

“THE PLACE OF GRACE”

James 4.6 & First Peter 5.5

I am sure some grow weary of my persistent insistence on Church attendance, my relentless prodding and encouraging of people to alter their schedules to accommodate special Church services, as well as my nagging (if you call it that) about Church membership, believer baptism, and involvement in our Church’s discipleship ministry under my oversight as opposed to the evangelical world’s Lone Ranger approach to what they estimate to be ministry without the accountability of pastoral oversight.

To address that mindset, turn to James 4:6 in your Bible, standing when you find that verse for the reading of God’s Word. I would like you to concentrate your attention on the final phrase of the second sentence in that verse:

“God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.”

Now, please, turn to First Peter 5.5, again focusing your attention on the second half of the second sentence in that verse:

“for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.”

There is considerable dispute among commentators concerning the Old Testament passage from which James and the Apostle Peter derived this truth. Some claim they are paraphrasing Genesis 6.3-7, or expressing the sentiment of Exodus 20.5, or perhaps Deuteronomy 32.11-19. Others think the statements are similar to Proverbs 3:34, where Solomon declared that the LORD scorns the scorers but gives grace to the humble. No one disputes that throughout God’s Word is saturated with the principle that God actively resists those who are proud (who resist God-ordained leadership) and that He gives grace only to those who are humble.

If my goal this morning was to deliver an exposition of these two verses, I would first try to thoroughly explain what is meant by God resisting the proud and what it is to be proud and then turn to defining what is meant by God giving grace to the humble and what it is to be humble. However, even a sermon as simple as that would take more than we have time for in one service.

Therefore, to defeat the mindset that we know what we are doing without God’s explicit guidance in Scripture, (remember, “There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof *are* the ways of death,” Proverbs 16.25), I will limit this message from God’s Word to three lines of thought for your consideration:

First, THE NECESSITY OF GRACE

The Greek word translated grace is χάρις. Unbelievers of James and Peter’s day used the word χάρις when referring to that which delighted them, and it is a term found on inscriptions and monuments as a reference to a ruler’s favor.¹ Centuries earlier, during the golden age of Athens, the word was used to refer to the

¹ Gerhard Kittel, Editor, *Theological Dictionary Of The New Testament, Vol XI*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974) pages 373, 375.

“favor” of the gods.² In the Old Testament, the LXX³ uses the word χάρις in Genesis 33.5 to describe God’s gift of children to Jacob as gracious, and, according to Psalm 119.29, the LORD is gracious with the Law.⁴ Throughout the New Testament, of course, grace is intimately connected to God’s favor and the understanding that what God graciously does He does not *have* to do, but does sovereignly.

This understanding of God’s grace, three very simple items related to grace that are profoundly important to grasp:

First, what is called in logic, the Law of the Excluded Middle. As you turn to Romans 11:6, let me assert that there is nothing in the Bible that is illogical. Paradoxical? Yes, but never illogical. There is much that is supra-logical, beyond our grasp of the logical, but nothing found in God’s Word flies in the face of logic or goes against logic. This is a crucial concept to appreciate in light of the irrationality and illogic of non-Christian world views that plague every unbeliever, and is similar to Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Atheism in its various forms like Marxism, Socialism, and Communism. Were you aware that Karl Marx repudiated logic, and that all communists and socialists, at the core of their thinking, deny logic?⁵ No surprise, since the unsaved condition is ultimately illogical. That said, and understanding logic to be rational and therefore governed by immutable laws, we find in Romans 11.6 an example of the Apostle Paul making use of what is called The Law of the Excluded Middle. The formula for this law that almost everyone understands, while being routinely violated by unsaved people, is “Everything is either A or not A.”⁶ How important is this law of logic, this principle of rational thought? It is part of the basis that governs the calculating and decision-making capability for every computer known to man. Violate this law of logic and you are irrational, illogical, and wrong. If you are a computer, you do not function without compliance with this law.

Romans 11.6: “And if by grace, then *is it* no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if *it be* of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.”

Referring to salvation from sins and the establishing of a relationship with God through His Son, Jesus Christ, Paul informed his readers in this verse that *if* salvation is based upon grace (God’s undeserved favor) then it *is not* based upon works (good deeds), but if salvation *is* of works (good deeds) it *is not* by grace. Thus, it is one or the other, not both, A or not A, not a blending of the two.

