

Rom. 14:19 So then let us follow after things which make for peace, and things whereby we may edify one another.

THE LENEXA EDIFIER

John 8:32

"And ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free"

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UNDERSTANDING GOD'S GRACE

Jim Stauffer

The grace of God, *charis*, is a favor granted by the giver and is represented by thankfulness on the part of the receiver. God is the giver of grace in His attempt to redeem us from a hopelessly lost condition. We, as sinners, are the receivers, in need of it because we have failed God through our sin. Thus, the term *unmerited favor*. To whom has God offered this unmerited favor?

Titus 2:11 tells us,..... *the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men..... Heb. 2:9* speaks of Christ being made lower than the angels,*because of the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God, he should taste of death for every man.* The offer of His grace to every man is clearly what John meant when he said,*that whosoever believeth on him should not perish but have eternal life.* (**John 3:16**)

A major disagreement in the religious world is whether God's grace is extended conditionally. The fact it is extended based upon man's obedience is without question if you consult the Bible for the answer. In every age or dispensation of law to man, God has been consistent in demanding obedience for salvation. (**Heb. 5:8,9**) For instance, Noah and his family were protected from the flood when he*found favor in the eyes of Jehovah.* (**Gen. 6:8**) But was that all it took? Of course not! The remainder of **Gen. 6** tells of the obedience of Noah in building the ark according to God's specifications. (**cf. Heb. 11:7**) During the time he built the ark, Noah continued to spread the warning of God's impending judgment to the world around him. He found favor with God by believing and obeying Him.

Later, when God kept His promise to Abraham by delivering the Israelites from Egyptian bondage, He gave the power to Moses to part the Red Sea to provide an escape from the pursuit of the Egyptians. What does reason tell us would have happened if the Israelites had refused to walk across that dry land, whether out of fear or stubbornness? Clearly they would have been captured and returned to slavery. Even God's grace demanded the cooperation, that is the obedience of the people for it to become effective for them.

Therefore, when we read **Eph. 2:8,9** we must

recognize the dynamic of man's faith opening the door to the grace God has extended to all men. Previously mentioned **Heb. 11:7** explains how that works. Noah, by faith, obeyed God by building an ark to the saving of his house. **Heb. 11:17** tells us Abraham took Isaac to Mt. Moriah and prepared to offer him as a sacrifice to God, by faith. That faith was in the word of God. (**cf. Jas. 2:21-24**) Now, we must also be men of faith. When Christ tells us explicitly, that, *He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned (MK.16:16)*, we must by faith in His word, obey. Listen carefully to the following passages. **John 1:12** *But as many as received him, to them gave he the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on his name: 13 who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.* John says those who believe on Him are those who are born of God. **John 6:29** *Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.* Here the Lord answers the question of what one must do to do the works of God. His answer is to believe in Christ. The history of God's relationship with His people teaches us true belief or faith is accompanied by obedience. Don't quibble over the commands of God when He offers you the only path of salvation. The only remedy for your sin. *Repent and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.* (**Acts 2:38**)

Only we can accept or reject the grace of God. It is not granted to any without faith. *So, belief cometh of hearing and hearing by the word of Christ.* (**Rom. 10:17**) We know then the choice is up to us. God has made it available to all, but only grants it to those who believe. Men can reject it for many reasons. Pride. (**Jas. 4:6**) Prejudice or bias against the gospel of Christ. (**Mat. 23:37**) And yes, we can accept it only to lose it later when we fail to remain faithful to the word of God. **Gal. 5:4** *Ye are severed from Christ, ye who would be justified by the law; ye are fallen away from grace.* Again, it is our choice, we can choose life or we can choose death. (**see Deut. 30:19**)

MAINTAINING THE BOND OF PEACE

Peace is always desirable -- internationally, nationally, religiously, and in the family.

"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" When David penned those powerful words, he did not reveal some great undiscovered truth. Peace, harmony, and unity are universal aspirations. We pray regularly for international peace, national harmony, and familial unity. But especially do we covet peace among brethren in the body of Christ.

"That they may all be one" was the prayer of our Savior (**Jno. 17:20,21**). Not just that we would tolerate one another or be willing to put up with one another, but that we would be of one heart with each other. Our Lord didn't ask for much in this world but He did ask -- the dying request of the dying Lord -- that we be *"one."*

The text for our consideration is a commission and call to unity.

Listen to Paul: *"I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"* (**Eph. 4:1-3**).

If we are to maintain the bond of peace, this passage requires three specific actions on our part:

We Must Acknowledge The Command: This is not optional equipment in the life of a Christian. The corollary commands are everywhere in the New Testament. *"As much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men"* (**Rom. 12:18**). *"Let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another"* (**Rom. 14:19**). *"Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord"* (**Heb. 12:14**).

