

♪ Worship Notes ♪

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THEME: The Grace of Worship

Grace upon Grace

“da quod iubes et iube quod vis”

“Grant what Thou commandest, and command what Thou dost desire.”

(Augustine, *Confessions* 10.29.40)

These words go to the very heart of true biblical Christianity. All faith systems in the world involve commandments to which the adherent is expected to adhere. Only Christianity dares to suggest that God Himself undertakes to perform in and for us what he expects of us. Another way of saying this is: “What God requires, He provides.” God wondrously does for us what we could never do for ourselves. In a word, this is the biblical concept of GRACE. What God has required of us, He has provided for us in Jesus Christ.

God’s Grace for Our Salvation

God requires complete holiness is required to enter into God’s presence in heaven. We neither have that, nor could ever attain that on our own. But what God has required—perfect holiness—He has provided

for us in Jesus Christ. Dressed in Christ’s righteousness, we can enter into God presence with confidence and “in full assurance of faith” (Heb 10:22).

God’s Grace for Our Sanctification

God requires a holy life from those of us who belong to Christ (1 Peter 1:14-16). In our flesh we are not capable of that (Romans 7:15-24). But what God has required, He has

undertaken to provide for us: the power to grow and walk in holiness of life. The New Testament contains numerous references to this way that God works:

In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. (Romans 8:26)

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. (Philippians 2:12-13)

For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me. (Colossians 1:29)

**GRACE:
God providing
for us
what he
requires of
us**

His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me. (1 Corinthians 15:10)

Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God. (2 Corinthians 3:5)

But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil. Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass. (1 Thessalonians 5:21-24)

Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. (Hebrews 13:20-21)

All of these passages (and more) speak to the wonder of God's grace for living the Christian life. Yes, we are required to walk obediently in newness of life (Ephesians 4:20-24)—but we are not left to try that on our own. Rather the grace of God works in and with us, “both to will and to work for His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13).

Why does God work this way, asking things of us then enabling us to do them? Another passage gives us the answer:

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in

order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 4:10-11)

God works in this way **so that he will receive all the glory**. No believer can say, *I did it myself*. “Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 1:31).

God's Grace for Our Worship

God requires, and deserves, perfect worship. We are certainly not capable of that. But the wonderful truth is that God has in Jesus Christ likewise provided for the perfect worship that He requires. Jesus always presents to His Father a perfect offering of worship to His Father, and He does so in our place and on our behalf. The writer of Hebrews identifies this quote from Psalm 22 as the words of Jesus Himself:

*I will tell of Your name to my brothers;
In the midst of the congregation I will sing
Your praise. (Hebrews 2:12)*

For a fuller exposition of this marvelous passage, please see [Worship Notes 1.8 \(August 2006\)](#).

This is God's grace for our worship. And as we don't need to fear that our salvation or our sanctification is ultimately dependent on our own strength and our own efforts alone, so we don't have to fear whether our worship has been “good enough.” In and of itself, it of course consistently falls pitifully short; but IN CHRIST, as He gathers up our meager efforts into His own perfect offering, our worship is always perfectly acceptable to the Father—not because of its excellence, but because of the excellence of His Son.

This also means that, whatever the outward style, form or manifestation of our external worship may be, a marvelously unifying truth is that wherever true worship is taking place, it is doing so because Christ our Mediator and Worship Leader is present in

the midst of His people (Hebrews 2:12) empowering and leading our people. Regardless of the outward trappings of our worship (architecture, dress, music style, etc.) the fact is that there is only ONE way to come to the Father in worship: and that is, through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. Our Mediator guarantees us full and unfettered access to the presence of the Father.

Hence we may speak of worship as a gift of God's grace. Our standing in Christ and our access through Him enable and empower our grateful praises. "We give Thee but Thine own, whate'er the gift may be." Worship is our gift to God, in grateful response to all that God has done for us and given to us in Jesus Christ—but only because of His grace for our salvation, for our sanctification, and for our worship.

