

The Beauty of Grace

by Thomas Watson

The sermon emphasizes the importance and beauty of grace, which is the infusion of a new and holy principle into the heart, making it after God's own heart.

Scripture: Genesis 6:8, Psalm 119:104, Proverbs 4:7, Proverbs 8:18, Zechariah 12:10, 1 Corinthians 1:5, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, Hebrews 10:38, James 1:11, 1 Peter 1:2, 1 Peter 1:7, 2 Peter 1:3

Topics: "Divine Grace", "Christian Sanctification"

Description

Thomas Watson preaches about the beauty of grace, emphasizing the connection between grace and peace, the meaning, author, necessity, and various aspects of grace. He delves into the necessity of grace for communion with God and provides an exhortation, examination, and direction for attaining grace, highlighting the soul-quickenings, enriching, adorning, and cleansing excellencies of grace, among others. Watson encourages believers to seek true grace, test its authenticity, and rely on God's power and promises for its perpetuation and abiding presence in their lives.

Transcript

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"May grace and peace be multiplied to you." 1 Peter 1:2

The blessed apostle, having felt the efficacy and sovereignty of grace, is taken up with the thoughts of it; and so sweet is this wine of paradise, that he commends it to those dispersed Christians to whom he writes, wishing them all an increase of it.

"May grace and peace be multiplied to you." The words run in the form of a salutation. When we greet our friends, we cannot wish them a greater blessing than grace and peace. Other mercies lie outside the pale--and are dispersed in common to men; but grace is a special gift bestowed on those who are the favorites of heaven. Observe the connection and the order of the words.

The connection: grace and peace. The way to have peace is to have grace; grace is the breeder of peace; the one is the root, the other the flower. Peace is the sweet water which distills from a gracious heart.

The order: first grace, then peace; grace has the priority. Grace and peace are two sisters--but grace is the eldest sister; and give me permission at this time to prefer the elder before the younger. "May grace be multiplied to you."

Here we shall consider:

the meaning of grace;

the author of grace;

why it is called grace;

the necessity of grace.

1. The MEANING of grace. This word "grace" has various acceptable uses in Scripture:

Grace is sometimes taken for the favor of God. Genesis 6:8: "Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord." God cast a gracious aspect upon him.

Grace is taken for beauty, as when we say something is graceful. James 1:11, "The flower fades--and the grace of the fashion of it perishes."

Grace is taken figuratively--and improperly, for the show of grace; as we call that a face in a looking-glass which is but the idea and resemblance of a face. So John 2:23: "Many believed in His name." That believing was but a show of faith.

Grace is taken in a genuine and proper sense, as in our text: "May grace be multiplied to you." It may admit this description: grace is the infusion of a new and holy principle into the heart, whereby it is changed from what it was--and is made after God's own heart. Grace does not make a moral change only--but a sacred one; it biases the soul heavenward--and stamps upon it the image and superscription of God.

2. The AUTHOR or efficient cause of grace, namely, the Spirit of God, who is therefore called "the Spirit of grace" in Zechariah 12:10. The Spirit is the fountain from whence the crystal streams of grace flow. Man, as Clemens Alexandrinus observes, is God's harp or timbrel; the harp will not sound unless touched with the finger. So the heart of man cannot put forth any sweet melody or harmony until first it is touched with the finger of God's Spirit.

This blessed Spirit works grace in the subject, both universally and progressively.

Universally. 1 Thessalonians 5:23: "May the God of peace sanctify you wholly." The Spirit of God infuses grace into all the faculties of the soul. Though grace is wrought but in part--yet in every part. In the understanding, grace works light; in the conscience, grace works tenderness; in the will, grace works consent; in the affections, grace works harmony. Therefore grace is compared to leaven in Matthew 13:33, because it swells itself in the whole soul and makes the life to swell and rise as high as heaven.

