

The Free Grace of God Exalted in the Character of St. Paul.

by John Gill

The apostle Paul's life and ministry were a testament to the free grace of God, which chose and gifted him for His purposes.

Scripture: Acts 26:16, 1 Corinthians 15:10

Topics: "Transformation in Christ", "Grace Of God"

Description

John Gill preaches on the profound impact of God's grace as exemplified in the life of the Apostle Paul. He emphasizes that Paul's transformation from a persecutor of Christians to a devoted apostle was solely due to God's grace, highlighting that all of Paul's achievements and identity were rooted in this divine favor. Gill illustrates that humility and recognition of one's unworthiness are essential in understanding the grace of God, which empowers believers to live righteously and fulfill their calling. The sermon serves as a reminder that every aspect of a believer's life, including their faith and good works, is a result of God's grace, urging the congregation to give glory to God for all they are and do.

Transcript

The Free Grace of God Exalted In The Character

Of The Apostle Paul

Occasioned by the Death of Mr. John Brine, Baptist Minister. Preached at St. Albans, Hertfordshire,

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But by the grace of God, I am what I am. --1 Corinthians 15:10

The apostle is treating in the context of the important doctrine of the resurrection of Christ from the dead: he asserts, that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures, which foretold he should rise, and as in fact he did; of this he produces ocular testimonies, as that "he was seen after his resurrection of Cephas, that is, Peter, and then of the twelve apostles; next of above five hundred brethren at once; after that of James, then of all the apostles; and last of all he was seen by himself."

And it seems by his own account, that he was seen by him more than once; as at his conversion, when a light shone around him, and he not only heard the voice of Christ, but he appeared to him, and made him a minister and witness of what he saw and heard, and of what should hereafter be made known unto him; nor was he, as he says, disobedient to the heavenly vision (Acts 26:16, 19); when he was "caught up into the third heaven, and heard and saw things unspeakable, and not lawful to be uttered ;" Which might be at the time of his conversion also: he doubtless had a sight of Christ in his human nature, as risen and ascended to heaven; and after all this, when he was come to Jerusalem again, and was praying in the temple, he fell into a trance; and, says he, I saw him (Acts 22:17, 18), meaning Christ, as well as heard the commission, instructions, and directions, he gave him; when he was as one born out of due time; which is not to be understood of him literally and in a natural sense, as if he was born before his time, of which we have no where any intimation, but figuratively: and the allusion is either, as some think, to a posthumous birth, the birth of one after the death of his father, to which there was something similar in the apostle's case.

The rest of the apostles were called unto and invested with the office of an apostle whilst Christ, their everlasting Father, was here on earth; but the apostle was invested with it after his death, and resurrection from the dead: or rather, the allusion is to an abortive or untimely birth, which has never seen the sun, nor known any thing; and is not known, has no name, and is of no account: this figurative phrase is explained by what follows, for I am the least of the apostles; and it is no wonder that he should call himself the least of the apostles, when he elsewhere says, that he was less than the least of all saints (Eph. 3:8); for if less than the least of all saints, he must be the least of the apostles; though, when he was traduced by the false teachers, and his character impeached, and the gospel and interest of Christ were like to suffer by those means, he exerted himself and magnified his office; and asserted, that he was not a whit behind the very chiefest of the apostles (2 Cor. 11:5; 12:11); though he here adds, that am not meet to be called an apostle; as indeed no one was; none are meet or deserving of themselves to be members of gospel-churches, to have a place and a name there better than that of sons and daughters; nor to be ordinary ministers of the word, and still less to be the apostles of Jesus Christ.

The reason given why he entertained such low and mean thoughts of himself, is, because, says he, I persecuted the church of God; of which, much notice is taken by the divine historian, that the grace of God in the conversion of the apostle, might be set off with a greater foil; it is observed that "the clothes of those that stoned Stephen were laid at his feet to be kept by him; that he was consenting to the death of Stephen; that he made havoc of the church, haling men and women to prison; that he breathed out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of Christ, and desired and took letters of the high priest, empowering him to take up any at Damascus he found in the Christian way, and to bring them to Jerusalem;" (Acts 7:58; 8:1, 3; 9:1, 2) and, according to his own account, he gave his voice against them, when put to death, punished them in every synagogue; compelled them to blaspheme, and persecuted them to strange cities, being exceeding mad against them (Acts 26:10, 11).

