

352 The God of all grace

We are used to saying “The Grace” together (II Corinthians 13.14), especially when bringing a time of communal prayer to a close, and in many Christian households the habit of “saying grace” before a meal still holds good. But as with any familiar spiritual word, it is easy for us to forget what the word “grace” is all about – what it actually involves, and what difference it does make, and is to make, in how we are to live our lives.

We gather from our Concordances that the Greek word “charis” (the “ch” being soft, as in “loch”) appears 156 times in the New Testament in its various forms. This single Greek word is translated in English in the King James’ Version as “grace” 130 times, “favour” 6 times, “thanks” or “thank” 11 times, “pleasure” 2 times, and under a miscellaneous heading 7 times (including “words of grace” / “liberality” / “benefit” / “joy”).

Exploring “charis” a little further by means of a Greek Lexicon (which gives us a highly detailed account of each New Testament word including its usage in the general Greek culture of those days), the nuances of the word are further filled out for us, which we can then illustrate with a few examples from the First Epistle of Peter.

From the Lexicon we come first to the description of “charis” from the Provider’s side of things. In pouring out His grace, the “God of all grace” bestows upon us His graciousness, benefit, favour, gift, loving kindness, liberality, goodwill, sweetness, charm and loveliness. What abundance! What grace!

We are reminded at this point of that other old definition of the word “grace” - “God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense”. All the divine bounty bound up in this single word “grace” is wrought through the Father’s extraordinary gift of His only-begotten Son Jesus Christ. How mindful we must always be that that Gift achieved its crucial, gracious purpose at appalling “expense” for both Father and Son (egs., John 1.17 / Romans 3.23-25).

This grace-in-Christ was no last-minute afterthought on the part of God the Father. We read of “the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you” (I Peter 1.18-21) – and, by God’s continuing grace, that “you” now includes the likes of us also. The prophets in what is now the Old Testament

“searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace [that should come] unto you” (1.10, KJV). They knew, by revelation, of the sufferings and the glory of Christ, but were shown that this promised outpouring of divine grace was not for their times. But then the gracious gift of Christ was given – and He remains “given” today, as “the chief cornerstone”, yet also as “a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence” in this sinful, ears-stopped world (from 2.6-8).

We can come, secondly, to the effects of God’s beautiful “charis” on its fortunate recipients. Our knowledge of God’s grace greatly deepens our understanding of the character of Almighty God Himself, as we learn that He is, among much else, “the God of all grace” (I Peter 5.10). Then this knowledge of His grace fosters within us gratitude, joy, thankfulness and delight, leading in turn to our desire for God’s grace to be known and shared by others (eg., 1.2b). As each of us has received the “charis gift” - “[even so] minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (4.10); yes, “freely we have received, freely we are to give” (from Matthew 10.8b), by treating one another with grace as well as we are able.

As we draw to a close this time we can mention some further references to God’s “charis” in I Peter for our quiet reflections. We are to “hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1.13). We can rejoice that husbands and wives are truly “heirs together of the grace of life” (3.7), and that “... God resisteth the proud and giveth grace to the humble” (5.5, from Proverbs 3.34). We are encouraged – “But the God of all grace (after a short time of suffering may He) ... make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle [you]” (5.10); and that the Holy Spirit through Peter assures us that the words of this epistle, written to his readers of then and now, truly comprise “the true grace of God, wherein ye stand” (5.12).

So with faith in Christ we stand. We stand on the Word of God, and gratefully join with Peter in his simple song of praise to - “the God of all grace ... to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen” (5.11).

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