Progressively. The Spirit of God works grace progressively. He carries it on from one degree to another. The Pelagians hold that the beginning of grace is from God--but the progress of grace is from ourselves. They teach that God is the Author of our faith--and we are the finishers. God shall lay the first stone, and we the superstructure. But, alas, we need the continual influence of the Spirit to carry on the work of grace

in our hearts. Should God withdraw His Spirit from the most holy men, their grace might fail and be annihilated. If the sun withdraws its light, though ever so little, there follows darkness in the air. We need not only saving grace--but assisting, exciting and upholding grace. The ship needs not only the sails--but the winds to carry it. We need not only the sails of our abilities and endeavors--but the wind of the Spirit. to blow us to the heavenly port.

3. Why is the work of holiness in the heart called grace?

First, because it has a supereminence above nature. It is a flower that does not grow in nature's garden; it is of a divine extraction. By reason we live the life of men; by grace we live the life of God.

Second, it is called grace because it is a work of free grace; every link in the golden chain of our salvation is wrought and enameled with free grace. That one should be sanctified and not another is of grace; that God should pass by many of the noble, rich and learned--and graft His heavenly endowments upon a more wild stock, of a churlish nature and weaker parts--may well be called "grace."

QUESTION. Why is saving grace not bestowed upon all?

ANSWER. We must hold with Zanchius that there is always a just reason for God's will. But in particular I answer:

God gives grace to one and denies it to another--to show His sovereignty. God is not bound to give grace to all. Romans 9:15: "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy." Suppose two malefactors were brought before the king; one he will pardon--but not the other. If any demands the reason, he will answer, "It is my prerogative." So God will give grace to one and not to another. He will make one a vessel of mercy, the other a vessel of wrath--and this is His prerogative. The apostle has silenced all disputes in this kind in Romans 9:20-21: "But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?' Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?" If we could suppose a plant to speak, it might ask, "Why was not I made a bird or an animal? Why should I not have the ability to reason?" Just so it is when vain man enters into contest with God and demands, "Why should not I have grace as well as another?" Do not dispute against God's sovereignty; let not the clay contend with the almighty Potter.

God may justly deny His grace to any wicked man, because once he had grace and lost it. If a father gave his son stock to trade with and the son loses it, the father is not bound to set him up again. God gave Adam a stock of grace to begin the world with. Adam lost it and made all his children bankrupt. And God is not obliged to give him grace again.

God may justly deny His grace to every wicked man because he is a despiser of grace. He tramples this pearl under foot (Proverbs 1:7). Is God bound to give grace to those who despise it? If a king's pardon is rejected once, he is not bound to offer it any more.

4. The NECESSITY of grace. Grace is most needful because it fits us for communion with God. 2 Corinthians 6:14: "What communion has light with darkness?" God can no more converse with an ungracious soul--than a king can converse with a swine. It is by grace that we keep a constant fellowship with heaven.

APPLICATION

I. Exhortation. Let me with the greatest zeal and earnestness, persuade all who have souls to save--to endeavor after grace. Grace will be desirable at death; it is useful now--and more seasonable to look after. Proverbs 4:7: "With all your getting, get understanding." Alexander was presented with a rich cabinet that had belonged to King Darius; he reserved it to put Homer's works in, since he considered those to be of great value. The heart is a spiritual cabinet into which the jewel of grace should be put; we should desire grace above other things, above the gifts of the Spirit, nay, above the comforts of the Spirit. Comfort is sweet--but grace is better than comfort, just as bread is better than honey. We may go to heaven without comfort--but not without grace. It is grace which makes us blessed in life and death.

I shall show you twelve rare excellencies in grace. I shall set this fair virgin of grace before you, hoping that you will be enticed to fall in love with it.

