



DOCTRINE

by Charles C. Ryrie

Defining God's Sovereign Grace

(Second of two parts)

Sovereign grace is undeserved because of sin. The opposite of grace is merited reward; the opposite of sovereign is enslaved. God displays this grace particularly in salvation.

Sovereign grace is displayed not only by positive declaration and action (see *Doctrine*, July/August issue for Part 1), but also by contrast with enslaving sin (Rom. 3:20,21; 1 Cor. 6:11; Eph. 2:13; 1 Tim. 1:12-14).

The contrast between sin and grace is particularly sharp in Romans 6:23: "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Indeed, this antithesis is the essence and development of the argument presented in the first part of Romans.

Paul traces sin's effects that the benefits of grace would stand out in bold relief, and the argument is climaxed in Romans 5:12-21.

Hebrew terms denoting evil are numerous. In fact, there are more words for evil than for good. There are at least eight basic words: *ra*, bad (Gen. 38:7); *rash*, wickedness (Exod. 2:13); *asham*, guilt (Hos. 4:15); *chata*, sin (Exod. 20:20); *avon*, iniquity (1 Sam. 3:13); *shagag*, err (Isa. 28:7); *taah*, wander away (Ezek. 48:11); *pasha*, rebel (1 Kings 8:50).

Their usage leads to certain conclusions about the doctrine of sin in the Old Testament:

1. Sin is fundamental disobedience to God.

2. While disobedience involves both positive and negative ideas, the emphasis is on the positive commission of wrong, not the negative omission of good. In other words, sin is not simply missing the mark; it's hitting the wrong one.

3. Sin may take many forms, and the Israelite was aware of the particular form that his sin did take.

The New Testament uses 12 basic words to describe sin: *kakos*, bad (Rom. 13:3); *poneros*, evil (Matt. 5:45); *asebes*, godless (Rom. 1:18); *enochos*, guilt (Matt. 5:21); *hamartia*, sin (1 Cor. 6:18); *adikia*, unrighteousness (1 Cor. 6:9); *anomos*, lawlessness (1 Tim. 1:9); *parabates*, transgression (Rom. 5:14); *agnoein*, to be ignorant (Rom. 1:13); *planan*, to go astray (1 Cor. 6:9); *paraptonmai*, to fall away (Gal. 6:1); and *hypocrites*, hypocrite (1 Tim. 4:2).

From the uses of these words, several conclusions may also be drawn:

1. Sin is always committed against a clear standard.

2. Ultimately, all sin is rebellion against God and a transgression of His standards.

3. Evil may assume a variety of forms.

4. Man's responsibility is definite and clearly understood.

Grace in the Bible is displayed against the background of sin. In the Old Testament, grace appeared in specific acts of favor on the part of man toward his fellow man and on the part of God toward man. But grace was never fully revealed until the coming of Christ.

Because testimonies of Scripture, history, and personal experience uniformly indicate that man is sinful, any favor God can show must be by grace. Sin earns death as its reward, unless the unmerited favor of God in the person of Jesus Christ intervenes (Rom. 6:23).

That intervention is twofold: the personal appearance of grace in the incarnation and the individual reception of grace in salvation.

The Blessings of Grace

Grace received in salvation brings certain possessions and positions to the believer. These privileges, which accompany saving grace, have been fully listed by L. S. Chafer. Here, with some revision, is an outline of them:



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The Blessing of Acceptance

The grace of Christ personally received unto salvation brings acceptance with God and is expressed in these ways: 1. redeemed (Rom. 3:24); 2. reconciled (2 Cor. 5:19-21); 3. forgiven (Rom. 3:25); 4. delivered (Col. 1:13); 5. accepted (Eph. 1:6); 6. justified (Rom. 3:24); 7. glorified (Rom. 8:30).

The Blessing of Enablement

The believer's enablement is assured by the following phrases: 1. under grace (Rom. 6:14); 2. freed from the law (2 Cor. 3:6-13); 3. Christ in you (Col. 1:27); 4. circumcised in Christ (Col. 2:11).

The Blessing of Position

The Christian's new position as a recipient of grace is described in a variety of ways: 1. members of a holy and royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:5, 9); 2. citizens of heaven (Phil. 3:20); 3. members of the family of God (Eph. 2:19); 4. a chosen generation, a holy nation, a peculiar people (1 Peter 2:9); 5. adopted (Gal. 4:5); 6. on the rock (1 Cor. 3:11); 7. light in the Lord (Eph. 5:8).

The Blessing of Inheritance

Grace also assures an inheritance for the believer. Facets of it are expressed in the following phrases: 1. complete in Him (Col. 2:9, 10); 2. possessing every spiritual blessing (Eph. 1:3); 3. blessed with the earnest of the Spirit (Eph. 1:14); 4. heirs of heaven (1 Peter 1:4).