

## Sermon 213: Romans 16:20: Grace

### OUTLINE

Grace announced

Grace mediated

### INTRODUCTION

If you had to boil down God, the Bible and the gospel down into one word, what word would it be? I think Paul would say that 'grace' sums it all up. Grace was the central theme for Paul in all his letters. He bracketed his letters with grace. I would like us to begin with an exercise, I need you to see this for yourself, the impact of the way Paul deliberately starts and ends all of his letters with grace is like so many hammer blows ringing over and over again the message of God's grace. I want you to see how Paul begins and ends every letter.

We will begin in Romans: 1:7, 'To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints, Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.' 16:20, 'The God of peace will soon crush Satan under feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.'

1 Corinthians: 1:3, 'Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.' 16:23, 'The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.'

2 Corinthians: 1:2, 'Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.' 13:14, 'The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.'

Galatians: 1:3, 'Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.' 6:18, 'the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers, Amen.'

Ephesians: 1:2, 'Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.' 6:24, 'Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.'

Philippians: 1:2, 'Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.' 4:23, 'The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.'

Colossians 1:2, 'to the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.' 4:18, 'I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand.

Remember my chains. Grace be with you.'

1 Thessalonians 1:1, 'Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, to the Church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.' 5:28, 'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.'

2 Thessalonians 1:2, 'Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.' 3:18, 'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.'

1 Timothy 1:2, 'To Timothy, my true child in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.' 6:21b, 'Grace be with you.'

2 Timothy 1:2, to Timothy my beloved child: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.' 4:22, 'The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.'

Titus: 1:4, 'To Titus, my true child in a common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Saviour.'

Philemon: v3, 'Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.'

v25, 'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.'

26 verses, 13 bracketing pairs all starting and ending Paul's letters with grace. What is the significance of this? That Paul sees grace as a lot more central than we do. Today as we look at Romans 16:20b, 'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you,' we want to

consider this grace uttered as a benediction, and then look at some of the various aspects of grace to appreciate its centrality.

## **Grace announced**

The first thing we should note is that all Paul's letters end with what we call a benediction. Our word comes from Latin. Bene means well, and dictio means say, so say well is the literal meaning and it is usually in the form of a wish or prayer at the end of a religious service. A prayer or the utterance of God's blessing upon someone is a ubiquitous practice and courtesy not restricted to Christianity. However, Paul takes a usual custom like a basic greeting and he renovates it to make the Christian realise what they have in the gospel. In the greetings at the beginnings of his letters he begins a new practice combining the usual Hebrew greeting of peace and a common Greek greeting of grace. He talks about the peace and grace which are ours through God and Christ. He highlights how a well-intended wish for someone becomes reality in the gospel.

Now you may have noticed that we end every service with a benediction, why do we do this? Are we merely caught in a formalist trap and just repeat old and dead things from the past, is it merely a meaningless relic from a time where the church was bogged down in sacramentalism? Are we getting our religious mojo on by pulling out some archaic and religious sounding things? No! It is obvious in the first place that it is a biblical and apostolic practice. Why then does Paul use it so regularly? The answer to this question comes in understanding the nature of a benediction, is it a well-intended wish or a reality, is it someone that we have or something still to be obtained, is it a promise or a prayer? It is more than well-wishing, Paul tells in Romans 5:2 that we have obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand. Grace is the reality of our existence in Christ. This is not something we gain only after a sermon, though more of it is given, it is the common atmosphere of our lives if we are in Christ. So in that way it is both a promise, because it is ours and will be ours, and a prayer for more of what God has pledged to His children.

One of the issues that surround these benedictions is who has the right to say them. In the OT the priests of God would pronounce the benediction of peace on God's people. This blessing would of course depend on the proper administration of the sacrifices, the priesthood and the temple, we have it secured by the perfection of Christ's sacrifice and priesthood. Unfortunately this translated into the distortion of Roman Catholic priests assuming to themselves the power of being conduits of God's grace. Grace became a substance that was handed on by the 7 sacraments properly administered by a properly ordained priesthood. We need to state that the grace that Paul is speaking about is ours not because of the office of the person announcing it but because of the gospel that secures it. In certain Reformed traditions only an ordained minister may announce the benediction but a layman can only pray it. I insist that this grace is ours not because of who announces it but because of the Christ who secured it for us. It rests for its effectiveness not in my office but God's gospel. And so when you utter the Amen after the announcement, utter it with a sense of surety that this is the grace that is ours by the gospel. Have a certain assurance in your heart that the grace spoken of is yours in Christ. And so when you go into the week that lies ahead you go with this last word spoken over you, that you go with God, that you go in His grace, and all that is provided by His grace because you are a child of God is yours. It is uttered as a prayer that will be answered, as a promise that will be fulfilled.

