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AMAZING GRACE

By Rubel Shelly

I suppose every Christian has a song or hymn which he likes to sing above all others. It has some special significance to him and is his favorite. My favorite, and one which surely ranks high on the list of most other Christians, is "Amazing Grace."

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me!

I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.

This song is pretty to the ear. But, beyond that, it is beautiful to the heart of a man who desires eternal life. The Bible makes it abundantly clear that there could be no salvation had it not been for divine grace. "For by grace have ye been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, that no man should glory." (Eph. 2:8-9.) "But where sin abounded, grace did abound more exceedingly; that, as sin reigned in death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Rom. 5:20-21.) The New Testament reveals the plan by which this grace is bestowed upon us and is itself called "the gospel of the grace of God." (Acts 20:24.)

Let us focus our attention on this old and beloved topic again and notice something of the nature and significance of the amazing grace of God to our lives.

What is grace? The logical point of beginning for such a study is to define the word "grace." It means free and undeserved favor. We use the term in business and speak of "grace periods" in connection with paying bills. For example, I have an insurance policy with a thirty-day grace period for premium payments. Now the company could cancel the policy and I would have no right to any policy benefits if I was ever just one day late with a premium. But they have given me a privilege to which I was not necessarily entitled. It is therefore a privilege not of right but of grace.

Now we certainly do not deserve salvation. We are all sinners, and anyone who denies it is both a liar himself and is, in effect, calling God a liar as well. (1 John 1:8, 10.) Sinners deserve eternal damnation in hell, for "The wages of sin is death." (Rom. 6:23.) So if even one of us is saved it will not be because he

deserved salvation but because he received it as an undeserved and free gift.

It has been correctly observed that sin is not only breaking God's law but also breaking God's heart. Suppose we break some law, we can pay the penalty, either of fine or of imprisonment which the law lays down, and then the law has no further claim on us; we are free of the law. But suppose we break someone's heart, we can never atone for that. Let us take a crude and imperfect analogy. Suppose a motorist by careless driving runs over and kills a child. He will be arrested; he will be tried; he will be found guilty; he will be sentenced to such and such a term of imprisonment, or to such and such a fine; and his license may be taken from him for such and such a period. But after he has paid the fine and served the imprisonment's term, the law has no further claim on him. As far as the law is concerned, the whole matter is over. But it is very different in the relation to the mother whose child he killed. He can never make things up to her, he can never put things right with her, by serving a term in imprisonment or by paying a fine. It is against her love for her child that he has committed this crime; and the only thing which can restore his relationship to her is an act of free forgiveness on her part. That is the way we are to God. It is not God's law against which we have sinned; it is against God's heart. And therefore only an act of free forgiveness of the grace of God can put us back into the right relationship with God.

So very many of the teachings of Jesus center on the matter of grace or undeserved favor. For example, although the word "grace" does not appear anywhere in the story, the Parable of the Prodigal Son is a story of grace. When the wayward boy of this parable went home, he rightly observed, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight: I am no more worthy to be called thy son." (Luke 15:21.) Suppose the father had replied, "You're right, so go away!" We would not love the story as we do, would we? But he did not treat his son as he deserved to be treated. He treated him as he needed to be treated. He called him "son" again, took him home, reinstated

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A Sermon Never Forgotten

Throughout the years I have heard many wonderful sermons, which I have forgotten, but one sermon have I seen, and it has remained in my heart until this day. It happened on a Sunday morning when I was on my way to one of the two small congregations in Munich, Germany, on a cold, rainy day in November.

After I got out of bed, I looked through the window which was covered with ice ferns. New deep snow had fallen during the night covering the streets of the city. I tried to decide whether I should go to worship or stay at home and read my Bible.

I realized the congregation would miss me, for I was the only song leader they had. On the other hand I would have to walk a half block to catch the bus to the building. Finally, I decided to go but only because I must lead the singing.

While I was riding the bus, I noticed two people trying hard to make their path through the snow. I recognized the people and knew where they were going. They were brother and sister Trollman, a faithful couple who attended every service. Brother Trollman was a man in his eighties, who had lost his eyesight. His only guidance was his seventy-eight year old wife, who was lame in one foot. They lived in a little two room apartment, and received a little support from the government. Because they could not afford to ride the bus to the services, which was about three miles away, they walked every Lord's day.

Here I am sitting in a warm bus, unwilling to go to worship, forced by my duty as a song leader, and there, in the cold weather, were two old people driven to worship by their love for the Lord.

