

GRACE AND MERCY

While grace and mercy are very similar, grace is only given to the children of God. A. W. Pink, in his book, "THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD", says, "Grace is a perfection of the divine character which is exercised only toward the elect. Neither in the Old Testament nor in the New is the grace of God ever mentioned in connection with mankind generally, still less with the lower order of His creatures. In this it is distinguished from 'mercy', for the mercy of God is 'over all His works' Psalms 145:9." Grace is not earned by anything that we do. Ephesians 2:8-9; "***For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast.***" To ask why God gives grace to someone is a contradiction. Grace is not given for a reason, but because He decides to give it. It is a gift; therefore it can not be given in exchange for anything. When some people come to God for something, they may think that God should show favoritism because of who they are or what they have done. In his book, "THE POWER OF PRAYER", R.A. Torrey writes of the following experience.

"In Melbourne, Australia, as I went on the platform one day at the business men's meeting, a note was put in my hands. This note read:

Dear Dr. Torrey:

I am in great perplexity. I have been praying for a long time for something that I am confident is according to God's will, but I do not get it. I have been a member of the Presbyterian Church for thirty years, and have tried to be a consistent one all the time. I have been the superintendent of the Sunday school for twenty-five years, and an elder in the church for twenty years; and yet God does not answer my prayer and I cannot understand it. Can you explain it to me?

I took the note with me on to the platform and read it and said, 'It is perfectly easy to explain. This man thinks that because he has been a consistent church member for thirty years, a faithful Sunday school superintendent for twenty-five years, and an elder in the church for twenty years, that God is

under obligation to answer his prayer. He is really praying in his own name, and God will not hear our prayers when we approach Him in that way. We must, if we would have God answer our prayers, give up any thought that we have any claim upon God. Not one of us deserves anything from God. If we got what we deserved, every last one of us would spend eternity in hell. But Jesus Christ has great claims on God, and we should go to God in our prayers not on the ground of any goodness in ourselves, but on the ground of Jesus Christ's claims. And this man is going on the ground of the claims that he supposes that he has, because he has been a faithful church member for thirty years, a Sunday school superintendent for twenty-five years, and an elder in the church twenty years. He is praying in his own name. 'At the close of the meeting a gentleman stepped up to me and said, 'I wrote that note. You have hit the nail square on the head. I did think that because I had been a consistent church member for thirty years, a Sunday school superintendent for twenty-five years, and an elder in the church for twenty years, that God was under obligation to answer my prayers. I see my mistake.' Not one of us has any claim on God. We are miserable sinners. But Jesus Christ has claims on God and He has given us the right to draw near to God in His name, that is, on the ground of His claims on God."

All that we get from God comes through grace and not through merit. If we receive from God because of what we do, then it is not grace but a debt that God owes to us. In other words, if you are paid for work that you do, that pay is an obligation of the one for whom you worked. But, if it is a gift, it is not earned and therefore not an obligation of the giver. Furthermore, the amount earned is a reflection of the value of the one who did the work. The value of a gift reflects the greatness of the one who gives the gift without regard to the greatness of the recipient. Grace is the very thing that enrages the self righteous because there is nothing that they can point to in pride and say, "see what I have done!" There is no way that they can lord it over others and become the one at the top. Unbelievers do not understand us because they think that Heaven can be earned by good works, so when you say that you are sure that you are going to Heaven, they think that you believe that you are better than other people. If they understood the grace of God they would understand

that there is no possibility of self righteousness for a true Christian, and that there is nothing but self righteousness for the non Christian.

One difference between grace and mercy is the fact that mercy presupposes guilt. If a criminal throws himself on the mercy of the court he is not saying that he didn't commit the crime. He admits his wrong doing and asks for mercy. He admits that he doesn't deserve mercy but he asks for it. You can't deserve mercy any more than you can deserve grace. When the children of Israel were in the wilderness, God met their every need and still they murmured against Him and against Moses. Finally God said to Moses; ***"How long will this people spurn me? And how long will they not believe in Me, despite all the signs which I have performed in their midst? I will smite them with pestilence and dispossess them, and I will make you into a nation greater and mightier than they."***

(Numbers 14:11-12) Moses pleaded for them saying, ***"Pardon, I pray You, the iniquity of this people According to the greatness of Your mercy and lovingkindness, and as You have forgiven [them] from Egypt until now. And the Lord said, I have pardoned according to your word;"*** (Numbers 14:19-20

Amplified) Moses didn't talk God out of anything here; he was acting as a type of Christ. In Hebrews 7:25 we read; ***"Hence, also, He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them."*** Again, we read in Romans 8:33-34; ***"Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.*** So, you see that Moses was acting as a type of Christ in his intercession for the Israelites. But we also have another intercessor who intercedes for us and that is the Holy Spirit. We read in Romans 8:26-27; ***"And in the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, for the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God."***

I have emphasized the fact that the grace and mercies of God are without merit because there is danger in not knowing it. If we do not have this fact firmly in our grasp, we open ourselves to all kinds of false doctrines such as "name it claim it" or the "prosperity doctrine",

the "Self esteem" doctrine, and a host of others that seek to create levels of conformity and importance in the group. We must know the great grace and mercy of God as well as our sinfulness and unworthiness. In his book; THE PENSEES, Blaise Pascal writes;

"The Christian faith teaches these two things: There is a God whom men are capable of knowing, and they have a corrupt nature which makes them unworthy of Him. It is equally important for men to know both of these points It is as equally dangerous for man to know God without knowing his own sinfulness as it is for him to know about his sinfulness without knowing the Redeemer who can cure him. Knowing only one of these aspects leads either to the arrogance of the philosophers, who have known God but not their own sinfulness, or to the despair of the atheists who know their own wretched state without knowing their Redeemer."

What Pascal says about the philosopher can also be said about some Christians. When God extends His grace and mercy to us, we can react in one of two ways. We can have the attitude that God approves of what we are doing and this is His way of showing it. This attitude is one of arrogance and self righteousness. The notion that God could be impressed with us is the height of egotism. There is not one of us that does not deserve punishment in Hell. If God wiped us from the face of the earth because of our sins, it would be justice. I, for one, do not want justice. I want mercy! If I get justice I am doomed. The grace and mercy of God should cause us to fall on our faces in repentance to a holy God. We read; ***"Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his deeds; to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but to those who are selfishly ambitious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation."***

(Romans 2:4-8) As you can see from this verse, we do not get our rewards here. They are reserved for that day when we will be judged for the deeds done in the body by Jesus Christ Himself. God's grace

and mercy do not tell us anything about us here and now, but they do tell us something about God. It tells us that He blesses us though unworthy. Our reaction to His grace also tells us something about our self. It should lead us to repentance because we know our own true selves. We have to get over the notion that God does good things to good people and bad things to bad people. It simply isn't true.

Paul Ziegler