1. Grace has a soul-QUICKENING excellency in it. Hebrews 10:38: "The just shall live by faith." Men void of grace are dead; they have breath--yet lack life. They are walking dead men (Ephesians 2:1). The life of sin--is the death of the soul; a sinner has all the signs of one who is dead. He has no pulse--the affections are the pulse of the soul; his pulse does not beat after God. He has no feeling. Ephesians 4:19: "Who being past feeling." Dead things have no beauty; there is no beauty in a dead flower. Dead things are not capable of privilege; the dead heir is not crowned. But grace is the vital artery of the soul; it not only irradiates, but animates. Therefore it is called "the light of life" in John 8:12. Believers are said to have their grave clothes pulled off, and to be alive from the dead (Romans 6:13). By grace the soul is grafted into Christ, the true Vine (John 15:5)--and is made not only living but lively (1 Peter 1:3). Grace puts forth a divine energy into the soul.

2. Grace has a soul-ENRICHING excellency. 1 Corinthians 1:5: "You are enriched in all knowledge." As the sun enriches the world with its golden beams, so knowledge bespangles and enriches the mind. Faith is an enriching grace. James 2:5 speaks of being "rich in faith." Faith brings Christ's riches into the soul! Faith entitles the soul to the promises. The promises are full of riches: justification, adoption and glory; and faith is the key which unlocks this cabinet of the promises and empties their treasure into the soul. The riches of grace excel all other riches. Grace "is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold." (Proverbs 3:14).

These riches make a man wise. Wisdom is the best possession; other riches cannot make one wise. A man may have a full purse and an empty brain. A rich heir, though he lives until he becomes of age, may never come to years of discretion; but these riches of grace have the power to make a man wise. Psalm 111:10: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." The saints are compared to wise virgins in Matthew 25. Grace makes a man wise to know Satan's devices and subtleties (2 Corinthians 2:11); it makes him wise unto salvation (2 Timothy 3:15). Grace puts the serpent's eye--in the dove's head.

These spiritual riches sanctify other riches. Riches without grace are hurtful; they are golden snares; they are the bellows of pride and the fuel of lust. They set open hell's gates for men; they are unblest blessings.

But grace sanctifies our riches; it corrects the poison; it takes away the curse; it makes other riches beneficial to us. These riches shall be certificates of God's love, wings to lift us up to paradise. Thus grace, by a divine chemistry, extracts heaven out of earth--and gives us not only venison--but the blessing.

Grace satisfies while other riches cannot (Ecclesiastes 5:10). Riches can no more fill the heart--than a triangle can fill a circle; but grace fills up every chink and space of the soul. It dilates the heart, and

ravishes the affections with joy (Romans 15:13), which joy, as Chrysostom said, is a foretaste of heaven.

3. Grace has a soul-ADORNING excellency. Grace puts a beauty and luster upon a person. 1 Peter 3:3-5: "Don't be concerned about the outward beauty that depends on fancy hairstyles, expensive jewelry, or beautiful clothes. You should be known for the beauty that comes from within, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is so precious to God. That is the way the holy women of old made themselves beautiful." If a man has gold and jewels, expensive clothing, hanging tapestries, these adorn the house, not the man; the glory of a man is grace. Proverbs 4:9: "She shall give to your head an ornament of grace." The graces are a chain of pearls, which adorns Christ's bride; the heart inlaid and enameled with grace is like the king's daughter--all glorious within (Psalm 45:13). A gracious soul is the image of God, meticulously drawn with the pencil of the Holy Spirit. A heart beautified with grace is the angels' joy (Luke 15:7)--and is God's lesser heaven (Isaiah 57:15; Ephesians 3:17).

Grace exceeds reason. Grace changes corruption into perfection; nothing so graces a man as grace does. Grace is the purest complexion of the soul, for it makes it like God. Grace is the flower of delight which Christ loves to smell. Grace is to the soul--as the eye to the body, as the sun to the world, as the diamond to the ring--it bespangles and beautifies. A soul decked with grace is as the dove covered with silver wings and golden feathers!

