

# Fulton County Gospel News

Good News About Christ And His Church For All Of The World

"...Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body." - Ephesians 5:23

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## "THE TRUE GRACE OF GOD"

by Ted J. Clarke

**Editor's Note:** *The major portion of this article appeared in the September 1991 issue of Fulton County Gospel News. At that time our mailing list was about half the size it is today. Continuing problems in the religious world in general and in our own brotherhood testify to the difficulty so many have in understanding what makes up the true grace of God. This fact justifies this rerun. Part of the original article has been expanded and revised to include some material from the Power Lectures on The Two Covenants. My lecture in that book was entitled, "Did Grace Exist in the Old Covenant?; Is the New Covenant a Covenant of All Grace and No Law?" [This book can be purchased from the Southaven Church of Christ, P.O. Box 128, Southaven, MS 38671. A more detailed discussion on grace is in that lesson than possible in this present article.]*

*Let me plead with you to take your Bible in hand, and, as you read this article, look up the Scripture references. See what God's word says on this vital topic. If I am in error, please show me where my error is. Be specific and deal with the arguments I have shown from the Scripture as to what is included in "the true grace of God" according to First Peter.*

### INTRODUCTION

So much has been spoken and written in the past few years about **grace** that some may have grown weary of hearing and reading about the subject. However, since Ephesians 2:8 says, "by grace are ye saved," we must understand grace to know whether or not we are truly saved. "Grace" is God's "favor" upon us, which we do not and could not deserve. Through Christ, God has given us what we need rather than what we deserve. However, we can receive God's grace only as we accept **the conditions which God attaches to it** (2 Corinthians 6:1).

Is the title of this article presumptuous? Since there are many conflicting views regarding grace, can anyone claim to write a definitive article on the **true** grace of God? Because of what the apostle Peter has written in his first epistle, it is possible to present a view of grace that clearly settles many of the questions which continue to arise in a study of grace. Why this Bible book? In his closing words of

the epistle, Peter said, "...I have written briefly, exhorting, and testifying that this is the true grace of God wherein ye stand" (1 Peter 5:12). Keep this verse in mind throughout this study. If one accepts Peter as being "an apostle of Jesus Christ" (1:1), and one who "preached the gospel...with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven" (1:12), then one must accept what Peter says when he testifies what constitutes "the true grace of God" (5:12). [All Scripture references in parentheses are from First Peter unless otherwise noted.]

### PETER, PROCLAIMER OF GRACE

The Lord promised to give Peter the keys to the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 16:19). Keys symbolize power to open and close. Peter's keys were to open the kingdom of heaven. He did so beginning in Acts, chapter two, when he preached faith, repentance, and baptism in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:36-41). However, on this Pentecost Day only the Jews received the gospel. Peter used his keys again in opening the kingdom of heaven to those of all nations (Gentiles) in Acts 10 & 11. If you will study the entire account you will see that Peter preached faith, repentance, and baptism in water, all in the name of Jesus Christ, just as he had in Acts 2 (Acts 10:43; 11:18; 10:47-48). Sometimes it is contended that Peter did not understand the role of grace in salvation. Since he was a Jew and works-oriented, we are told, he preached a different gospel than Paul's gospel of grace (cf. Acts 20:24,32). However, Galatians 1:23 and First Peter reveal that both apostles taught the **same** gospel. Did Peter teach that we are saved by grace, through faith, as Paul did (Ephesians 2:8; Romans 5:1-2)? Indeed, he did! Peter wrote -

"Receiving the end of your **faith**, even the **salvation** of your souls, Of which **salvation** the Prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the **grace** that should come to you" (1:9-10).

Note that in Peter's statements both faith

and grace are tied to salvation, exactly as with Paul. Peter connects the salvation of our souls with the grace of God, which came through Christ in his sufferings on the cross and subsequent glorification in his resurrection (1:11-12). This harmonizes with what Peter taught in Acts 2, when he preached that forgiveness is possible because of Christ's death (vv. 23, 24) and his resurrection to glory (vv. 31-39).

Several commentators believe that the "grace that is to be brought to you" (1:13) refers to the culmination of God's grace in our salvation in heaven when Jesus returns. The problem with that is that the Greek word translated "to be brought" is in the present tense, and literally means "is being brought." The "revelation of Jesus Christ," then, does not mean his second coming. Rather, "the grace that is being brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" is God's saving grace which is brought to us now, as we believe and accept Christ as He is revealed to us in the gospel preached by those inspired by the Holy Spirit (1:12-13). Thus, the grace which had been prophesied to come by the Old Testament prophets (1:10), and that grace which was presently being brought to Peter's readers (1:13), was rooted and centered in Jesus Christ.