While I am never at liberty to amend the *"perfect law of liberty,"* keeping the *"unity of the Spirit"* in the *"bond of peace"* is within my purview and at my discretion. We must remember that creating discord in the family of God is a serious matter. When brethren *"bite and devour"* one another, it saps our energy, quenches our spirit, negates our influence and, most seriously, violates the command of God. We will *"walk worthy of the calling"* only when we *"endeavor to keep"* peace and harmony. Thus the command to *"Be at peace among yourselves"* (**1 Thes. 5:13**).

We Must Accept The Challenge: Paul's use of the word "endeavoring" implies that unity among brethren will pose a challenge. Translated elsewhere with the words "give diligence," the implication is that achieving and maintaining harmony among often dissimilar people will be a formidable task. Quite simply, we are not clones of each other.

For example, the congregation with which I labor is an amazingly diverse group. We truly are "red and yellow, black and white." We have folks from every corner of the country. We are blue collar and white collar; Republicans and Democrats, babes in Christ and

mature, seasoned saints. We have many folks who grew up in religious indifference, denominationalism, or Catholicism. Let's be honest, when the call of the gospel brings together people of such diversity in background and spiritual maturity, it will take a tremendous amount of effort, patience, and love to mold into a harmonious family.

Thus, I must make sure that I try -- and that I try hard -- to *"keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."* I must make sure that there is not in me any vestige of selfishness or jealousy or slander or hypersensitivity that would allow Satan to use me as a pawn in his filthy fingers. I must remember that Satan would like to do in my congregation what he has done in so many others, that is, divide and conquer through backbiting and negativity.

We Must Adopt The Character: Verses one and three of our text make a fine sentence, for example, *"I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called...endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."* But sandwiched between those two verses are four character traits that are essential for peace to prevail.

"With all lowliness." Or as the NIV suggests, "completely humble." It is an echo of the sentiment of Jesus when He declared, *"If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all"* (**Mk. 9:35**). In the context of a local church, I must remember that I am not the only one there -- and neither are you!

"With all...gentleness." Perhaps the word is best defined as being the opposite of rudeness, harshness, or self-assertiveness. It simply emphasizes that our opportunities for unity are enhanced when our spirit is kind. Someone has well said, "If you cut off a man's nose, there is no need to give him a rose to smell." Is it any wonder we are commissioned to *"speak the truth in love"*?

"With longsuffering." Patience will forever be essential in the maintenance of harmony. Sometimes personalities will conflict, people will exercise poor judgment, use ill-chosen words, exhibit a bad attitude, and take regrettable action. Sometimes we must ask God to help us be big people. Why should we suffer long with fellow saints? Because we want them to suffer long with us!

"Bearing with one another in love." One of the truly amazing statements regarding Jesus' love for His disciples was made on the night before He died. Listen to the sentiment: *"Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end"* (**Jno. 13:1**). With all their faults, failures, and foibles, He never gave up on them. Don't you know that was difficult? And make no mistake, it will be difficult at times for us, too. Why bother acknowledging the command, accepting the challenge and adopting the character? So *"that the world may believe that You sent Me,"* said Jesus. And so that you and I might *"see the Lord,"* said the Hebrew writer (**12:14**).

By Don Truex in Biblical Insights, Vol. 4, No. 7, July 2004

HERMAN WHO?

A few years ago as several brethren and I chatted about a medley of Bible topics, the discussion turned to hermeneutics. One of the fellows, his voice full of exasperation, blurted out, "Who is this Herman fellow? I'd never even heard of him until a few months ago and now nobody wants to talk about anything else." He was just putting us on, of course, but the annoyance was real. The use of the "fancy" term, hermeneutics, for Bible study bespoke a trend that concerned him. It smacked of intellectualism. He saw it as one more indication of a growing dissatisfaction with simple, direct language in the pursuit of Bible knowledge.

Whatever the merits of this brother's concern, Bible study, under any name, is a critical topic for Christians. Knowing how to do it well is an absolute necessity. I don't mean to suggest that we all must take formal courses in Logic and Hermeneutics before we can understand the gospel message of salvation. But at the very least, we need a common-sense grip on how communication works if we are going to understand God's message to us.

If we are to *"receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save (our) souls" (Jas. 1:21)*, if we are to *"know the truth" which shall make us free (Jno. 8:32)*, if we are to have some grasp of *"all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue" (2 Pet. 1:3)*, then we need some skill at the business of interpretation. Whatever natural gifts we may possess along that line, additional knowledge and polishing won't hurt.

In our previous article we discussed the importance of context in Bible study, noting that we are almost certain to go wrong if we take a verse out of its surroundings.

No Contradictions: Another common hermeneutical principle is the presumption of harmony. We grant this even in general hermeneutics: every author is assumed to write in agreement with himself, unless it is clearly established other wise. In sacred hermeneutics (interpretation of the Bible) this rule is considered an absolute. If the author of the Bible is God, it will have no contradictions, since He is all-knowing and all-powerful.

