the new covenant language in His institution of the Lord's Supper. Sharing the cup of wine with His disciples on the night before He would be put to death on a cross He said that "this cup is the new covenant in my blood" (1st Corinthians 11:25). The new covenant, which is the culmination of all the stages of the covenant of grace, is both already enacted and yet awaits its consummation in the return of Christ in glory at the end of the ages. Christ's atoning death and resurrection are God's answer to sin. There is no other and there is no better solution to our plight. The covenant of grace which began in Eden finds its completion in the garden city of the New Jerusalem. There the Lamb of God who was foreshadowed in the animal garments given to our first parents sits upon the throne and receives adoration. There in that place we will worship the Triune God in beautiful splendor without pain or tears. Till then we gather every Lord's Day to celebrate the culmination of the covenant of grace in Jesus Christ.

6. A Teaching Grace

Jeffrey Stivason⁸

Cardinal Bellarmine (1542-1621) was a well-known figure of the Counter-Reformation and was no mean theologian. He was Pope Clement VIII's personal theologian and in 1930 he was canonized and consequently named a Doctor of the Church. Protestants often reflect on the Reformation as the time in which the doctrine of justification was once again restored to a Biblical foundation. However, according to Bellarmine, the greatest error of Protestantism was not its doctrine of justification.

According to Bellarmine, the Protestant's reprehensible heresy was the belief that they could be sure of their eternal inheritance. Assurance was the problem. But why? Well, he thought that if people came to believe that they were pardoned fully and freely by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone – they would presume that such a thing was a license to sin fully and freely!

If Bellarmine is correct, then we have some serious thinking to do. But is he? Consider Paul's pastoral letters written to a young man named Titus. Titus was the pastor whom the Apostle Paul left on the isle of Crete in order to shepherd the flock of God there (Titus 1:4, 5). In one sense his task was simple. Titus was to appoint elders on the island. Paul even gave some specific instructions for Titus to follow (Titus 1:5–9). But having finished instructing Titus the Apostle turned his attention to the flock on the island. They were in need of shepherding and oversight and the Cretans were not especially disposed to follow the guidance of the shepherd's staff.

The problems spelled out in the letter indicate that Paul likely had been in the homes of these island dwellers. He knew what Titus was up against. He was left with older men and older women who

were intemperate, some were drunkards. There was insensibility among the young and old alike. Young wives needed to be subject to their husbands while learning to love them and their children. Subjection needed to be learned by both the young men and the slaves of the island. In fact, Paul says, winding up this particular series of exhortations, "you must adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect" (Titus 2:10).

Now, here is the question. Why? Why must our lives be changed, sin be put away, relationships be re-ordered? Why must our lives adorn the gospel? The answer is in verse 11 of chapter two. The NKJV renders the text like this, "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men..." In other words, based on the conjunction "for" we are to understand that because of the arrival of the salvation bringing grace of God our lives are to be of a different character. To put it another way, the Christ who alone saves through faith alone brings moral renovation to His own.

In fact, verse twelve spells out the purpose accomplished by the appearing of the grace of God in Jesus Christ; it is instructive in nature. In other words, the salvation bringing grace of God not only saves but instructs us to renounce ungodliness and worldly lusts. Or as one commentator puts it, "grace teaches us to deny both the root principle, 'godlessness, impiety,' and its many concrete manifestations, 'worldly desires.'"⁹ Thus, the grace that saves is also the grace that instructs and motivates us toward greater godliness.

Now, is this not the very thing taught by the Reformers, Luther not the least among them? In a Christmas Sermon based on the third chapter of Titus the German reformer said, "Works never merit heaven, heaven is conferred purely of grace."¹⁰ But then he made the following statement, "Good works are to be performed without any thought of merit, simply for the benefit of one's neighbor and for the honor of God."¹¹

Consequently, according to Luther, works have their place in the Christian life but a "delusive doctrine of works blinds the Christian's eyes, perverts a right understanding of faith and forces him from the way of truth and salvation."¹² Thus, for Luther and those who followed him, Bellarmine's criticism's missed the

proverbial mark. Grace is not license but a righteous life clothed in righteous deeds because it is a life united to Christ. For Luther, it was simple, "No one can do good until he himself is good. He does not become good through works, but his works are good because he is good. He becomes good through the washing of regeneration and in no other way."¹³ The salvation bringing grace of God in Jesus Christ appeared not only to save but to instruct us in godliness. That was the Reformer's understanding because it was the Bible's understanding, but sadly, it was contrary to Cardinal Bellarmine's understanding.

Notes

¹ Jonathan Master (PhD, University of Aberdeen) is professor of theology and dean of the School of Divinity at Cairn University. He is also director of Cairn's Center for University Studies. Dr. Master serves as the Alliance's editorial director, as well as co-host of the *Theology on the Go* podcast.

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³ Tim Bertolet is a graduate of Lancaster Bible College and Westminster Theological Seminary. He is an ordained pastor in the Bible Fellowship Church, currently serving as pastor of Faith Bible Fellowship Church in York, Pa. He is a husband and father of four daughters. You can follow him on Twitter @tim_bertolet.

⁴ Michael Roberts (D.Th., University of South Africa) is the Alliance editor of ThinkandActBiblically.org.

⁵ John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, 1.341-342. Quoted in *John Owen: The Man and His Theology*, ed. Robert W. Oliver (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, and Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2002), 96.

⁶ James Rich (PhD, Westminster Theological Seminary) is the assistant pastor at Covenant Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Harleysville, PA. He has previously taught at a high school, college, and seminary level.

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⁸ Jeffrey Stivason (PhD, Westminster Theological Seminary) is the pastor of Grace Reformed Presbyterian Church in Gibsonia, PA, and editor at Place for Truth. He has been serving the Lord as a minister of the Gospel since 1995 and has planted two churches during that time.

⁹ George W. Knight III, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, New International Greek Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 320.

¹⁰ Martin Luther, *Luther's Christmas Sermons*, vol. 1, (Minneapolis, MN: The Luther Press, 1908), 151.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 151.

¹² *Ibid.*, 152.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 159.



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