4. Grace has a soul-CLEANSING excellency. By nature we are defiled; sin makes things filthy (2 Corinthians 7:1). A sinner's heart is so black that nothing but hell can equal it; but grace is a spiritual laver--and therefore it is called "the washing of regeneration" in Titus 3:5. The grace of repentance cleanses. Mary's tears, as they washed Christ's feet--so they washed her heart. Faith has a cleansing virtue. Acts 15:9: "Having purified their hearts by faith." Grace whitens the soul; it takes out the leopard spots--and turns it into an azure beauty. Grace is of a celestial nature; though it does not wholly remove sin--it does subdue it. Though it does not keep sin out, it does keep it under control. Though sin in a gracious soul does not totally die--yet it dies daily. Grace makes the heart into a spiritual temple which has this inscription on it: "Holiness to the Lord!"

5. Grace has a soul-STRENGTHENING excellency. Grace enables a man to do that which exceeds the power of nature. Grace teaches us to mortify our sins, to love our enemies--and to prefer the glory of Christ before our own lives. Thus the three Hebrew children in Daniel, by the power of grace, marched in the face of death; neither the sound of the music could allure them--nor the heat of the furnace frighten them (Daniel 3:17). Grace is a Christian's armor, which does more than any other armor can--it not only defends him, but puts courage into him. Grace makes us not only bear suffering--but rejoice in suffering (Romans 5:3). A soul steeled and animated with grace, can tread upon the lion and adder (Psalm 91:13), and with the leviathan can laugh at the shaking of a spear (Job 41:29). Thus does grace infuse a heroic spirit and drive strength into a man--making him act above the sphere of nature.

6. Grace has a soul-RAISING excellency. Grace is a divine spark which ascends. When the heart is divinely touched with the magnet of the Spirit--it is drawn up to God. Proverbs 15:24: "The path of the wise leads to life above." Grace raises a man above others; he lives in the altitudes, while others creep on the earth and are almost buried in it. A Christian, by the wings of grace, flies aloft; the saints mount up as eagles (Isaiah 40:31). A believer is a citizen of heaven; there he trades by faith. Grace shoots the heart above the world (Psalm 139:17; Philippians 3:21). Grace gives us conformity to Christ and communion with Him. 1 John 1:3: "Our fellowship is with the Father--and with His Son Jesus." A man full of grace has Christ in his heart--and the world under his feet! Grace humbles--yet elevates.

7. Grace has a PERFUMING excellency. Grace makes us a sweet fragrance to God. Hence grace is compared to those spices which are most odoriferous and fragrant: myrrh, cinnamon, and frankincense (Song of Solomon 4:14). There is a double perfume that grace sends forth.

First, it perfumes our NAMES. Hebrews 11:2: "By faith the elders obtained a good report." Grace was the spice which perfumed their names. How renowned was Abraham for his faith, Moses for his meekness, or Phinehas for his zeal? What a fresh perfume their names send forth to this day. The very wicked cannot but see a resplendent majesty in the graces of the saints; and though with their tongues they revile grace--yet with their hearts they reverence it. Thus grace is aromatic; it embalms the names of men. When a gracious person dies--he carries a good conscience with him, and leaves a good name behind him.

Second, grace perfumes our DUTIES. Psalm 141:2: "Let my prayer be set forth before You as incense." Noah's sacrifice was a perfume. Genesis 8:21: "The Lord smelled a sweet fragrance." The sighs of a wicked man are an offensive breath; his solemn sacrifice is dung (Malachi 2:3). There is such a foul stench coming from a sinner's duties, that God will not come near! Who can endure the smell of a dead corpse? "I hate all your show and pretense--the hypocrisy of your religious festivals and solemn assemblies. I will not accept your burnt offerings and grain offerings. I won't even notice all your choice peace offerings. Away with your hymns of praise! They are only noise to my ears. I will not listen to your music, no matter how lovely it is." Amos 5:21-23.

But grace gives a fragrance and redolence to our holy things. Hebrews 11:4: "It was by faith that Abel brought a more acceptable offering to God than Cain did. God accepted Abel's offering." Abel's sacrifice was better-scented. God smelled a sweet fragrance in it, for He accepted his gifts. If it is asked what this testimony was that God gave of Abel's sacrifice, Jerome said that God set his sacrifice on fire (1 Kings 18:38), so from heaven testifying His acceptance of Abel's offering. And if grace so perfumes you, wear this flower not in your bosoms--but in your hearts!