Now the sense of all this evil dwelt upon his mind, remained with him, and kept him humble all his days, amidst all his grace, gifts, attainments and usefulness. So every saint has something or other to keep him humble, indwelling sin, or Satan's temptations, or afflictions in the world; and then follow the words first read, but by the grace of God I am what I am; be I what I am, greater or lesser, as a man, a saint, a minister, and an apostle, I am just such an one as it is the will of God I should be; by his grace I am what I am.

Two things I observe from hence: That the apostle was something, not a mere non-entity, he had a being, and was in some circumstances; which is supposed and implied in the phrase, I am what I am. That be that something he was, what it may, that he was by the grace of God. I. That the apostle was something; he had an existence and was in circumstances, on many accounts, not mean and despicable. There is a sense indeed in which he was nothing, and which he himself observes, though I be nothing (2 Cor. 12:11); not absolutely, he was a man, had the integral parts of a man, a body and a soul; a body consisting of flesh, blood and bones; and though of the earth earthly, sprung out of the dust, and would return to dust: again, yet was something, and would be even in that state; for dust is something: and besides he had a rational soul, possessed of intellectual powers and faculties; a spirit immaterial and immortal, and of more worth than a world; for what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? (Matthew 16:16).

But in a comparative sense he was nothing, that is, when compared with God, the everlasting I AM, the fountain of being, the Being of beings: so some things in comparison of others that are greatly more excellent, are represented as non-entities; thus earthly riches, when compared with the durable, solid and substantial riches of grace and glory, are said to be that which is not (Prov. 23:6); in like manner, the duration of a creature, in comparison of the eternity of God, is nothing.

Mine age, says David, is as nothing before thee (Ps. 39:5); not to be mentioned with his days and years, which are throughout all generations and without beginning; men of the greatest name and figure are not to be spoken of with him; and not only single individuals, but even all nations before him are as nothing; and could there be any thing less than nothing, they would be that; they are counted to him less than nothing and vanity (Isa. 40:17). Moreover the apostle was nothing, of no account and esteem with the men of the world, particularly with the false teachers; with respect to whom he says, what has been before referred to, though I be nothing; that is, in the opinion of the false teachers, who vilified him, and endeavored to make him contemptible in the eyes of others; and which is not to be wondered at, since Christ himself was despised and rejected of men, or ceased from being a man, from being reckoned in the class of men, a worm, and no man, in their esteem; and so all his followers are accounted as the filth of the world, and the offscouring of all things.

Add to this, that the apostle was nothing in his own eyes; he reckoned himself the chief of sinners, and less than the least of all saints; and, generally speaking, those that have the most grace and the greatest gifts, and are of the greatest usefulness, are the most humble, and think the most meanly of themselves. So those boughs and branches of trees, that are most richly laden with fruit, bend downwards, and hang lowest. But notwithstanding all this, the apostle was something, I am what I am; not as the false teachers, and vain boasters of their knowledge and gifts, who, thought they were something when they were nothing; and fancied they knew something, when they knew nothing as they ought to know; not like Simon Magus, who gave out that himself was some great one (Acts 8:9); had great knowledge of things, had great power, and could do great and wonderful feats, when he was nothing; nothing in grace, for notwithstanding his profession of faith, he was in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity; nothing in knowledge of divine things, he knew nothing spiritually and experimentally; nor in gifts, and therefore offered money that he might be possessed of the gifts of the Spirit, and of power to confer them on others: but our apostle was something in grace; there was a principle of grace and holiness in him, and an abundance of grace bestowed on him; there was some good thing in him towards the Lord God of Israel; the root of the matter was in him; he was no sounding brass, nor tinkling cymbal.

He was something in knowledge, divine, spiritual, and evangelical; he knew much of the person, offices and grace of Christ; of the mysteries of grace, and doctrines of the gospel; perhaps more than any mere man besides himself ever did: ye may understand, says he, my knowledge in the mystery of Christ (Eph.3:4); and, which was very great: he was something in gifts, he was endued with extraordinary gifts; in nothing, in no gift was he behind the very chiefest apostles; truly the signs of an apostle were wrought by him every where, in wonders and mighty deeds (2 Cor. 12:11, 12); and was of more extensive usefulness in preaching the Gospel, converting sinners, and planting churches, than any other whatever.

