

On Being Presbyterian
Chapter 2 - “The Priority of Amazing Grace”

Grace vs. Karma: What’s the difference?

“Grace makes beauty out of ugly things.” – U2 lyric from the song, *Grace*

“We don’t deserve grace; it is a gift. As a result, a biblical understanding of grace is tied into what we have already considered: God the King’s working to save a people for his own glory. Such salvation is completely undeserved – ‘while we were still sinners, Christ died for us’ (Rom. 5:8).” (p. 34)

I. Grace Meets Our Needs

“The amazing-ness of grace is deeply rooted in the fact that we are sinners who deserve God’s wrath.” (p. 35)

Not just lack of merit (as if neutral) before God → demerit

The “Five Points of Calvinism”:

(1) **Total Depravity**

“It signifies a corruption of our moral and spiritual nature that is total not in degree (for no one is as bad as he or she might be) but in extent.” – J.I. Packer

Romans 7.18

(2) **Unconditional Election**

“This divine choice is an expression of free and sovereign grace, for it is unconstrained and unconditional, not merited by anything in those who are its subjects.” – J.I. Packer

Ephesians 1.4-5; Romans 9.10-13

(3) **Limited Atonement**

“It is probably better to talk about a definite or particular atonement rather than a ‘limited’ one: Jesus died for a particular people, namely, the people that God had chosen.” (p. 38)

John 17.6-9; John 10.14-15

(4) **Irresistible Grace**

“Electing grace is also effective grace: Jesus, who knows the sheep, reveals Himself to them in such a way that they will respond.” *NGSB* note at John 10.4

John 6.37, 44

(5) **Perseverance of the Saints**

“Because God has worked for our salvation at every point – election, atonement, effectual calling – he will certainly bring it to consummation so that we enter into the fullness of eternal life.” (p. 39)

Philippians 1.6; Matthew 24.13

Reformed theology distinguishes “saving grace” (addressed by the five points) from “common grace.” The former is limited to the elect while the latter is not.

In reading profane authors, the admirable light of truth displayed in them should remind us that the human mind, however much fallen and perverted from its original integrity, is still adorned and invested with admirable gifts from the Creator. If we reflect that the Spirit of God is the only fountain of truth, we will be careful, as we should avoid offering insult to him, not to reject or condemn truth wherever it appears. (John Calvin)

II. Grace Transforms Us

“Although our salvation is from beginning to end the result of God’s grace, we tend to think that we need to become more like Christ through our own strenuous self-exertion. We are saved by grace, we think, but made holy by the law, our effort, our work... [L]ike every other aspect of our salvation, our holiness depends on our faithful resting upon God’s grace alone.” (p. 41)

Key to understanding sanctification by grace is union with Christ.
Ephesians 1.3; 2.5-7

“By virtue of our union with Christ, we are as *justified* as we will ever be – our status has been changed in God’s sight forever. By virtue of our union with Christ, we are as *righteous* as we will ever be – not inwardly, which is increasing more and more as the Spirit uses his Word to transform us into Christ’s image, but in God’s sight because we are clothed in the perfect righteousness of Christ (Gal. 3:27). By virtue of our union with Christ, we are as *adopted* as we will ever be – we cannot become more ‘children’ than we already are; we have been moved from the status of slaves to beloved children of God (Gal. 4:4-7). And, by virtue of our union with Christ, we have the greatest of all spiritual blessings – we have *Christ* himself, through communion with him by the Spirit and the word. All of these blessings come to us through grace – the undeserved favor of God.” (pp. 44-45)

The indicative precedes the imperative: “Because certain things are true about us in Christ, we are called to live in certain ways.” (p. 43)

Romans 6.1-2

1 Corinthians 6.15

simil iustus et peccator = “at the same time just and sinner” (Luther)

Notwithstanding, the persons of believers being accepted through Christ, their good works also are accepted in Him; not as though they were in this life wholly unblamable and unprovable in God’s sight; but that He, looking upon them in His Son, is pleased to accept and reward that which is sincere, although accompanied with many weaknesses and imperfections. (*WCF* 16.6)

Grace, not guilt, should motivate us to good works.

III. Grace Will Lead Us Home

“God’s undeserved favor finishes what it starts. God our King continues his good work in us until we are brought home safely to God.” (p. 47)

Philippians 1.6

Romans 8.29-30, 35-39

This perseverance of the saints depends not upon their own free will, but upon the immutability of the decree of election, flowing from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father; upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ, the abiding of the Spirit, and of the seed of God within them, and the nature of the covenant of grace: from all which ariseth the certainty and infallibility thereof. (*WCF* 17.2)