

The Glory of God's Grace: The Meaning of God's Grace and How It Can Change Your Life by James Montgomery Boice, Kregel, Grand Rapids, MI: 1999. (30 Quotes selected by Doug Nichols)

1. God's Favor to the Undeserving

It is against the dark background of sin that grace emerges. Grace means God's favor to the undeserving. So it is only in the context of sin that grace can be appreciated. [Page 12]

2. Time to Repent and be Restored

Adam and Eve must have expected a swift execution of that sentence. Yet after the judgment had been pronounced and God had left them, they were still standing there in the Garden. Fallen, but alive! In other words, they now had time to repent of their sin and believe God about the Savior who would come, just as earlier they had doubted God's word and disobeyed him. [Page 13]

3. Grace to All: Common

Common grace is grace God shows to all people whether or not they come to personal faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior. [Page 13]

4. Not Believing, but Alive: Common Grace

If you are not a believer in Christ and are nevertheless alive, that alone is an example of the common grace of God. If you are not in hell, where your sins will eventually take you if you do not repent, it is because God is gracious. One day you will die and be judged, but today is still a day of spiritual opportunity. [Page 13]

5. God Saved Our First Parents.

That is, God justified them on the basis of what Jesus was to do (they looked forward to it), just as God justifies us through faith in what Jesus has done (we look back). [Page 14]

6. Substitution for Our Sin

The death of the animals must have taught them the principle of substitution, the innocent dying for the guilty, just as the innocent Son of God would one day die for the sins of those God was giving to him. When God clothed our first parents the animals'

skins, Adam and Eve must have had at least a first glimmer of the doctrine of imputed righteousness. [Page 14]

7. Death, but Found Life

Adam and Eve expected to die. Instead they found life.

They must have expected an immediate execution of God's sentence without appeal and without any hope of God's mercy. Instead, they received a promise of a Savior to come and were brought from a state of condemnation to a state of justification by believing in him. [Page 15]

8. *Bad Things to Good People, Not Biblical.*

A number of years ago a New York rabbi named Harold S. Kushner made a splash in the publishing world with a book entitled *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. It was on the *New York Times* best-seller list for months. The thesis of the book was that bad things happen to good people because God is not omnipotent and things simply get away from him. At the end of the book Kushner advises us to forgive God and, like him, just try to get on with life and do the best we can. How different from what the Bible teaches! [Page 17]

9. Good Things Happen to Bad People: God's Grace

The question is not why bad things happen to good people but why good things happen to bad people. We are all bad people, and good things happen to us every day of our lives. And in profusion! The real question is: Why didn't the tower fall on us? We weren't we struck down by Herod's soldiers? Indeed, why did God allow such wicked persons as ourselves to awake this morning, get out of bed, go to work, and add to the mushrooming misery of the world? [Page 18]

10. Why Common Grace?

In theological language, we are talking about *common grace*, the fact that God "causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matthew 5:45), and the question we are asking is why common grace is so very common. We are asking God's purpose in allowing so many good things to happen to bad people. [Page 19]

11. God Tolerates the Evil of Unbelief

The amazing thing is not that bad things happened to those people, but that good things happen to everyone. And the most amazing thing of all is that God had

tolerated the evil of the unbelieving, Gentile world for so long and had postponed (and continues to postpone) judging it severely. [Page 22]

12. Good Purposes in God's Actions

Having spoken of grace, Paul concludes, "God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. For in him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:27-28). This is important. For it is a way of saying that God also has a good purposes in his good actions. He wants us to recognize his goodness, to turn from sin, to reach out and find him, and so be able to express our gratitude in true faith and proper obedience.

[Page 24]

13. It is to Special Grace that We Respond

People do not respond to common grace. It does not matter whether common grace expresses itself in the good things of life that should lead us to seek out and thank God who is the source of all good things, or whether it expresses itself in bad things, like natural disasters, that are intended as a warning of the even greater disaster of God's final judgment. The wicked respond to neither, as Isaiah says. Therefore, if anyone is going to be saved from sin and brought to true faith in God and obedience, it is going to be by *special grace* and not by *common grace*, that is, by the electing grace of God, which reaches down to regenerate lost sinners and turn them from their destructive ways. [Page 27-28]

14. God Brings True Stability

People are always fickle until God brings true stability into their lives through the gospel. If anything of any permanence is to happen—if lives are to be changed, if the seed of the Word is to fall into good soil and bear fruit, and do it year after year—it will only be through the special electing and regenerating grace of God. [Page 28]

15. Common Grace Saves No One

Common grace saves no one. But although common grace saves no one, the special grace of God operating by the preaching and teaching of the Word of God does.