Clinton Lockhart, in *Principles of Interpretation*, lists this rule as an axiom: "One of two contradictory statements must be false, unless corresponding terms have different meanings or applications" (p. 28).

Defense: This issue confronts us in two practical situations. The first is when an unbeliever, in an effort to prove that the Bible is not written by God, charges that it contains contradictions. This puts us on the defensive and obliges us to show the harmony of the matters in dispute. How we do this depends on the specific facts of the case.

Suppose, for example, that the unbeliever charges that Paul, in saying that we are not saved by works, contradicts James, who says that we are saved by works. Here, our task is to show that these two writers use the word works in different ways. Paul speaks of

works of merit which would put God in debt to us; James has in mind the obedience of faith, which Paul also taught (**cf., Rom. 1:5; 16:26**).

Or perhaps the skeptic believes Matthew, when he mentions one angel at the tomb of Jesus (**Matt. 28**), to be in conflict with Luke, who refers to two angels (**ch. 24**). Here we have two possible solutions. First, the writers may have had different time frames in view: at one point there was one angel, and either earlier or later, there were two. Second, different or additional facts (one angel/two angels) may be complementary rather than contradictory. Matthew felt it necessary to mention only one angel, while Luke, in accord with his purpose, gives us more detail.

These two examples suggest some general guidelines for resolving alleged inconsistencies in Scripture.

Offense: The other situation finds us on the offensive, as we study to interpret a given passage correctly. In **Matt. 4:7**, Jesus showed us that one verse cannot be pitted against another. The devil had tempted Him to jump from the pinnacle of the temple by citing **Psa. 91:11,12**, which promised Him God's protection. But Jesus replied, *"It is written AGAIN, 'You shall not tempt the LORD your God.'" Psalm 91* must harmonize with **Deut. 6:16**.

As another example, it is faulty exegesis to attribute salvation to faith only in passages such as **Jno. 3:16** and **Acts 16:31**. Why? Because other verses say that matters such as repentance and baptism also play a part in salvation (**Acts 2:38**). Not to mention **Jas. 2:24**, which says that a man is not saved by *"faith only."* One text cannot oppose or nullify another.

Finally, whatever meaning we ascribe to God's hardening of Pharaoh's heart (**Exo. 9:12; 10:20, etc.**), we cannot advance a view that denies man's freedom to choose (**Deut. 30:19; Jos. 24: 15; Prov. 1:29; 3:31**).

Sound interpretation of Scripture is based on sound methods of study. Stay tuned. We'll talk about hermeneutics some more.

By Jim Ward in Lost River Bulletin, Vol. 53, No. 19.

There'll be no microbursts in heaven
For the weather up there will be calm
And we'll join the heavenly chorus
In singing the 23rd Psalm
by Grant Clothier

Psa. 23:0 *A Psalm of David. 1 Jehovah is my shepherd; I shall not want. 2 He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; He leadeth me beside still waters. 3 He restoreth my soul: He guideth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. 4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me. 5 Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: Thou hast anointed my head with oil; My cup runneth over. 6 Surely goodness and lovingkindness shall follow me all the days of my life; And I shall dwell in the house of Jehovah for ever.*

Eph. 2:19 *So then ye are no more strangers and sojourners, but ye are fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God, 20 being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief corner stone; 21 in whom each several building, fitly framed together, groweth into a holy temple in the Lord;*

1Pet. 2:9 *But ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that ye may show forth the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:*

Psa. 1:1 *Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the wicked, Nor standeth in the way of sinners, Nor sitteth in the seat of scoffers: 2 But his delight is in the law of Jehovah; And on his law doth he meditate day and night. 3 And he shall be like a tree planted by the streams of water, That bringeth forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also doth not wither; And whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. 4 The wicked are not so, But are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. 5 Therefore the wicked shall not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. 6 For Jehovah knoweth the way of the righteous; But the way of the wicked shall perish.*

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IRENE HURD, MARY CZIRR, JAN PATRICK, GRANT CLOTHIER, J.R. DANIEL AND JESSIE GIBSON. PAT CLOTHIER IS UNDERGOING TREATMENTS FOR ESOPHAGEAL CANCER.

SUNDAY BIBLE CLASS: GOSPEL OF JOHN

WEDNESDAY BIBLE CLASS: PREMILLENNIALISM

SUNDAY SERMON: LEST WE FORGET



What Must I Do To Be Saved?

Hear the gospel - Romans 10:17

Believe in Jesus Christ - Hebrews 11:6

Repent of sins - Acts 17:30

Confess Christ as Lord - Romans 10:9,10

Be Baptized for remission of sins

Acts 2:38

Be Faithful unto death - Revelation 2:10