I will not dare, says he, to speak of any of those things which Christ hath not wrought by me, to make the Gentiles obedient by word and deed, through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God (Rom. 15:18, 19). He was also something, and very high indeed, in the esteem and account of God and Christ; he was a chosen vessel to bear his name before the Gentiles (Acts 9:15): and so all Christ's faithful ministers, on whom he has bestowed gifts and grace, and makes more or less useful, are something in his account; they are held as stars in his right hand: and indeed all his people are precious in his sight; his Hephzibah in whom he delights, his Beulah to whom he is married, his jewels, his peculiar treasure, his portion, and the lot of his inheritance.

II. Let that something the apostle was be what it may, that he was by the grace of God; that is, by the good-will and pleasure of God; in which sense this phrase is often to be understood, both in the Old and in the New Testament: when Noah is said to find grace in the eyes of the Lord (Gen. 6:8); the meaning is, that he enjoyed the free favor and good-will of God, and was well-pleasing and acceptable in his sight; and whatever distinguishing blessing he had, he had it through the grace and good-will of God, and not through any merits of his own: and so in the New Testament, whenever salvation, and the several parts of it, are ascribed to the grace of God, as, by grace ye are saved (Eph. 2:8), and the like, it is always to be understood of the unmerited favor and sovereign will and good pleasure of God; and in this sense are we to understand it here.

And for the farther illustration of it, I shall endeavor to shew that what the apostle was, and so what any other man is, as a man, as a minister, and as a saint, that they are by the grace and favor of God. First, What the apostle was as a man, was owing to the good-will and pleasure of God. And so is what any man is as such. God gives life and breath and being to all his creatures; thou hast granted me life and favor (Job 10:12), says Job; to have life and being in this world, is owing to a grant from God; and that grant is a favor, owing to the good-will and pleasure of God: the spirit of God has made me, says one of Job's friends, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life (Job 33:4); life, in the first spring of it, is a gift of God; and the continuance of it depends on his will and pleasure: his visitation preserves the spirits of men; he upholds their souls in life; in him they live, move, and have their being; and whether their continuance in life is longer or shorter, it is just as his sovereign will and pleasure is; it is through his good hand upon them, that they remain in being in this world so long as they do.

All the mercies of life are from God; hence he is called, the father of mercies (2 Cor. 1:3): and there are many and various, and are continually repeated; they are new every morning, and continue all the day, and are renewed every day; and having food and raiment, we should not only be therewith content, but be thankful for them; since, as good old Jacob says, we are not worthy of the least of all the mercies shewed us; not of the least morsel of bread we eat, nor of the clothes we wear: and how sensible of the divine goodness was that patriarch to the last; and how thankful for it?

The God that fed me all my life long until this day -- bless the lads (Gen. 32:10). Some have a greater affluence of the good things of this life than others; more they have than they can make use of themselves, and which are given them for the relief of others; these are wisdom's left-hand-blessings. When David and his princes offered to largely and so willingly towards the building of the temple, he acknowledges it was all of God, both the ability and the willing mind; Riches and honor come of thee--Who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort!

For all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee! (1 Chron. 29:13, 14). Riches are the property of God, he gives and takes them away at his pleasure, and this he does to shew his sovereignty; he made Job the greatest man in all the east for wealth and worldly substance, and in one day stripped him of it all; The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away (Job 1:3, 21); it is all according to his good pleasure. All the endowments of the mind, the natural parts and abilities of men, their intellectual and reasoning powers and faculties, are of God; There is a spirit in man, a rational spirit, and that is of God, a gift of his to men: The inspiration of the almighty, giveth them understanding (Job 32:8); which distinguishes men from brutes, and gives them the pre-eminence to them; for God is he, who teacheth us more than the beasts of the earth, and maketh us wiser than the fowls of heaven (Job 35:11).