I was not able to do anything but blush, ashamed of myself and the weak faith and love I had proven to my Lord. I felt like an evildoer in court being judged by his own conscience. This old couple without their knowledge and without one word had taught me a greater lesson than could ever be said in words.

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DID YOU KNOW . . .

"Nothing worthwhile ever happens in a hurry."

"It's funny how we never get too old to learn some new way to be stupid."

"Never judge a man's actions until you know his motives."

"While some stand on the promises, others just sit on the premises."

"Hope for the best, but be ready for the worst."

"It is much easier to carry your cross than to drag it."

"It is not so much what we know as how we use what we know."

"The strongest words are usually used in the weakest arguments."

"Opportunity is most often rejected because it is disguised as hard work."

"There is a wonderful mystical law of nature that the three things we crave most in life — happiness, freedom, and peace of mind — are always attained by giving them to someone else."

"Never believe anything bad about anybody unless you positively know it is true."

The Goodness and Severity of God Towards Youth

By Glynn V. Purdy

God loves children. Jesus sums up God's love for children in a beautiful way in Luke 18:15, 16. People were bringing their children to Jesus for him to touch them, but when the disciples saw it, they rebuked those who brought the children. Jesus then said, after calling the children to him, "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God." He further stated to his disciples. "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18:3). God considers children a blessing to the parents. "As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of thy youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate" (Psalm 127:4, 5). Even Jesus came into the world as a child, and learned to grow "In wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2:52). The greatest wisdom which God gave Solomon was the ability to determine the true mother of a child, that the child might grow up with his own mother. God selected a youth of only seventeen years to go into Egypt and prepare for the Israelite nation to sojourn there (Gen. 37:2). Josiah was eight years old when God chose him to reign over Israel (2 Kings 22:1). God chose such men as Moses and John the baptizer, one shortly after birth and the other before birth, to train them to be great leaders for good among his people.

God shows his love for children again when he charges parents to teach and rear the child to take his proper place in the kingdom of God, and the kingdom of men. Listen as God instructs parents in the Old Testament, "These words, which I command you this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shall teach them diligently unto thy children, and shall talk to them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down and when thou risest up" (Deut. 6:6, 7). God speaks in the New Testament also concerning the children whom he loves, "And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). Or, in our modern language, fathers do not goad your children to resentment, but bring them up in the instruction and correction of the Lord. Yes indeed, God loves young people, and demands that parents train them right. Proverbs 22:6 states, "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." The

responsibility of the parents is plainly presented. "Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged" (Col. 3:21). Fathers are not to exasperate their children lest they become disheartened. Many more Scriptures could be given, but this is enough to show the goodness of God toward youth. There is both a GOODNESS and SEVERITY of God (Rom. 11:22). Goodness toward the obedient and severity toward the disobedient. Truly there are two sides to God; his love and wrath, and we may choose which we prefer by our conduct.

God has certain commands for youth also. Children, as well as adults, come under the instruction of God. The child's first instructions come through the parents, and if the parents are following God's instructions then the child has the proper start in life. So the first order to the child is to be in subjection to his parents. "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honor thy father and mother: which is the first commandment with promise; that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth" (Eph. 6:1-3). "Children obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord" (Col. 3:20). God said to parents in the Old Testament, "He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him" (Prov. 13:24). Here God teaches that the parent who corrects his child, even if punishment is necessary, is showing his love for him. God will chasten every disobedient child whom he loveth, this is HOW he shows his love (Heb. 12:5, 6). God first shows his love for a child through his parents who respect his will enough to instruct and train the child in the ways of God. Therefore, even the severity of God, shown in discipline, is also a part of his love. The child who submits to the instruction and discipline of a father, who fears God and walks in his ways, is coming under the instruction and care of God. This is good.

The child must learn self discipline. "Flee also youthful lust: but follow righteousness, faith, love, peace, with them who call on God out of a pure heart" (2 Tim. 2:22). Even Paul had to exercise self discipline (1 Cor. 9:27). The child must come under the doctrine of God and continue therein, for without this he will be lost (1 Tim. 4:16). The child has the same obligation to God, to set an example for good, as the adult (1

The Leadership of God's People

By Harold Turner

In both the Old and New Testaments God has designed a system of leadership to govern his people. From the very earliest period of man's relationship with God there has been a problem with faithfulness. God's people have never, for very long at a time, remained entirely faithful. Isaiah clearly described most generations, when he said, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way" (Isa. 53:6). Because of this problem, God designated that highly qualified men be selected and appointed to lead his people in the path of truth. The history of the Old Testament clearly shows that when highly qualified men were appointed to lead God's people, they progressed, and were faithful to his laws, however, when poorly qualified men were appointed, the people drifted away from serving the Lord.