QUOTABLES

Grace for Our Worship

"Christ as the One True Worshipper leads us in our worship, by giving Himself to us, so that by Grace His Worship of the Father is our worship and our worship of the Father is a response of thanksgiving for Christ."
(David W. Torrance, "The Word of God in Worship," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 1 [1983]:11-16)

"There is no worship, no music, no prayer, no sermon, in itself so good that God has to accept it. Just as we are sinners whose life God redeems by grace, we are all mumbling stutters whose words and music God accepts by grace. Just as we cannot attain heaven by a ladder of good works, so can we not attain God's ear by a scale of beautiful notes.
(Cornelius Plantinga, Jr. and Sue A. Rozeboom, *Discerning the Spirits: A Guide to Thinking about Christian Worship Today*, 2)

"Worship is both an event and a lifestyle in which believers, by grace, center their mind's attention and their heart's affection on the Lord, humbly glorifying God in response to His greatness, His mighty acts, and His Word."
(Dave Hall)

"In all that you do, you are to nourish Christ's people from the riches of his grace, and to strengthen them to glorify God in this life and in the life to come."
(*Book of Common Prayer*)

"The initiative for coming together is due to God. It is God, who by his immanent action, urges souls to seek him. It is God, and God alone, who disposes them to hear his word. In a word, worship is a grace: all here is grace."
(Robert Will, *L'Esprit du Culte Protestant*, quoted in Richard Paquier, *Dynamics of Worship: Foundations and Uses of Liturgy*, 7)

"Both revelation and response, both sacrament and sacrifice, are gifts of divine grace. The point is to preserve and make luminous the patristic instinct that both God's revelation and our human response are gifts to be received rather than accomplishments to be sought."
(John D. Witvliet, "The Trinitarian DNA of Christian Worship: Perennial Themes in Recent Theological Literature,"
http://www.yale.edu/ism/colloq_journal/vol2/witvliet1.html)

“Here is the one true priest, the one true worshiper, the leader of our worship in whom alone ‘the ordinances of worship’ are perfectly fulfilled and through who alone we can draw near to God. So worship is God’s gift of grace to us in Christ. This is why all our worship (in baptism, Lord’s Supper, etc.) must be seen as an ordinance of grace.”

(James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*, 63)

“For Christians, through the firm testimony of God’s Word and Spirit, God’s favor is sure. Therefore, since grace is a gift, Christian worship is never other than a response.”

(John E. Burkhardt, *Worship: A Searching Examination of the Liturgical Experience*, 18)

“According to a biblical understanding, from both the Old and New Testaments, worship is an ordinance of grace. . . . the gift of the God of grace who provides for us a way of loving communion.”

(James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*, 60)

“By the grace of God we seek to voice for all creatures the praises of God and realise our God-given destiny to be the priests of creation under Christ our Great High Priest.”

(James B. Torrance, “The Place of Jesus Christ in Worship,” in *Theological Foundations for Ministry*, 363)

“‘Do not be conformed by this world; but be transformed by the renewing of your minds.’ (Romans 12:2) His actual grammar here is rather striking, isn’t it? Here is a statement, ‘be transformed by the renewal of your minds,’ in the present tense, in the imperative mood—it’s something to do—and yet it’s in the passive voice. And here he brings us to one of the marvels of grace that enables us rightly to worship God: that we are engaged and involved in the life of sanctification; and yet the life of sanctification is a process by

which we are giving ourselves over to be sanctified.”

(Sinclair Ferguson, “True Spirituality, True Worship” [sermon])

“Only by the grace of God are we here to worship Him, and it will be by His grace that our worship will be successful. When we stop to think about worship, just who do we think we are, walking into the presence of the Almighty and Holy God, the Ancient of Days, presuming to invoke His presence and offer Him anything—even the praise and thanks that are His due? It is only by His mercy that we can walk into His presence and call upon His name. It is only by His mercy that we may worship at all. It is only by His mercy that we can worship at any given service. All our plans and preparation, all our prayers and meditations are no more than widows’ mites cast into the temple treasury. Only the Master knows if what we did was worship. Only His Spirit will make it worship.”

(Ben Patterson, “Can Worship Leaders Worship?,” *Leadership* Spring 1986, 37-39)

“We participate in Christ’s worship of the Father by life in the Spirit, in virtue of what Christ has done and is doing for us. . . . We draw near to God our Father in and through the Mediator, our great High Priest—drawn by the Spirit of love. This is the way in which the Triune God in wonderful grace lifts us up into the life and love and communion of the Godhead.”

(James B. Torrance, “Christ in Our Place,” in *A Passion for Christ*, 43)

“Worship is a miracle of grace; it is God who calls us to gather together to reorient our frayed and tattered selves each week.”

(Leanne Van Dyk, “Proclamation: Revelation, Christology,” *A More Profound Alleluia*, 57)

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