Now whatever the apostle had of this kind, as well as of other things, it was through the favor and good-will of God: as he certainly was a man of great natural abilities, of strong reasoning powers, his enemies themselves being witnesses; his letters, say they, are weighty and powerful (2 Cor. 10:10); written in a masculine style, and full of strong nervous reasonings and arguments, they were not able to answer. Secondly, What he was as a minister and an apostle, was through the favor and good-will of God; he did not become one of himself, through his own attainments, or by any merits of his; for he before says, he was not meet to be called an Apostle; nor was he made a minister of the gospel, or an apostle, by man; this he disavows: Paul an apostle, not of man, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father; the commission and qualifications he had as such, were not of men, but of God; the gospel he preached, the doctrines of it he delivered, and the instructions he had for that purpose, were not after men, neither received he them of men, nor was he taught them but by the revelation of Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:1, 11, 12): it was not owing to his education, to his being brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, and instructed in all the learning of those times, which qualified him for a minister of the word; this served only to make him a keener adversary, and a more bitter enemy to Christ and his gospel.

Whenever he speaks of his being put into the ministry, he attributes it to the grace and favor of God; making mention of the gospel, he adds, whereof I was made a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given unto ME, by the effectual working of his power: unto ME, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given; that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ (Eph. 3:7, 8): and that he was an extraordinary minister; an apostle of Christ, he ascribes to the grace of God; by whom we have received grace and apostleship (Rom. 1:5); that is, grace to make us apostles, and to qualify for that office, and ordinary ministers of the word become such through gifts, which Christ, their ascended Lord and King, has received for men, and gives to men; and which gifts are of grace and free favor dispensed to whomsoever he pleases; to some more, and others less, but all of grace: having gifts differing according to the grace that is given us; whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith (Rom. 12:6): and again, as every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God (1 Pet. 4:10); so that whatever any one is as a minister of the word, he is so by the gift of grace, by the free grace and favor of God, Thirdly, What the apostle was as a saint, he was by the grace of God, as every saint is; what distinguishes a saint from a

sinner, or one man from another, is entirely owing to the grace and free favor of God. 1.

Was the apostle a chosen vessel, not only to preach the gospel, but chosen to grace here and glory hereafter, as he undoubtedly was; he often puts himself among the chosen ones; thus, speaking of the vessels of mercy afore prepared unto glory, he adds, by way of explanation, even us whom he hath called (Rom. 9:24); and in another place, according as he hath chosen us in him, before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love (Eph. 1:4): this he was by the grace of God, as all the chosen ones be; for. they are chosen, not for any good works done by them, or foreseen to be done by them.; for the act of election passed before any were done by them, and without respect to any; for the children not being yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth (Rom. 9:11): besides good works are the fruits and effects of election, and therefore cannot be the cause of it; we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained, that we should walk in them (Eph. 2:10): to which add, that they are the evidences of election unto others; hence that exhortation of the apostle, give diligence to make your calling and election sure (2 Pet.1:10); not election by calling, though the latter is an evidence of the former, since both are to be made sure; and therefore must be by some third thing, and that is good works; by which there are made not sure in themselves; nor sure to the saints, but to the world; which give to them a certain evidence that the saints are, what they profess to be, the chosen and called of God; and is the best evidence they are capable of giving to the world of those things, and of their receiving from them.

Nor is it owing to the holiness of men, either internal or external, that any are chosen to eternal life. Men are chosen, not because they are holy, but that they should be holy and without blame; they are chosen not for, but through sanctification of the spirit (Eph. 1:4); they are chosen to it as an end, and through it as a mean, and it is insured by election. And so far is this doctrine from being a licentious one, as it is ignorantly traduced by some, that it is the source and spring of all real holiness that has been in the world since the fall of Adam; had not God referred to himself a remnant according to the election of grace, the whole world had been as Sodom and Gomorrah, both for sin and for punishment; there would have been no such thing as holiness among the sons of Adam.

Nor is the choice of men owing to their faith; they are chosen not for their belief, but through the belief of the truth, through faith in Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life: faith is the fruit and effect of election, and is secured, and ascertained by it; as many as were ordained unto eternal life believed (Acts 8:48); hence faith, is called the faith. of God's elect (Titus 1:1), because it is a consequent of their election, and is peculiar to them. It remains that men are what they are, as chosen ones, not by any thing: of theirs, but by the grace, favor, and good-will of God; hence this act of God is called the election of grace, on which the apostle argues in this strong and nervous manner; if by grace, then it is no more of works; otherwise grace is no more grace:--for grace is not grace, unless it is altogether free; but if it be of works, then it is no more grace; otherwise work is no more work (Rom. 11:5, 6); to blend and confound them together, is to destroy the nature and use of both. 2.

