

November 15, 2020

TIME OF REFLECTION

“The grace of God is love freely shown towards guilty sinners, contrary to their merit and indeed in defiance of their demerit. It is God showing goodness to persons who deserve only severity and had no reason to expect anything but severity.... [G]race means so little to some... because they do not share the beliefs about God and man which it presupposes.”

“Grace is free in that it of self-originated, and of proceeding from One who was free not to be gracious.”

~J.I. Packer (1926-2020), English-born theologian

“[I]f God were not angry at injustice...and did not make the final end to violence, God would not be worthy of our worship.... My thesis that the practice of nonviolence requires a belief in divine vengeance will be unpopular with many Christians, especially theologians in the West.... [But] I suggest imagining that you are delivering a lecture in a war zone (which is where a paper that underlies this chapter was originally delivered). Among your listeners are people whose...villages have been first plundered, then burned, and leveled to the ground, whose daughters and sisters have been raped, whose fathers and brothers have had their throats slit.... The topic of the lecture: a Christian attitude toward violence. The thesis: we should not retaliate since God is perfect noncoercive love. Soon you would discover that it takes the quiet of a suburban home for the birth of the thesis that human nonviolence corresponds to God’s refusal to judge. In a scorched land, soaked in the blood of the innocent, it will invariably die. And as one watches it die, one will do well to reflect about many other pleasant captivities of the liberal mind.”

~Miroslav Volf, Croatian-born theologian, professor at Yale

“The people who heard Jesus’ disciples proclaiming the Good News were as impressed by what they saw [Christian love in action] as by what they heard.... Conventional love is evoked by lovable qualities in the beloved, but the love people encountered from Christ embraced sinners and outcasts, Samaritans and enemies. It gave, not prudentially in order to receive, but because giving was its nature.”

~Huston Smith (1919-2016), former chair of the Philosophy Department at MIT

“The generous will prosper;
those who refresh others will themselves be refreshed.”

~Proverbs 11:25 (NLT)

“We deserved death, wrath, and hell forever. Jesus took our liability.... Jesus drank our hell.”

~Conrad Mbewe, Zambian pastor

Worship through the Word

SERMON – “The Grace of God”

– Rev. Don Willeman, Lead Pastor of Christ Redeemer Church of Hanover, NH

SERMON PASSAGE – *selected passages from Ephesians 1 and 2 (NIV)*

Ephesians 1

³Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. ⁴For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— ⁶to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. ⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace ⁸that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, ⁹he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, ¹⁰to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

¹¹In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will...

Ephesians 2

¹As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ²in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. ⁴But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— ⁹not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.