8. Grace has a soul-ENNOBLING excellency. Grace ennobles a man. Grace makes us vessels of honor; it sets us above princes and nobles. Theodosius thought it more dignity to be Christ's servant, and wear His livery laced with the silver graces of the Spirit--than to be great and renowned in the world. Isaiah 43:4: "Since you were precious in My sight, you have been honorable."

Sin debases a man. Christ tells wicked men of their pedigree in John 8:44: "You are of your father the devil." They may put a cloven foot in their chariots. An ungracious person is a vile person. Nahum 1:14: "You are vile." The Hebrew word for "vile" signifies to be lightly esteemed; there is nothing so vile but an ungracious man will do it. He is pliable to anything; he is like wire, which will be bent any way. He will snare his conscience, stain his credit, and run as a slave after the sinful injunctions of men. But grace ennobles; he who is divinely inspired, as he is high born (1 John 3:1), so he acts suitable to his birth. He hates whatever is hypocritical and sordid. The saints are called kings and priests for their dignity (Revelation 1:6), and jewels for their value (Malachi 3:17).

9. Grace has a soul-SECURING excellency. Grace brings safety along with it. You all desire to be safe in dangerous times; if sword or pestilence comes, if death peeps in at your windows--would you be safe? Nothing will secure you in times of danger--but grace. Grace is the best lifeguard; it puts Christians out of gunshot, and frees them from the power of hell and damnation. Proverbs 10:2: "Righteousness delivers from death." Do not righteous men die? Yes--but righteousness delivers from the sting of the first death, and the fear of the second death. It was the saying of one, "I am not afraid to die--but to be damned." But

here is a believer's comfort--the fire of God's wrath can never kindle upon him! Grace is God's own image stamped on the soul--and He will not destroy His own image!

Xerxes the Persian, when he destroyed all the temples in Greece, caused the temple of Diana to be preserved for its beautiful structure. Just so, that soul which has the beauty of holiness shining in it, shall be preserved for the glory of the structure. God will not allow His own temple to be destroyed. Would you be secured in evil times? Get grace and fortify this garrison; a good conscience is a Christian's royal fort. David's enemies lay round about him; yet, he said, "I lay down and slept. I woke up in safety, for the Lord was watching over me" (Psalm 3:5). A good conscience can sleep in the mouth of a cannon. Grace is a Christian's coat of armor, which fears neither the arrow nor the bullet. True grace may be shot at--but can never be shot through. Grace puts the soul into Christ, and there it is safe--as the bee is safe in the hive, and as the dove is safe in the ark. Romans 8:1: "There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus."

10. Grace has a heart-ESTABLISHING excellency in it. Hebrews 13:9: "It is a good thing that the heart is established with grace." Before the infusion of grace, the heart is like a ship without a ballast; it wavers and tosses, being ready to overturn. Therefore a man void of grace is called a double-minded man in James 1:8. He acts for and against--as if he had two souls. He is unresolved: today of one mind, tomorrow of another. Today he will hear a preacher who is orthodox, tomorrow one who is heterodox. He will be as the times are--and change his religion as fast as the chameleon does his color. Hearts unsanctified will be unsettled; they will join the popular side. They will follow not what is best--but what is safest; they are not for that religion which has the Word to guide it--but for that which has the sword to back it. This is what Seneca called a mind that rolls up and down, and settles nowhere.

But grace consolidates and fixes the heart. Psalm 57:7: "My heart is fixed, O God." Hypocrites are like meteors in the air--but David was a fixed star. Grace keeps the heart upright; and the more sincere, the more steadfast. Grace carries the heart to God as the center, and there it rests (Psalm 116; Psalm 7). A gracious heart cleaves to God, and let whatever changes come, the soul is settled as a ship at anchor.