Was the apostle an adopted sort of God? this he was by the grace of God; which is the next spiritual blessing that follows election, in that famous first chapter of the epistle to the Ephesians; and where the apostle ranks himself among those that are predestinated to the adoption of children, and which he ascribes to the good will and pleasure of God; having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will (Eph. 1:5).

None are the children of God through any merits of their own, for they are by nature children of wrath, as others (Eph. 2:3); there is no reason or motive in them that should move the Lord to put them among the children; it need not be wondered at to hear him say, how shall I put thee among the children, so unlovely, so unworthy! but it is amazing what follows, thou shalt call me my Father, and not turn away from me (Jer. 3:19). In civil adoption there is commonly something in the adopted, or relative to it, that induces the adopter to take the step he does; there are but two instances of this kind in scripture, I think, and they both suggest something of this nature; the one is the adoption of Moses by Pharaoh's daughter, of whom it is said, that he was a goodly child, exceeding fair and lovely to look upon, which attracted the affections of the princess, as well as its case and circumstances moved her compassion; the other is the adoption of Esther by Mordecai, of whom it is remarked, that the maid was fair and beautiful, and besides was a relation of Mordecai; but in the case of divine adoption, there is nothing lovely and amiable in the adopted, but all the reverse, like the wretched infant cast out in the open field to the loathing of its person in the day it was born (Ezek. 16:5); wherefore the apostle John breaks forth in this pathetic manner, in the view of this amazing blessing; Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God! (1 John 3:4), it is by the unmerited love, free favor and good-will of God, that saints are what they are in this sense; by the grace of God in predestination to this blessing, which, as before observed, is according to the good pleasure of his will; by the grace of God in the covenant, which is a covenant of grace, ordered in all things and sure, full of all spiritual blessings, called the sure mercies of David, because they flow from the grace, mercy, and favor of God in Christ; in which this blessing of grace, adoption, is provided and secured; and which runs thus, without any condition required; I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty (2 Cor. 6:18): it is also by and through the grace of Christ, who has redeemed his that were under the law, that they might receive the adoption of children (Gal. 4:5), as a free-grace-gift; and to as many as receive him, that is, believe in him, he gives power, right and privilege, to become the sons of God (John 1:12); and it is by the grace of the Spirit that this blessing is manifested, applied, and bore witness to, who is therefore called the Spirit of adoption. (Rom. 8:15). 3.

Was the apostle redeemed by Christ? as without doubt he was, and he had the faith of assurance of interest in this blessing of redemption; which stands next in order to election and adoption, in the above mentioned chapter, and where the apostle puts himself among the redeemed ones, in whom we have redemption through his blood (Eph. 1:7); this he was by the grace of God; for though redemption is by the blood of Christ, it is according to the riches of God's grace; though it cost Christ dear, his blood and life, it is free to the redeemed; it is without money and without price to them; it was the free grace of God that provided Christ to be the Redeemer and Savior, called him to this work, appointed him to do it, and promised him as such; it was owing to the grace of God that he was sent in the fullness of time to redeem men; at his incarnation, the first step to it, the angels sung, peace on earth, good-will to men (Luke 2:14); the love, grace, favor and good-will of God, are in a most wonderful manner displayed in the mission of Christ to obtain redemption for men.

God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that is, to be the Savior of men; in this was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him; herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins (John 3:16; 1 John 4:9, 10); it is owing to the grace, favor and good-will of God to men, that Christ was delivered up for them, into the hands of justice and death; it was by the grace of God he tasted death for every man (Heb. 2:9); that is, suffered death for every one of the sons he brings to glory, for every one of the brethren he is not ashamed to own, for every one of the children given unto

him, as appears from the context.

As Abraham showed his love to God in not withholding his son, his only son, his beloved son; so God has shewn his love, favor and good-will to men; in not sparing, but sending and giving his own, his only begotten son, his well-beloved son, to suffer and die for them, in order to redeem them and to be a redeemed, one, is an instance of distinguishing grace; for they that are redeemed, are redeemed from among men, out of every kindred, tongue, people and nation; so that by the grace of God they are what they are. 4.