[Page 28]

16. God Was Gracious in Sending Christ for Us

We can't fault God for his righteousness or justice. But if law is all we have to go on, we might be at least partially excused if we should think of God as rather insensitive to us or unsympathetic to our failures.

But now Jesus has come, and we see in a dramatic way that the giving of the law is not all there is to say about God. True, God is a lawgiver, and he did give the law through Moses, and the law of the Old Testament is “holy, righteous, and good.” But God is also gracious, as gracious as Jesus Christ. God is not harsh or unforgiving, as we suppose. Moreover, his purpose in sending Jesus was to teach us that he is indeed gracious and to provide a way for us to be saved from the punishment required by the law, since we cannot either obey the law or save ourselves from condemnation. [Page 35-36]

17. Law versus Grace

Here are some characteristics of the reign of the law versus the reign of grace, which came by Jesus Christ.

1. Under law God demands righteousness from his people; under grace God gives righteousness to them.
2. Under law righteousness is based upon Moses and good works; under grace righteousness is based on Christ and Christ’s character.
3. Under the law blessings accompany obedience; under grace God bestows blessings as a free gift.
4. Under the law there is nothing in men or women by which we can achieve what God demands; under grace that power is made available. [Page 41]

18. Sin That Grace May Increase? No!

We must never think that grace, wonderful as it is, either permits or encourages us to go on sinning. For it is not only “grace” that comes through Jesus Christ. “Truth did also (John 1:17). And the truth in this matter is that God still requires holiness of his people. “Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?” asked Paul. He answered, “By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?” (Romans 6:1-2). [Page 41]

19. Grace Must be Sovereign

The words *sovereign grace*, are almost redundant, though necessary. *Sovereign* means “according to the will of the sovereign [that is, God].” It means according to his will and nothing else. *Grace* means “unmerited favor.” But think what happens as soon as you begin to tinker with those terms. If you take “sovereign” away from grace so that grace is no longer dependent upon the pure will of God, then grace becomes dependent upon something else, either merit in the subject receiving it or circumstances, and in that case, grace ceases to be grace. It becomes something deserved or necessary. In order to have true grace, grace must be sovereign. [Page 48]

20. The Miracle of New Birth

The only other view, the biblical one, is that when Adam and Eve sinned the human race fell the whole way. Human beings fell to the bottom of the ravine and cannot get out by their own power. “I’ve fallen down, and I can’t get up” is the only accurate assessment of our spiritual condition. In fact, we are destined to remain down unless God on the basis of *his own sovereign choice* reach out to perform the miracle of the new birth and thus lifts us up out of the pit of sin and set us on the edge once again.

The Bible says that we are “dead in . . . transgressions and sin” (Ephesians 2:1), and Jesus taught, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him” (John 6:44). [Page 53-54]

21. Grace Is Not Grace, If Based on Human Actions

In the declining days of the late Roman Empire, these issues were debated at length by a British monk named Pelagius and the great early church father Saint Augustine. Pelagius wanted to preserve human choice, as he saw it. He saw men and women as being formed more or less morally neutral. We make bad choices, he said. Bad choices dispose us to make further bad choices. But we do not need to make bad choices, and we always have the ability to turn our selves back, repudiate our sins, and choose God. At one time Augustine though like Pelagius. But he came to see, and then argued forcefully, that Pelagians do not do justice to the Bible’s teachings about either sin or grace. They do not do justice to sin, because they try to preserve some little oasis, however small, of human goodness. They do not do justice to grace because a salvation that depends on human ability makes grace largely irrelevant. It is necessary. Besides, grace is no longer grace if it is based on something in human beings, either seen or foreseen. [Page 54]

22. Being Saved, Will Be Holy

Ephesians chapter 1 also teaches this, for it says clearly that God “chose us . . . to be holy and blameless” (v. 4). In other words, election is not concerned only with the end result—that is, that we might be saved and go to heaven. It is also concerned with the steps along the way, which include holiness. Holiness is a direct result of God’s determination since he has decreed that those who are being saved will be holy. If we are not growing in holiness, we are not elect. We are not saved persons. [Page 55]

23. God Works Through Imperfect Us

People have supposed that election must make evangelism unnecessary. “If God is going to save some person, then he will save that person regardless of what we may or

may not do,” they say. That does not follow. The fact that God determines the end does not mean that he ignores the means by which that end will be attained. He ordains the means, too. In this case, he has ordained that it is by means of preaching and teaching the Word that people will be converted.