The basic nature of man has not changed. The need has ever been present for the highest quality of leadership to help men with their struggles to do right. The pattern that God has given to guide his people will work successfully when followed. Any flaw or failure is not due to the divine part of this plan, but rather to the human part. Only when we lower the standards that God has given for this great work, will it not work successfully. When we become content with a second-rate standard, we can, in turn, expect a second-rate church.

Men, down through the ages, have continually expressed discontent for the patterns that God has given to guide them. And, without exception, when men change and depart from the divine pattern and standards, problems begin to develop. It is easy to look about us and see what these changes have brought. When men changed the pattern God gave to govern his people, rather than to unite the people, it only divided them. Most of the systems governing religious bodies today have no similarity to that revealed in the Bible.

In the Bible, there is no governing body outside the local congregation. Christ is the only head of the church: the Bible is the only rule of faith and practice, and each local congregation is subject only to the governing body within itself.

In Acts 14:23, after establishing the churches in various cities, Paul and Barnabas returned and "Ordained elders in every church." In Titus 1:5, Paul said to Titus, "For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee."

These elders were highly qualified men appointed to the leadership of God's people. In Acts 20:17-32, Paul spoke to the elders of the church in Ephesus, saying, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." Likewise, the apostle Peter wrote, "The elders which are among you I exhort . . . Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock." (1 Peter 5:1-3). These passages show clearly that God's plan calls for each congregation appointing qualified men from its own membership to oversee the spiritual growth and needs of the local church. This is not to say that we are to just appoint men whether they are qualified men or not to this office of government. Unqualified men do not make a qualified congregation from the standpoint of church government. You will notice that all the qualifications for the eldership, as given in 1 Timothy 3:1-7, and Titus 1:5-9, are introduced by "Must". A man who does not have ALL of these qualifications, to some degree, is not an elder in the eyes of God.

To keep God's people from straying, elders must be vigilant in protecting the church from erroneous teaching (Acts 20:28-31), and in seeing that the church has a well balanced diet of spiritual food. This demands that the elders be mature in their understanding of God's word, and capable to teach it. (Titus 1:9-11). The growth and development of the church depends upon the teaching program within.

Another vital point in the leadership of God's people is that stated by the apostle Peter in 1 Peter 5:3; elders are to be "Ensamples to the flock." It seems only natural that we follow the example of those over us. Not only are elders to provide the proper example through the teaching of God's word, but through their manner of life as well. Notice this in Hebrews 13:7, "Remember them that have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation."

The work and responsibility of being an elder in the Lord's church is truly an awesome task. Our souls are in their care, and they must account unto God for this stewardship. But we have a responsibility unto them as well, "Obey them that have

The Danger of Strong Drink

By Clovis Ragsdale

One of the greatest evils facing our nation today is the ever increasing number of people who engage in strong drink. The companies who make this product report ever increasing sales. Our highways are littered with empty beer and whiskey containers. A steady stream of advertising is constantly before us in magazines and over the airways, extolling the virtues of this and that brand of strong drink.

This writer can remember when the law forbid the sale of whiskey. True, there were some who patronized the moonshiner, but one seldom saw much drinking among teenagers and women. Today with the easy access to strong drink it has become a problem in our schools among the very young. Alcoholism among women is reaching alarming proportions.

During the days of prohibition we were told that legalizing whiskey would bring in great amounts of tax revenue. Now we can see how wrong this argument was because for every tax dollar taken in, we lose many more in fighting the crime it causes, in the many man hours of labor lost, and in the poverty it brings upon many homes who have to be supported by relief agencies. This is over and above the misery it causes, the lives lost, and the sin that strong drink brings to those who use it.

We cannot help but wonder why the citizens of our nation can place their stamp of approval on a thing which is condemned by the word of God in plain and unmistakable terms. Paul said in 1 Cor. 6:10, that no drunkard shall inherit the kingdom of God. Yet we claim to be a Christian nation. Are we in reality

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the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you." (Heb. 13:17).

May God help us to encourage our elders, to hold up their hands by our willing support, and continually pray that they may be granted wisdom to plan, promote, and lead the church in the service of our Lord. May God help those men who are elders to be the proper example in living and serving Christ, taking the oversight of the church, not by constraint, but willingly, and of a ready mind. "And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away" (1 Peter 5:4).