11. Grace has a PREPARATORY excellency in it. Grace prepares and fits us for glory. Glory is the highest peg of our felicity; it transcends all our thoughts. Glory can have no hyperbole. Now grace tunes and fits the soul for glory. 2 Peter 1:3: "Who has called us to glory and virtue." Virtue leads to glory. First you cleanse the vessel, and then pour in wine. God first cleanses us by His grace, and then pours in the wine of glory. The silver link of grace draws the golden link of glory after it! Indeed, grace differs little from glory. Grace is glory in the bud--and glory is grace in the full flower. Glory is nothing but the consummation of grace.

12. Grace has an ABIDING excellency. Temporal things are for a season--but grace has eternity stamped upon it. It is called "durable riches" in Proverbs 8:18. Other riches take wings and fly from us; grace takes wings and flies with us to heaven. Some tell us of falling away from grace. I grant that "seeming grace" may be lost--as a blazing comet will spend and evaporate. Saving grace may fail in the degree; it may suffer an eclipse; it may lose all its sweet fruit of joy and peace--but still there is sap in the vine, and the seed of God remains (1 John 3:9).

Grace is a blossom of eternity. 1 John 2:27 speaks of "the anointing which abides." Colors laid in oil are durable; those hearts which are laid in oil, and have the anointing of God, hold their colors and endure forever. Grace is compared to a river of the water of life in John 7:38. This river can never be dried up, for

the Spirit of God is the spring that feeds it. Grace is not like a lease which soon expires. So the Pelagians would make it: today a believer, tomorrow an unbeliever; today justified, tomorrow unjustified. This would be like a lease soon run out; but God settles grace on the saints as an inheritance, and He will see that the legacy shall never be cut off. He who has true grace can no more fall away than the angels--which are fixed stars in their heavenly orbs.

The arguments to prove the perpetuation of grace are:

1. God's election, which I ground upon Romans 8:29-30: "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son." Predestination is the grand cause of the saint's preservation. God chooses to salvation, as well as to faith (2 Thessalonians 2:13). What shall make God's election void?

2. The power of God. 1 Peter 1:5: "We are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." I deny not, but that grace in itself may perish (our grace is no better coin than Adam's). But grace in God's keeping cannot perish; the saints' graces of themselves may break as glasses--but these glasses in the hand of God never break.

3. God's solemn engagement. The Lord has passed it under hand and seal. He has given bond for the saints' perseverance. Jeremiah 32:40: "I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, and they shall not depart from Me." A believer's charter is confirmed under the broad seal of heaven; and if grace does not endure to eternity--it is either because God lacks power to make good what He has decreed, or truth to make good what He has promised; either of which, to assert, would be blasphemy.

Besides all this, Jesus Christ our blessed High Priest, who has the golden plate on His forehead, appears in the court of heaven for His people. And as He poured out blood on the cross, so He pours forth prayers in heaven for the saints' perseverance. Hebrews 7:25: "He ever lives to make intercession for them." And Christ is not only a Priest--but a Son; and therefore He will prevail. And also, which puts the matter out of doubt, what Christ prays for as He is man--He has power to give as He is God. John 17:24: "Father, I will." When He says, "Father," there He prays as man. When He says, "I will," there He gives as God.

So that grace is an abiding thing; Christians, you may lose your friends, your estates, and your lives--but you shall never lose your grace. Those who hold falling away from grace, would make a believer wear Cain's mark, which was a continual shaking and trembling in his flesh. They would spill a Christian's cordial, and break a link of the chain of salvation.

II. Examination. Let us test whether our grace is true; there is something which looks like grace--which is not true grace. Chrysostom said that the devil has a counterfeit chain to all the graces, and he would deceive us with it. Jewelers have ways to try their precious stones; let us try our grace by a Scripture touchstone. The painted Christian shall have a painted paradise!

True grace is seen by an aversion and antipathy against sin. Psalm 119:104: "I hate every false way." Grace sets itself against one's darling sins (Psalm 18:23), and against the sins of the times (Revelation 2:2).