### GRACE AND OBEDIENCE

One major problem in the religious world is the denial that we must obey God in order to be saved. Does the "grace of God" which is in Christ exclude obedience? Not at all! It is in regard to that grace that Peter calls for his readers to be "obedient children...holy in all manner of conversation [living]...Be ye holy; for I am holy" (1:14-16). Some might protest that obedience should be our natural response to grace, but that our obedience does not in any way secure or maintain our salvation through Christ. It is true that obedience should be our response to God's grace, but it is **not true** that our salvation does not depend in part on our obedience. Peter plainly says, "ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth" (1:22). This obedience which purifies us is part of God's grace and equal to the new birth of which our Lord spoke in John 3:3-5, being "born

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again...born of water and the Spirit." In our obedience we are "born again...by the word of God...which by the gospel is preached unto you" (1:23-25). The same gospel which teaches that we are saved by being born again also teaches that we are saved by our obedience. This is precisely why Hebrews 5:9 says that **Christ "became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him."** Jesus does not save those who refuse to obey him (cf. Matthew 7:21; Luke 6:46). Does God's grace remove the need for man's obedience to God? No, a thousand times no! If one believes what Peter has written, obedience to God's will is a part of "the true grace of God" (5:12).

**TWO APOSTLES, ONE GOSPEL**

There are those who claim that Peter wrote **only** to the Jews dispersed throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia (1:1). Remember that some maintain that there were two gospels; Peter's gospel of works to the Jews and Paul's gospel of grace to the Gentile nations. As we demonstrated previously, Paul and Peter preached **the same gospel of God's grace**. Peter described Paul as "our beloved brother" (2 Peter 3:15). Peter's second letter was written to the same audience as his first (2 Peter 3:1). Peter mentioned that Paul had also written to this same audience in more

than one epistle (2 Peter 3:15-16). There was no difference in the one gospel these two preached, for they were both apostles sent by Christ and they wrote to the same people. Furthermore, Peter (2:9-10) used the same prophecies from Hosea 1:9-10; 2:23 to apply to his readers as Paul did in Romans 9:25-26. The verses of Romans 9:24-26 clearly apply these passages to the Gentiles. Therefore, Peter's audience was made up at least partly of Gentiles. This same apostle said the Jews and Gentiles were saved in the same manner (Acts 15:7-11). The same grace that saves has "appeared to all men" and instructs us as to what we must do to receive it (Titus 2:11-14). This is certainly in harmony with Peter's admission in Acts 10:34-35, that God is no respecter of persons and that men of all nations must work righteousness to be accepted by God, thus receiving His grace. Neither Paul nor Peter taught salvation by grace alone or faith alone.

**GOD'S GRACE IN BAPTISM**

Not only does Peter connect our general obedience to the grace of God, he connects one specific act of obedience to salvation and grace, which many deny is essential to receive God's grace; namely baptism in water (3:20-21). Remember that in 1:10 Peter connected salvation with God's grace through faith. In the following verses he connected salvation with baptism.

"Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (3:20-21).

Note that Peter contrasts the **disobedient** in the world with **obedient** Noah and his family (cf. Genesis 6:22; 7:5). In Genesis 6:8 it is said, "But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord." Why did Noah find God's grace and the others did not? He was obedient, just, and perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God (Genesis 6:9). One simply cannot separate receiving God's grace from man's obedience; nor should one try to do so. Noah was saved by water, in the ark which he built in obedience to God. The mentioning of that fact led Peter to state that in a like figure, or antitype, **"baptism doth also now save us"** (3:21). Since we are

unquestionably saved by grace, when Peter connected baptism with salvation, he also connected baptism to the **grace of God**.

Peter does not say that baptism alone saves us, but he does insist that it is a part of what "now saves us!" Baptism is as much a part of God's saving grace to us as the flood was a part of God's saving grace to Noah and his family. In the ark the waters bore Noah safely from the destructive power of the flood as it cleansed a sin-filled world. Water (in baptism) saves us and cleanses our sin-stained souls today **because it is a part of what God has commanded**, not because it is a commandment of men (cf. Matthew 15:9). Jesus said in Mark 16:16, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Peter likewise connected faith and baptism with salvation (1:9; 3:21).