Now that you see this Law of the Excluded Middle and recognize that salvation is either by grace and not works, or by works and not grace, turn with me to Ephesians 2.5, looking at the phrase enclosed in parentheses: “(by grace ye are saved)”⁷ Let me point out something that is frequently overlooked. Paul’s use here of the perfect passive participle form of the Greek verb for salvation, σώζω, means that not only have believers been saved, and will be saved, but that believers are presently *being* saved.

Thus, the notion that someone who claims to be a Christian and therefore pretends to have been delivered from the penalty of sins, while presuming to anticipate someday being delivered from the presence of sins in

² Ibid., page 374.

³ The Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament.

⁴ Ibid., page 377.

⁵ Ludwig von Mises, *Socialism: An Economic and Sociological Analysis*, (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, Inc., Second Edition, 1981), pages 5-6.

⁶ *Webster’s New Universal Unabridged Dictionary*, (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1996), page 638.

⁷ See also Romans 3.24; 4.16;

heaven, while giving no ongoing evidence of being delivered from the power of sins presently, makes no Scriptural sense whatsoever. It is more than interesting to note that there is only one belief system in existence anywhere in the world that embraces the notion that salvation *is not* the result of work, doing good deeds. Of course, that is the Christian faith as it is revealed in the Word of God, the Bible.

Only Bible Christianity posits that salvation is by grace and not works. Not Hinduism, not Buddhism, not Islam, indeed not socialism, and not even such denominations within 'Christendom' such as Roman Catholicism, the various Greek, Ukrainian, and Russian Orthodox churches, the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Mormons, the Jehovah Witnesses, the so-called Church of Christ, and the 7th Day Adventists. No non-Christian religious faith systems, and not all so-called Christian groups, but only Christianity that recognizes and embraces the Biblical doctrine of salvation by grace, differs from all other worldview positions in asserting that God graciously gives salvation to any person through the Person of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Thus, grace is needed by every sinner who seeks to escape certain damnation and to then know with assurance that he has salvation by ongoing evidence of God's grace in his life. To state the matter another way, grace is something you *must* have and cannot face death without, unless you are resigned to spending all eternity in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone. Deny the existence of God, refuse to deal with Him in the manner He prescribes in His Bible, pretend that you experienced a one-off salvation event without ongoing evidence of a relationship with Christ. You will face death and eternity without the grace you so desperately need.

Next, THE IMPORTANCE OF HUMILITY

Consider, first, the preeminent display of humility in God's Word, the Lord Jesus Christ. Turn with me to Philippians 2.1-8, where the Apostle Paul wrote,

- 1 If *there be* therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies,
- 2 Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, *being* of one accord, of one mind.
- 3 *Let nothing be done* through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.
- 4 Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.
- 5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:
- 6 Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:
- 7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:
- 8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

The word humbled in Philippians 2.8 is the same Greek word as is found in James 4.6, and pertains to being lowly, undistinguished, and of no account.⁸ This is not a description of someone who needs to be recognized, who requires receiving credit, or who craves acknowledgment.

Seeing humility displayed by the Lord Jesus Christ, we now recognize that God has *always* insisted on humility from those who interact with Him.

⁸ Bauer, Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), page 989.

Second Chronicles 7.14: “If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.”

Second Chronicles 34.27: “Because thine heart was tender, and thou didst humble thyself before God, when thou heardest his words against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, and humbledst thyself before me, and didst rend thy clothes, and weep before me; I have even heard *thee* also, saith the LORD.”

Second Chronicles 7.14 shows God’s demand that the nation of Israel humble itself as a first step in seeking God’s blessing for its country. Second Chronicles 34.27 records the LORD’s response to young King Josiah’s humble pleas to God. Contrary to the thinking of many people, humility is not a bad thing, as the Savior humbled Himself. Therefore, what complaint could any sinner have about the urgency of humbling himself? Humility is a necessary attitude, since the absence of humility requires the presence of pride, which God hates to the point of resisting everyone proud.

Third, humility was not only *displayed* by the Savior and *desired* by God, it is also *directed* in Scripture.

Matthew 18.4: “Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”

Matthew 23.12: “And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.”

James 4.10: “Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.”

Why do you suppose the Savior and Scripture are so adamant about the importance and necessity of humility? Read through God’s Word, and you will see that God shares glory with no creature, and therefore has no interest in providing grace to anyone who is proud and who will then claim credit for his own success. Therefore, what role ought humility to play in our decisions to attend or not attend Church services, to serve or not serve in Church ministry, and to avail or not avail ourselves of the means of grace we so desperately need and God sovereignly dispenses via the means He has chosen?

Finally, we see humility *defended*.