Was the apostle a justified person? as he certainly was; he was so by the grace of God; not by any works or merits of his: these he disclaims; for I know nothing by myself, yet am I not hereby justified (1 Cor. 4:4); though he was not conscious of any unfaithfulness in his ministry, yet this was not the matter of his justification before God; nay had he been unconscious of any sin then in him, or done by him, he knew he could not be justified thereby from former sins committed by him; and therefore he desired to be found in Christ, not having his own righteousness, which is of the law, but the righteousness which is of God by faith (Phil. 3:9); the righteousness of Christ, which is imputed of God, and received by faith: if men, Abraham, or any other, were justified by works, they would have whereof to glory; but boasting is excluded in the article of justification, not by the law of works, but by the doctrine of faith.

Justification cannot be by works, because they are imperfect; and if a justifying righteousness was by them, the death of Christ would be in vain, and the grace of God frustrated; but it is safest to conclude with the apostle, that a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the law (Rom. 3:28); and who always ascribes justification, so the free grace of God. In one place he says, being justified by his grace; and as if it was not strongly enough expressed, he elsewhere says, being justified freely by his grace (Titus 3:7); grace moved God to send his Son to bring in everlasting righteousness, and Christ to work it out; God of his grace imputes it to his people, without works; and faith by which they receive it, is a free-grace-gift of his; and they that receive the gift of righteousness, receive abundance of grace in it and with it. 5.

Was the apostle a pardoned sinner? of which there can be no question; this he was, not through any merit of his, but by the grace of God; I obtained mercy, says he, that is, pardoning grace and mercy, even though he had been a blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious; and he expresses the abundance of grace displayed herein, the grace of our Lord, adds he, was exceeding abundant with faith and love, which is Christ Jesus (1 Tim. 1:13, 14): pardon of sin, though through the blood of Christ which was shed for it, yet is according to the riches of grace; all that are pardoned, are pardoned, not through any deservings, of theirs, for all alike have sinned, and all the world is become guilty before God; and the law pronounces condemnation and death without mercy; if any are pardoned it is by the grace of God through the blood and sacrifice of Christ: nor even for their repentance and humiliation; truly gracious souls do repent of sin, and are humble for it; but this is not the cause of their pardon; what of this kind is most genuine and evangelical, flows from a sense of pardon applied; first, souls look to Christ by faith for pardon though his blood, and then they mourn for sins pardoned; and never do they mourn better and more kindly, or are more ashamed and confounded because of their sins, than when they are most satisfied that God is pacified towards them for all that they have done: nor is it owing to their confession of sin, and depart me from it, that any are pardoned.

Such who have received the grace of God in truth, will confess their sins and depart from them, and such receive mercy, but not as the cause of it; but pardoning mercy with God is used as a motive to forsake sin (Isa. 55:7). And though when men confess their sins, god is just and faithful to forgive them their sins, yet it

is not on account of their confession, but on account of the blood of his Son, that his justice and faithfulness appear in the forgiveness of it. Forgiveness of sin is always attributed to the multitude of mercy in God, to the tender mercy of our God, to the riches of his grace, and to the covenant of his grace, in which this blessing is provided (Heb. 8:12; Ps. 51:1; Luke 1:78; Eph. 1:7). 6.

Was the apostle regenerated, called, converted, sanctified? it was all by the grace of God; and so the regeneration, vocation, conversion and sanctification of every one. Regeneration is necessary to salvation; it is in this way God saves his people, and without it none can see nor enter into the kingdom of heaven; and this is not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of men, but of God; of the will, power, and grace of God, who of his own will, of his sovereign good-will and pleasure, begets men with the word of truth (John 1:13; Jam. 1:18): effectual vocation is of grace; the apostle ascribes his calling to grace, when it pleased God--who called me by his grace (Gal. 1:15); and whoever are called, are called with an holy calling, not according to their works, but according to his (God's) purpose and grace given them in Christ Jesus before the world began (2 Tim. 1:9).

Conversion is not by might or power of men, but by the Spirit of the Lord, by his mighty and efficacious grace; they are turned when he turns them, and not before. Sanctification is by the Spirit of God, and not by the will of men: if any are partakers of sanctification, and of the several parts of it, it is by the grace of God: have any repentance unto life unto salvation, which needeth not to be repented of, it is a grant from God, a gift of Christ, who is exalted as a Prince and a Savior, to give repentance unto Israel (Acts 11:18; 5:31).