**STANDING IN GOD'S GRACE**

Peter evidently knew that Christians would be severely tested for their faith. The fact that he wrote so much about suffering in First Peter testifies to his concerns for them to know the true grace of God, prompting his admonition to them to "stand fast therein" [God's true grace] (5:12, ASV). Brethren and friends, we must know what is contained in "the true grace of God" and "stand ye fast therein," upholding the total teaching of the Scriptures on God's grace (cf. Psalms 119:160). When people isolate passages like Ephesians 2:8-9 or Galatians 2:16 and ignore the contextual setting of these verses, they pervert them, making them teach what God never intended (cf. 2 Peter 3:15-16). **If we abandon the true grace of God for the man-made doctrines which pervert that grace, we cannot teach anyone how to be saved and we also will be lost!**

We may lose a large segment of the church to the present threat of apostasy, unless elders, preachers, and members insist on sound doctrine being preached from our pulpits and taught in our Bible classes. Even if we do lose large numbers, we must believe that God's grace will continue with us, enabling us to endure every trial. Even Paul experienced God's grace in ways he did not desire, but he grew stronger thereby (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). May we pray for wisdom and strength to always stand **for and in God's true grace**.

That true grace includes a perfect, royal law of liberty which sets free those who come to God through His Son, our Savior and King (cf. James 1:25; John 14:6;

Colossians 1:13). Those who think they are exalting Christ when they cry out "Grace alone...Faith alone...We do not contribute one whit to our salvation by anything we do" - these people are not elevating God's grace through Christ. They are ignoring Christ's New Testament "royal law," which works within the bounds of God's grace. Brethren, friends, **"this is the true grace of God: stand ye fast therein!"**

**CONCLUSION**

Peter "testified" that what he wrote about in this epistle was "the true grace of God" (5:12). Yet, some will not accept that. Will you? Peter opened and closed his first letter with the subject of God's grace (1:2, 10; 5:10, 12). One cannot successfully deny his emphasis on grace in this epistle. He contended that a part of "the true grace of God" is obedience to God's word in becoming children of God (1:22-25); that we must continue to live as obedient children (1:14-16); and that since "baptism doth also now save us," it too is necessary in receiving God's grace unto salvation (3:20-21). **If we attempt to change or substitute any part of "the true grace of God" which Peter has revealed, it is no longer God's true grace.** Such would merely be the false teaching of men. If you have not been baptized in water in the name of Christ in order to be saved, you are not standing in the true grace of God. If you are not continuing to live as obedient children, you are outside of God's true grace. God has made his grace available for all men. Will you not renounce the false teaching of denominational dogmas and stand with faithful Christians in "the true grace of God?"

**TEMPER**

When I have lost my temper,  
I have lost my reason, too.  
I'm never proud of anything  
Which angrily I do.  
When I have talked in anger  
And my cheeks are flaming red,  
I have always uttered something  
Which I wish I had not said.  
In anger I have never  
Done a kindly deed or wise,  
But many things for which I felt  
I should apologize.  
I'm looking back across my life,  
At all I asked or made,  
I can't recall a single time  
When fury ever paid.  
So I struggle to be patient,  
For I've reached a wiser age;  
I do not want to do a thing  
Or speak a word in rage.  
I have learned by sad experience  
That when my temper flies,  
I never do a worthy deed,  
A decent deed or wise.

**GOD'S FIRM FOUNDATION**

by Robin W. Haley

"Howbeit the firm foundation of God standeth, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his: and, Let everyone that nameth the name of the Lord depart from unrighteousness" (2 Timothy 2:19). Paul told this to Timothy on the heels of having instructed him to give diligence and study to show approval and not shame by rightly dividing the Word (verse 15). This was positive instruction. Paul also included some negative instruction. This is found in verse 16, to shun or avoid profane things which only lead to ungodliness. Thus, our text provides us with the inoculation against the gangrene of verse 17 and will keep our faith from being overthrown, verse 18!

This text teaches us two very important things. First, **God knows His people.** In reminding the brethren in the churches of Galatia not to attempt justification through the Old Law, Paul told them, "ye have come to know God, or rather to be known by God" (Galatians 4:9). What a blessed thought: God knows who each of us is, and is pleased to be called our God. The Hebrews writer reminds us, "But now they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed of them, to be called their God; for he hath prepared for them a city" (Hebrews 11:16). On judgment day, God and Christ will know us because we have come to know them. How did this happen? John tells us: "And hereby we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. (4) He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:3-4). How awful it would be to hear Jesus say, "I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matthew 7:23).

He knows us because **we are His possession.** There are at least three texts which so state this relationship we have with God. Perhaps the most pointed dealing with this thought is this: "who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a people for his own possession, zealous of good works" (Titus 2:14). We are His because He has cleansed and redeemed us. This took place at our conversion when we followed what the Word taught in order to be saved (Ephesians 5:26).

Second, our text shows us that God's people abstain from unrighteousness. "Unrighteousness" is anything that is not

right. We know what is right because the Bible has made such things plain. We must hunger and thirst after righteousness. This necessarily demands that we abstain from the things "contrary to sound doctrine" (1 Timothy 6:3; Titus 2:1). Paul would remind us "For the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men, (12) instructing us, to the intent that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world" (Titus 2:11-12). We ought always to thank God for providing us with the gospel of Christ. He "saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before times eternal, (10) but hath now been manifested by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Timothy 1:9-10). Let us study more so that we may be like Timothy who "from a babe hast known the sacred writings which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15). In this way, we too will always be standing upon God's Firm Foundation.