Job 22.29: “When *men* are cast down, then thou shalt say, *There is* lifting up; and he shall save the humble person.”

Psalms 9.12: “When he maketh inquisition for blood, he remembereth them: he forgetteth not the cry of the humble.”

Psalms 10.17: “LORD, thou hast heard the desire of the humble: thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear.”

Psalms 69.32-33: ³² The humble shall see *this*, *and* be glad: and your heart shall live that seek God.
³³ For the LORD heareth the poor,”

When people are cast down, when it is time for God to judge each person righteously, He prepares the heart of the humble person, He hears the desire of the humble person, and He saves the humble person. James and Peter sum all of this up when they declare that God gives grace to the humble.

Finally, THE MEANS OF GRACE

“Means of grace” is a phrase frequently used by the Puritans to describe the various mechanisms by which God sovereignly shows favor to sinners; the practices by which sinners are to engage in, by which God shows His favor, and deals with us about spiritual matters. In other words, God ordinarily does not come to a man sitting on a rock doing nothing and suddenly impart grace to him so that he turns from his sins and comes to Jesus Christ by faith. God *usually* works through various means to impart grace for salvation. That said, employing the different means of grace, be it reading Scripture, crying out to God, listening to a Gospel sermon, attending a worship service, or Bible study, must be done with humility.

Let me mention four prominent means of God’s grace:

First, preaching and teaching is a means of grace. Without a doubt, the preaching of God’s Word is the single most important means of grace God *ordinarily* uses to bring about the salvation of a sinner. Consider First Corinthians 1.18 and 21:

- 18 For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it [the preaching of the cross] is the power of God.
- 21 For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.

Romans 10.17 also sheds light on this means of grace:

“So then faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”

However, when God’s Word is preached and taught, it is highly *unlikely* that faith will be imparted by the Spirit when hearing of the Word of God unless the right attitude is present, James 1.21:

“receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.”

Meekness, in this verse, is synonymous with humility and recognizing that “I must have this truth in my life, and without it I am helpless.” With that attitude, then, sitting under the Gospel and hearing God’s Word preached, the Spirit of God imparts faith to respond to the truth, Second Corinthians 4.13. However, *everything* that occurs, the opportunity to hear the truth, the preacher, the teacher, the attitude of the listener, the convicting and faith-imparting work of the Holy Spirit, and even the final response to the Gospel, is a result of God’s grace given by means of preaching. Is that true, and you *still* have no plan to worship with us this evening? Of course, you decide to make. It is also your responsibility to address.

Second, meditating on God’s Word is a means of grace. After His servant Moses died, the LORD said these words to Joshua, in Joshua 1.8:

“This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.”

To excel spiritually, you *must* meditate on God’s Word. That means, of course, that you must first hear or read it. No one does well spiritually who regards God’s Word lightly. However, more is needed than that. You must ponder, reflect, consider, turn it over in your mind, and chew on it like a cow chews its cud. No one does this who is proud, since only the humble see their need of God’s blessing, value the importance of God’s Word, and recognize how utterly each of us depends upon God. Memorize? That is good, but it is *not* meditating on the Word. Meditating is more important than memorizing. Memorizing hides God’s Word in your mind, while meditating fixes God’s Word in your heart (Psalm 119:11).

Third, prayer is a means of imparting God's grace. Prayer is pleading with God, asking of God, begging from God. Prayer is never only a conversation with God. If you are an unbeliever, there is no guarantee that God will hear you, unless you humble yourself, as we saw earlier. What is prayer? Prayer is an appeal to God to provide or to supply something to you or for you that you cannot supply on your own. It is not asking God to help you, really, so much as it is asking God to do something that you cannot possibly do yourself or do for yourself. Additionally, prayer, real prayer, heartfelt prayer, is itself a humbling of oneself before God. Therefore, whether you have a guarantee of being answered or not, by what right does any creature presume to stand proudly before God? So much the better, then, for every person who humbles himself before God by means of prayer. As Isaiah 55.6 declares,

“Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near.”

This verse implies what is found elsewhere in God's Word, that God is not always accessible by means of prayer. Therefore, you need to get to it while you can. The Lord Jesus Christ prayed often. The Apostles were all men of prayer. Paul directed the new believers in Thessalonica to “Pray without ceasing,” First Thessalonians 5.17. In Hebrews 4.16, believers are strongly urged to pray:

“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”

What pride is exhibited to the great cloud of witnesses by any of God's creatures who think they have no need to obtain from God through prayer what they do not have but desperately need: grace.