## Grace mediated

This is how grace is announced, but what is grace and how do we get it? A typical definition for grace is unmerited favour, or the acronym, God's riches at Christ's expense. Grace is God's disposition to unworthy sinners, and I think the best definition is de-merited favour. Which incidentally is a not a word my spell checker likes, but is a most important way to define grace. A W Pink uses a well-known illustration. If you are walking down the street and you see man begging and you give him something if he is willing to do some work in your garden, that is not grace that is works, he merits the money you will be giving him. If he is begging and you give him some money without him doing anything for you, that is unmerited favour, and is often the definition of grace that we use. However, closer to the truth is the fact that the beggar attacks you and stabs you and steals your wallet, and the next time you see him you forgive him and give him more money still, that is de-merited favour and the grace of God towards us. Works is giving you what you have earned, unmerited favour is giving to you when you have not earned it, but grace is giving you the opposite of what you have earned, even when you have demerited God's goodness to you. You deserve hell, you deserve pain and torment and punishment for the horrible things you are and do. God does not give you the things you do deserve but more He gives you eternal life, eternal riches, eternal joy and peace. He gives you the best that He can give. If we bring it back to our illustration it is like going down the street seeing the beggar who mugged you and adopting him, taking him into your home to live not just for a meal, and making him an heir and friend. This is God's disposition towards you.

Now God's disposition towards you is not a one off gift that gives once and then the giving is over, God's grace surrounds you from eternity past to eternity future. We sing of this grace all the time, the Trinity Hymnal lists hymns dealing with grace under the following headings: converting grace, the covenant of grace, efficacious grace, the fullness of grace, magnified grace, refreshing grace, regenerating grace, sanctifying grace, saving grace and sovereign grace. It also has combined listings such as the love and grace of God, the love and grace of Christ, the love and grace of the Holy Spirit and salvation by grace. Moreover, descriptive phrases are used in the hymns themselves: abounding grace, abundant grace, amazing grace, boundless grace, fountain of grace, God of grace, indelible grace, marvellous grace, matchless grace, overflowing grace, pardoning grace, plenteous grace, unfailing grace, unmeasurable grace, wonderful grace, wondrous grace, the word of grace, grace all sufficient, grace alone.<sup>1</sup>

The description that Paul gives us of grace is specifically 'the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.' What does he mean by this? No doubt this is an attempt to distinguish the grace that specific to Christianity to the grace that made up the usual way of well-wishing someone in the ancient world. If we want to look at it in terms of theological categories we can divide God's grace into common grace and saving grace. Common grace is that goodness of God that He bestows upon all of His creation where he gives rain and seasons, and life and marriage and childbirth and the gifts of creation to the good and the bad alike. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is a grace distinct from common grace, it is saving grace.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ should also not be pressed to mean that grace is from the Son but not the Father, all the works of the Trinity are one. Rather we should think of the grace that comes through Jesus Christ, or on account of our union with Christ, think of Christ as a treasure chest that any who have Christ get the riches that God has for us in Him. All of God's grace to you from beginning to end is in Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> Boice, Romans, p1944.

This is absolutely key. If you are not aware of the grace of God, then you are not giving the glory to God. Let me put it more controversially, if you believe that salvation is of grace from beginning to end, that it is all of grace, then you are a Calvinist. Maybe some of you don't like to be called that, there are those who try and avoid names because they are divisive, that is ok. My goal is to that if God's glory is to be central, if we are to affirm that all things are from Him, and through Him and to Him, if He is the one who is going to be worshipped for our salvation and not ourselves, we must understand this idea of grace. When someone asks me why I am a Calvinist I can give any number of answers, if I am feeling cheeky I will say because the Bible teaches it. But in order to help people understand the heart of Reformed theology I put it this way. I am Reformed because I believe that salvation belongs to our God and that He must get 100% of the glory for my and your salvation. Contrary to popular belief being Reformed is not about glorifying man, someone like Calvin, it is all about the glory of God.