True grace is known by its growth; growth evidences life. Dead things do not grow. A picture will not grow. Just so, a hypocrite, who is but a picture of piety, does not grow. But a sincere Christian grows in love to

Christ, in humility, and in good works. Hosea 14:5: "I will be to Israel like a refreshing dew from heaven. It will blossom like the lily; it will send roots deep into the soil like the cedars in Lebanon.

6 Its branches will spread out like those of beautiful olive trees, as fragrant as the cedar forests of Lebanon." When the Spirit of God distills as dew upon the soul--it makes grace flourish and put forth into maturity.

True grace will make us willing to suffer for Christ. Grace is like gold: it will abide the fiery trial (1 Peter 1:7). And if, upon a serious scrutiny and trial, we find that we have the right jewel, the grace of God in truth (Colossians 1:6), this will be a deathbed cordial. We may, with Simeon, depart in peace, being assured that though we cannot resist death--yet we shall overcome it.

III. Direction. Let me lay down some directions for the attaining of grace.

Direction 1. If we would be enriched with this jewel of grace--let us take pains for it. We are bid to make a search after knowledge, as a man who searches for a vein of gold or hidden treasure. (Proverbs 2:2-3). Our salvation cost Christ blood--it will cost us sweat.

Direction 2. Let us go to God for grace. He is called "the God of all grace" in 1 Peter 5:10. We could lose grace of ourselves--but we cannot find it of ourselves. The sheep can wander from the fold--but cannot return without the help of the shepherd. Go to the God of all

grace. He is the first planter, the promoter, and the perfecter of grace. God is the Father of lights (James 1:17). He must light up this candle of grace in the soul. Grace is in His gift.

Oh, then, go to God in prayer; lay your heart before Him: "Lord, I lack grace. I lack a humble, believing heart; and You are the God of all grace. All my springs are in You. Oh, enrich me with grace; do not deny me this before I die. What is gold in the bag--if I have no oil in the lamp? Give me that anointing of God. I read in Your Word of the fruits of the Spirit. Lord, my heart is barren soil; plant some of these supernatural fruits in me so that I may be more useful and serviceable. Lord, I cannot be put off with other things. Who will You give grace to--if not to such as ask, and are resolved not to stop asking?"

Direction 3. If you would have grace, engage the prayers of others on your behalf. He is likely to be rich--who has several stocks going. He is in the way of spiritual thriving--who has several stocks of prayer going for him. If you had a child who was sick, you would beg the prayers of others. You have a soul that is sick, sick with pride and lust, sick unto death. Oh, beg the prayers of godly friends that God will heal you with His grace. Moses and Jacob had much power with God; believers can prevail sometimes not only for themselves--but for their friends. A godly man's prayers may do you more good, than if he should bestow upon you all his lands of inheritance.

Direction 4. If you would have grace, frequent the means of grace. Lie at the pool of Bethesda; wait at the posts of wisdom's door. Inward grace is wrought by outward means; the preaching the Word is the engine that God uses to work grace; it is called "the rod of His strength" (Psalm 110:2) and "the breath of His lips" (Isaiah 11:4). By this God causes breath to enter; out of this golden pipe of the sanctuary, God empties the golden oil of grace into the soul. The ministry of the gospel is called the ministry of the Spirit in 2 Corinthians 3:8, because the Spirit of God ordinarily makes use of this to work grace. This ministry of the Spirit is to be preferred before the ministry of angels.

QUESTION. Why is the Word preached the ordinary means to convey grace? Why not conversation or reading?

ANSWER. The reason is because God has appointed it to this end, and He will grace His own ordinances. 1 Corinthians 11: "It pleased God." What reason could be given why the waters of Damascus should not have as sovereign a virtue to heal Naaman's leprosy, as the waters of Jordan? Only this, because the Lord appointed and sanctified the one to this work--and not the other. If therefore we would have grace, let us wait where the manna falls, and there expect the dew of the Spirit to fall with manna. The power of God goes along with His Word.

How we should delight in ordinances! Sleidan said there was a church in France formerly which the Protestants called "paradise," as if they thought themselves in paradise while they were in the house of God. Those ordinances should be our paradise, which are the power of God to salvation.

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