God may give men space to repent, but if he does not give them grace to repent, they never will. No means whatever are sufficient of themselves; not the greatest mercies; if any thing, one would think, the goodness of God would lead men to repentance, but it does not; nor the severest judgments, as famine, pestilence, the sword, etc. For notwithstanding these, men return not to the Lord (Amos 4:6-11). The most awakening ministry, such as that of John the Baptist, who preached the doctrine of repentance, will not be effectual of itself, as facts shew; and indeed, unless God, by his powerful and efficacious grace, takes away the stony heart, and gives an heart of flesh, no man will repent of his sins: faith in Christ is the gift of God, and not of a man's self; it is given to men to believe; nor can any come to Christ, that is, believe in him, unless it is given him of the Father; and hope, when it is a good one, firm and sure and well sounded, it is given, and given through grace (Eph. 2:8; 2 Thess. 2:16); and the same maybe said of every grace of the Spirit, and of every part and branch of sanctification, which is begun in grace, and is completed by it. 7.

Did the apostle conduct his life, conversation, and walk, becoming the character he bore as an apostle, a minister, and a saint? this was by the grace of God, and to it he ascribes it; our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-wards (2 Cor. 1:12); and it is the grace of God that teaches and enables the saints to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world (Titus 2:11, 12); and if men persevere in faith and holiness unto the end, it is to be ascribed to the grace and power of God, by which they are kept through faith unto salvation.

In a word, it is by the grace of God saints are what they are; by the grace of God they have what they have; and by the grace of God they do what they do. Wherefore, 1). Let us give the glory of all we have, are, and do, to the grace of God: the end God has in all he does, in things spiritual, and relative to our salvation, is the glory of his grace (Eph. 1:6); and our concern should be, as much as in us lies, that this

end be answered; and therefore not unto ourselves, to any works, merits, and deserts of ours, but to the grace of God, be all the glory. 2).

Let us endeavor to hold fast the doctrines of grace, whereby the glory of the grace of God is maintained; for men may fail of the grace of God (Heb. 12:15), that is, of the doctrines of grace; may come short of them, drop and deny them; for whoever seek for justification and salvation by the works of the law, are fallen from grace (Gal. 5:4), that is, from the doctrine of grace; for from the love and favor of God in his heart, and from the grace of God implanted in the hearts of his people, there can be no falling. 3).

Let us take care that the grace of God is not received in vain (2 Cor. 6:1); that is, the gospel of the grace of God, which may be received and professed in vain, when the professors of it are not careful to adorn the doctrine of God their Savior, by a becoming life and conversation; and when they turn the grace of God, the doctrines of it into lasciviousness, and abuse it to wicked purposes. 4). Let us, such who are truly partakers of the grace of God, be encouraged to expect glory; for to whomsoever God gives grace he gives glory; these are inseparably connected together: whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified, and whom he justified, them he also glorified: (Rom. 8:30) what we now are, we are by the grace of God; but it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we should be looking, waiting for, and expecting the appearance of Christ, when we shall be like him, and see him as he is (1 John 3:2). Note:

The reason why this Sermon is placed among the Funeral Discourses, is, that it was first preached on account of the death of the Reverend Mr. John Brine. But as he had left directions not to have any Funeral Sermon preached for him, the character then given of this great and good man was obliged to be but short: The following is the substance of what was then delivered:--I am debarred from saying so much of him, as otherwise I could do, we both having been born in the same place, and myself some years older than him, and from his being among the first-fruits of my Ministry.--I might take notice of his natural and acquired abilities, his great understanding, clear light, and sound judgment in the doctrines of the gospel, and the great and deep things of God:--Of his zeal, skill and courage in vindicating important truths, published by him to the world, by which, he, being dead, yet speaketh. In fine, I might observe to you, that his walk and conversation in the world, was honorable and ornamental to the profession which he made, and suitable to the character he sustained, as a Minister of Jesus Christ, all which endeared him to his friends--But I am forbid to speak any thing more.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/john-gill/the-free-grace-of-god-exalted-in-the-character-of-st-paul/>

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