Go back to the beginning of your salvation, your election, you can call this God's sovereign grace. If you are familiar with TULIP, otherwise known as the doctrines of grace, this is the U of TULIP, namely unconditional election. Why did God save you? Do you think God saw anything in you that moved Him to choose you and not someone else? If we answer yes then we are saying that it was not an act of grace on God's part, that He was not free, but had to save me. This is the opposite of sovereign grace. Whether you want to make God look into the future to see your works, or faith or anything in you that makes God choose you, this does not square with what the Bible teaches about God choosing you in Christ according to the purpose of His own will, and it not being based on anything in you. Sure this raises many difficult questions, but we don't not believe something because it makes difficult questions, we insist on believing things that the Bible teaches no matter what difficulties it creates. We trust the authority of God's word not our own reason. God has good and perfect reasons that He just has not revealed, but we can know that it is not based upon us.

Our salvation not only rests on God's gracious choice of us in eternity, but the ongoing provision of God is the person and work of Christ. Think on Christ's work as prophet, priest and king. Think of the second person of the Trinity becoming man, the fact that He subjected Himself to the law, allowed Himself to be tortured to death and died for the guilt of our sins. Let me ask you, do you think that you deserved such a thing? Would you agree that you earned the opposite of this? The grace of God is the source of our salvation not us.

So far we have looked at what is called the *pactum salutis* the covenant of redemption, in other words, the agreement between the Trinity in eternity past to save us. We have looked at the *Historia salutis*, this is the historical acts of Christ to provide salvation for us. So we have seen the work of the Father and the Son, but now we must consider the work of the Holy Spirit who applies the finished work of Christ to us.

When the gospel was preached to you, why did you believe? Was it because of you or because of God's grace? John 6:44, 'No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.'<sup>2</sup> Because of our sinfulness, our total depravity, in other words, the effects of sin upon every part of us, we could not save ourselves without the intervention of God. The Holy Spirit worked in our hearts as He did in Lydia's when He opened her heart to believe. We were given a heart of flesh in the place of

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<sup>2</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Jn 6:44). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

a heart of stone and enabled to believe and repent which is not natural to the natural man. The day of your salvation was appointed by God and when the Spirit worked we call this efficacious grace, or effective grace. Your new birth, your faith, your repentance and the ensuing benefits of justification and adoption, they are gifts of God by His grace.

And now here you are a Christian how do you grow, how do you do good works, how do you persevere? Are you the source of these things? Does God get the glory for your salvation up to this point, but the rest is up to you? No, for from Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to Him alone be the glory. This is a very reassuring truth. Do you feel weak and that you could fail God at any moment, that when you look inside you see so much hardness of heart and love of sin. God's grace continues to work in you both to will and do for His good pleasure. The Holy Spirit dwells within to motivate you to holiness, to enable you to holiness, and to empower you for holiness. When you persevere and do good deeds who gets the glory, you? Are you the source of your strength and desire? No, we say with Paul 1 Cor. 15:10, 'But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.'<sup>3</sup>

As an imperfect believer you will fall, we do not condone this, but God's grace has made provision for these failures and forgives you ongoing sins, 1 John 1:9, 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.'<sup>4</sup> This grace which continues to cover your sins is not paying you back for the times you were good, this is by grace.

As a believer you have gifts, the word for gift in the Greek is the same word for grace. When you serve the church and other are blessed by your ministry, who is the true source of your effectiveness, you or God? It is Him working by His grace. As a believer you are also able to make progress in sanctification and produce the fruits of the Spirit. Let me ask you, are these from you? Is your own heart the native soil that is able to produce such good fruits? No these are the work of the Spirit within us.

As a believer when you suffer and the devil is allowed to wage war against you, is this God punishing you for your sins? When you fall sick is this God's wrath manifesting itself in your life? No, you are not under law, you are not under wrath, you are in grace, and are a child of God. Sure there may be pain but it is the pain of a Father sanctifying and perfecting you not the wrath of a judge, He deals with you on the basis of grace not law.

And when Christ comes again and you receive a new body and are rewarded for your life of obedience, are the gifts of glorification and rewards equal to your efforts? No! God glorifies us and rewards us and bestows the inheritance upon us by grace not works.

This is the grace that is yours if Christ is yours. He has elected you by grace, provided your atonement in the person and work of Christ by His grace, and in His grace He has applied the benefits of Christ's work to you. Regeneration, faith, repentance, justification, adoption, sanctification, good providences, fruit of the Spirit gifts, and glory and reward. It is a package deal, and everytime you hear the gospel in Church and the service ends with a benediction saying, and now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. This is not

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<sup>3</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (1 Co 15:10). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

<sup>4</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (1 Jn 1:9). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

a maybe, this is not merely well-wishing, this is a fact that the gospel creates and it is a work that will be completed. This is God's work and He gets the glory. The matter does not rely on your strength but His, not your faithfulness but His. You have been saved, are being saved, and will be saved by grace. To God alone be the glory.