Finally, and perhaps surprisingly to some, conversation and discussion can be a means of grace. Despite what some people fancy to be true to avoid making courageous decisions, you are affected by who you talk to, who you hang around, the kind of conversations you expose yourself to. In First Corinthians 15.33, Paul pointedly told the Corinthians,

“Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.”

Who you hang around influences you. With that in mind, consider Ephesians 4.29:

“Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.”

Paul encouraged Church members in Ephesus to minister grace to those who heard them. Just as important, however, is the person on the receiving end to ensure you hear the right person talking, who seeks to bless you with what they say. Why so? Because a person can either minister grace to you and thereby bless you, or minister error and rebellion and disharmony and wickedness to you and thereby curse you. Consider those who encourage pride and self-sufficiency. Reflect on those who are rebellious and opposed to the Gospel. Do you not think they will influence your thought life and affect your willingness to humble yourself in the sight of God?

We human beings like to think we are logical and rational in our decision-making, but the truth is that we are frequently the most irrational of creatures. We fly in the face of reality for utterly laughable reasons, and we usually do so because of pride.

Cain had no illusions about the power and majesty of Almighty God. Yet, he refused to offer up an acceptable sacrifice to God, complained when his sacrifice was rejected, slew his younger brother Abel, and then bellyached that God's punishment of him was more than he could bear. Does any of that sound reasonable, rational, or logical, or was it example after example of pride in action?

Moses confronted Pharaoh with demands to allow the Jewish population that he had enslaved, but was fearful of, to leave. Miracle after miracle occurred in an astonishing display of God's power over ten of Egypt's false gods.

There was no denying the might of the one true and living God that Moses served, yet Pharaoh still hardened his heart, broke his word about allowing the Jewish people to leave, and doomed his army in a failed attempt to follow the Israelites through the parted waters of the Red Sea. Does any of that sound logical, or was it example after example of pride in action?

The Amalekites, the Moabites, the Canaanites, the Philistines, the Assyrians, all fell to the God of the Israelites after knowing what He had done to preserve His people from annihilation by the Egyptians. Why did they take the foolish courses of action they followed to their destruction? Were their decisions rational, logical, or in any way reasonable? No, they were, in each instance, motivated by pride rather than humility.

On an individual level, consider such men as Nebuchadnezzar in the Old Testament and Saul of Tarsus in the New Testament. Both men, of great pride and arrogance, were humbled by God in each case: Nebuchadnezzar through temporary madness and Saul of Tarsus by the personal appearance of the glorified Savior. Each man, once humbled, was then graciously dealt with by God, culminating in their conversions.⁹

However, it is far more the case with most individuals that God providentially works in their lives to bring about a humble mind and heart, so they will be kindly disposed to listen to the truth that Christ promised would set men free. There are as many different ways this is brought about as there are individuals whose lives are transformed by the Gospel. The two necessary factors, however, are always present: humility and grace.

Do you see the necessity of grace, God's grace? Apart from God's grace, no sinner's sins can be forgiven, no eternal life can be given, and no blessings for the living of life after conversion are granted. Every good and perfect gift comes from God, yet God has no obligation to bless us so. That He does bless us is a token of His grace.

However, there is grace associated with sunshine and rain, good health and sufficient employment, lovable kids and freedom to live your life without much interference. That is one kind of grace that is extended to pretty much everyone. Another type of grace is way more important, because it is associated with salvation from your sins, new life in Christ, and an eternity in heaven instead of the lake of fire.

That grace, that specific grace that has to do with salvation and cleansing and growth as a Christian, is withheld from the proud while made available to the humble. What kind of person are you?

Do you recognize no need of God, no requirement for your sins to be forgiven, and no cause for regret after neglecting God and not fearing Him? Is your life one of self-centered satisfaction from doing your own thing?

That, my friend, is pride and not humility. Humility recognizes that God made you with a purpose in mind, while also acknowledging your inability to achieve that purpose on your own. Humility recognizes that you are helpless, hopeless, and that you stand in harm's way without the protection and provision of the Savior, Jesus Christ.

Will you humble yourself to accept that God's Word is true, that sin damns the soul, and that Jesus Christ is the only Savior of sinful men's souls? Only the Lord Jesus ever claimed to be the Savior. Only Christianity has ever claimed that salvation is by grace, meaning anyone can be saved so long as they are humble enough to receive God's grace.

Therefore, only Jesus Christ saves, yet He only saves by God's grace to you who are humble. Humility is the place where God's grace is found.

⁹ Daniel 4; Acts 9.1-18