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## THE GAMALIEL PHILOSOPHY

by Marvin Rickett

The Bible is fully inspired of God, but sometimes the Holy Spirit recorded the words of an uninspired man, regardless of whether or not he spoke truth. Such an example is Gamaliel and his opinion about false teachers and false doctrine.

The apostles had been brought before the Jewish Sanhedrin for the second time. They had already been warned once by this august body to cease speaking and preaching in the name of Jesus. The apostles had replied, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:19, 20). So as soon as they were released they continued to preach and teach boldly the doctrine of Jesus Christ. Thus the Sanhedrin had them arrested again, and in their attempt to silence them were about to do something drastic.

Gamaliel, a learned and respected member of the Sanhedrin, attempted to avert an immediate execution by giving some sage advice. He recalled examples of two false teachers in the past, Theudas and Judas, whose movements simply died out when they were left alone. This proved, he reasoned, that they were not from God. Any movement which does not have God's approval will die on its own, was his conclusion: "And now I say unto you, refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to naught: but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God" (Acts 5:38, 39).

But was Gamaliel's philosophy the truth? Some brethren have taken it at face value and used it as a reason not to oppose false teachers, preach negatively, or debate the Cause with their neighbor. "Leave them alone, and it will die out," is the prevalent attitude against false teachers and their doctrine. This attitude has allowed pentecostalism, premillennialism, Calvinism and liberalism to creep into the church unopposed. When these doctrines didn't die out, they reason, "They must be approved by God."

A casual look at history will quickly show one that "the Gamaliel philosophy" is false. Satan is not defeated by passive ignorance. He must be met head-on and vigorously contended with. Witness the birth and growth of Mohammedanism.

It is obviously a false religious system with a false god, Allah; a false prophet, Mohammed; and a false bible, the Koran. It is condemned in the Bible by such passages as Galatians 1:8, 9; II Peter 2:1-3; Revelation 22:18, 19). The point is, Mohammedanism is a false religion, is without God's approval, yet it did not die out. It still flourishes today and claims hundreds of millions adherents.

An example of more recent history is the false system of Mormonism. It has a false prophet, Joseph Smith; a mythical angel, Moroni; and a false bible, the Book of Mormon. It is condemned by the same passages, given above, which condemn Mohammedanism. It has not died out, nor does it appear anywhere near extinction. In fact, it is among the top ten fastest growing religions in the world today, claiming some 9 million adherents.

The Gamaliel philosophy is a dangerous doctrine because it encourages accommodation to false systems and promotes apathy against damnable heresies. Satan will not be defeated by ignoring him. The Bible teaches us to "earnestly contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). The apostle Paul told Timothy, and preachers to follow, to "reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine" (II Timothy 4:2). He told the Ephesian church, "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them" (Ephesians 5:11).

The other side of Gamaliel's coin is false, too: "If it is of God, ye cannot overthrow it." God's causes have been defeated in certain localities because brethren have become weak-kneed and lukewarm. You see, God has placed the gospel in earthen vessels. These vessels have chosen, from time to time, not to remain faithful. However, God, in His divine foreknowledge, has seen to it that His Kingdom and His Word will never completely die out (Matthew 16:18; I Peter 1:25).

Let us not be timid in opposing false systems. Our actively opposing them may defeat them, whereas our ignoring them allows them to flourish.

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## GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION

1. Hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17; Acts 16:32).
2. Believing what is taught (Mark 16:16; Hebrews 11:6).
3. Repentance (Acts 2:38; Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30).
4. Confession (Romans 10:9, 10; Acts 8:37).
5. Baptism (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; I Peter 3:21; Romans 6:3, 4).
6. After the above five steps, faithful Christian Living (I Peter 2:11, 12; Revelation 2:10).

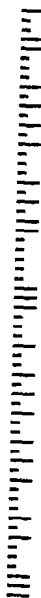
## THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

1. The Bible is its only guide (Romans 1:16; I Thess. 2:13).
2. Wears a Biblical Name (Romans 16:16).
3. Established at the right place (Isaiah 2:2,3; Acts 2).
4. Established at the right time (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2).
5. Established on the right person (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:36).
6. Saved are in it (Ephesians 5:23; Acts 2:47).
7. Its members are enrolled in heaven (Hebrews 12:23).
8. Membership in it is obtained by obedience to God's commands including baptism (Acts 2:41-47; I Corinthians 12:13).

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