Besides, it is only election that gives us any hope of success as we evangelize. If God cannot call people to faith effectively, how can we? We cannot persuade them. But if God is working, then he can work in us even if we are inept witnesses. We do not know who God’s elect are, but we can find out who some of them are by telling them about Jesus. Those who are God’s elect people will respond to our witness (or the witness of others), confess their sin, believe on Jesus, and grow in holiness. We can speak to them boldly because we know that God has promised to bless his Word and will not allow it to return to him without accomplishing his purpose (Isaiah 55:11). We can know that all whom God has elected to salvation will be saved. [Page 55-56]

24. Christ Was the Redeemer

What God has done through Jesus Christ is to redeem his elect or chosen people (Isaiah 55:7-10). Redemption involves all three persons of the Godhead: (1) God the Father, who planned it’ (2) God the Son, who accomplished it; and (3) God the Spirit, who applies it to God’s people. But redemption is chiefly associated with Jesus, who is specifically called the redeemer. [Page 56]

25. We Become Christ’s Forever

Redemption is a commercial term meaning “to buy in the marketplace so that the object or person purchased might be freed from it,” and Jesus did this for us by dying in our place. To carry the illustration out, we are pictured as slaves to sin, unable to free ourselves from sin’s bondage and the world’s grasp. Instead of freeing us, the world merely gambles for our souls. It offers everything that is its currency: fame, sex, pleasure, power, wealth. For these things millions sell their eternal souls and are perishing. But Jesus enters the marketplace as our Redeemer. Jesus bids the price of his blood, and God says, “Sold to Jesus for the price of his blood.” There is no higher bid than that, and so we become his forever.

The apostle Peter wrote, “It was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect” (1 Peter 1:18-19). [Page 57]

26. Christ's Death Has Infinite Value

For whom did Jesus Christ die? Most people will respond, "For everyone, of course; Jesus died for the whole world," and there is a sense in which that is true. Jesus died for all kinds of people and for people scattered throughout the whole world. Also, his death has infinite value, being adequate to atone not only for the sins of all the people of this world but for all the sins of all the people of a billion worlds like this and more besides, if there are any. [Page 57-58]

27. Chosen to be Saved

But the proper biblical answer is that Jesus died for the sins of his elect people only, the Father sending him to make specific atonement for the sins of those whom he had already elected to salvation. That is what Ephesians chapter 1 is saying. For the "we" who have been redeemed (v. 7) are the "us" who have been described earlier as being chosen and "predestined" to be saved (vv. 4-5). [Page 58]

28. Christ's Specific Atonement for His People

The greatest of all Puritan theologians was a scholar named John Owen. Few people read him today because his mind was so keen that most of today's sloppy thinkers cannot easily follow him. Owen was very sharp in this area. In a book titled *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, Owen argued that there are only three possible opinions where Christ's death is concerned. Either; (1) Christ died for all the sins of all men, so that all are saved, or (2) Christ died for all the sins of some men, so that these but not all are saved, or, (3) Christ died for some of the sins of all men. If it is the latter, then all are lost. They must perish for the sins for which Jesus did not die. The first is universalism, which Scripture rejects. The second is the correct and only biblical position.

To those who agree that Jesus died for all sins of all men but that all are not saved because all do not believe, Owen asked shrewdly, "This unbelief of theirs, is it sin or is it not?" If it is not a sin, why should it keep them from salvation, since they cannot be condemned for an act that is not sinful? If we admit it is a sin, the question then becomes: Is it a sin for which Christ died, or is it not? If he did not die for it, then he did not die for all the sins of all men. If he did die for it, why should this more than any other sin for which he died keep an unbelieving person from salvation? Such clear thinking focuses us back either to universalism, which we know to be wrong, or to the second or Calvinistic position.

The sovereign God has exercised his grace in salvation by sending Jesus to make specific atonement for his people's sins. In other words, grace expresses God's choice by what theologians call particular redemption. [Page 58-59]

29. The Holy Spirit Calls

The Holy Spirit works through the preaching of the Word of God to call to faith those whom God has previously elected to salvation and for whom Jesus Christ specifically died. Apart from those three actions—the act of God in electing, the work of Christ in dying, and the power of the Holy Spirit in calling—there would be no hope for anyone. No one could be saved. But because of those actions—because of God’s sovereign grace—even the worst of blaspheming rebels may be turned from his or her folly and find the Savior. [Page 60]

30. Cannot Earn or Contribute to Salvation

Not for a moment can we suppose that there is anything we can do to earn or even contribute to our salvation. Salvation is truly and utterly by the grace of God alone. But if we are saved by grace, that is, if we are who we claim to be as Christians, we will be abounding in good works lived by the new life of Christ within, works that glorify him. [Page 74]